

Great things are expected of the 2008 Ohio State Buckeyes. They will take the field on Saturday against Youngstown State knowing that in order to accomplish their goal, they will have to win every game they play. And YSU just happens to be the first one. As he will every Friday, Buckeye Dan Wismar gives us a comprehensive preview of the Buckeyes coming game on Saturday, looking at the matchups on both sides of the ball and telling us what to look for. It's finally here! GO BUCKS!!!



August 30, 2008

Ohio Stadium, Columbus, Ohio

Ohio State vs. Youngstown State

12:00 p.m.

TV: Big Ten Network

Coming Out Party

Great things are expected of the 2008 Ohio State Buckeyes. They will take the field on Saturday against Youngstown State knowing that in order to accomplish their goal, they will have to win every game they play. And YSU just happens to be the first one.

If Ohio State wins the Big Ten title outright for the third straight year, they will have achieved a historic first. But the bar is set on the very top notch in Columbus, where nothing but a BCS Championship Game victory will satisfy this team and their coach. Such is the elevated state of the football program at Ohio State in the Jim Tressel era.

A 73-16 record. Four Big Ten titles, seven bowl games, five BCS bowl games, three BCS championship games in six years. One national championship.

If the worst thing the national press can say about your coach is that they're tired of seeing him in the national championship game, you've probably got the right guy in the job. But after lackluster showings in two title games in a row, Tressel must understand that the college football nation won't be inviting him back if he has even one loss in 2008. For it is written....somewhere. Hence the win-them-all plan.

So Game One is this Saturday. Let the methodical destruction of the YSU Penguins begin.

Oh yes...and let the margin of victory be pleasing to the insatiable fan base, while also preserving the Tressel reputation as a guy who won't run up the score. Let the Heisman favorite Chris Wells get his 150 yards and two touchdowns...by halftime, and let the defense stifle any semblance of a YSU attack. Let all the young kids play, and let the young quarterback dazzle the assembled with a glimpse of the Buckeye future. Let the Buckeye safeties corral an interception, and let there be no broken legs.

The Buckeyes dispatched the Penguins last year by a 38-6 count, and Jim Tressel had his third string quarterback throw a TD pass, calling off the dogs early against the school he coached for fifteen years. This year's YSU game draws interest from around the country largely because it will be the Buckeye coming out party for the *new* third string quarterback at Ohio State, the celebrated Terrelle Pryor. Well, Pryor will play, but the 2008 Buckeyes feature as many as five first team All-Americans, most of whom are seniors, who approach this game as something much more significant than some freshman's debut. It's the first step in their last chance for a championship.

The Buckeyes welcome the talented Pryor, but this is the team of James Laurinaitis and Malcolm Jenkins and Marcus Freeman on defense, and of Todd Boeckman, Alex Boone, Brian Robiskie and Chris Wells on offense. The one they call Beanie is the only non-senior among them. And he could be leaving too. Maybe with a statue under his arm. This will be *their* coming out party.

It will also mark the last time the Buckeyes face an FCS (formerly D1-AA) team for at least five years, which might quiet the overblown criticism OSU has taken for

their scheduling. This two-game series between Ohio State and YSU was something Tressel had worked for years to arrange while he was still coaching the Penguins. It's hard to fault him for finally obliging YSU when he got into a position to do it, especially when he routinely schedules tough early season series with the likes of Texas, USC, Miami (FL) and Virginia Tech.

OSU Offense vs YSU Defense

Coach Tressel had to replace only his right tackle and his fullback from the 2007 offense that scored over 30 points a game and produced nearly 400 yards per game in Big Ten play. Taking over at right tackle for Kirk Barton will be sophomore Bryant Browning (6'4" and 312). And converted tight end, senior Brandon Smith has emerged from summer ball with the starting assignment at fullback.

They'll join a huge and experienced offensive line, a deep, talented receiving corps, the returning All-Big Ten quarterback, Todd Boeckman, and running back Chris 'Beanie' Wells, ranked in the preseason as the best in the nation at his position.

Senior quarterback Todd Boeckman looks to be a much more confident player in 2008, and is a vocal and emotional leader on the field. The No. 2 spot at quarterback belongs to redshirt freshman Joe Bauserman, although freshman Terrelle Pryor might get on the field first, as the OSU coaches are likely to have some special plays in the playbook designed to use Pryor with the first team. Bauserman is an unusually mature freshman at 22, having spent three years playing pro baseball before enrolling at OSU. [More on the OSU quarterbacks](#) .

The left side of the Buckeyes line features the wall of LT Alex Boone (6'8" and 310) and LG Steve Rehring (6'8" and 337) to lead the way for Wells, and protect Boeckman. Jim Cordle (6'4" and 300) returns at center, and senior guard Ben Person (6'3" and 323) will join Browning on the right side. [More on the OSU offensive line](#)

Receivers Brian Robiskie and Brian Hartline will start again for OSU, and most of the time they'll be in a three-receiver set, joined by Ray Small or Dane Sanzenbacher, with true freshman DeVier Posey also seeing action in multiple-receiver alignments. As the game progresses, the depth of the wide receiver group for the 2008 Bucks should become apparent. Look for Taurian

Washington and Grant Schwartz to get into the game and demonstrate what seven-deep means. [More on the OSU wide receivers](#) .

At running back behind the feature back Wells, we'll be seeing a new face as the No.2 tailback. Dan 'Boom' Herron, a redshirt freshman, has won the backup job from senior Mo Wells. Sophomore speedster Brandon Saine has been nursing a strained hamstring for a couple of weeks, and may be limited on Saturday, but Herron has earned the backup job on his own merit. [More on the OSU running backs](#)

Rory Nicol and Jake Ballard are listed as co-starters by the team at the tight end position. Their job descriptions revolve around blocking, and I'll believe they'll be more involved in the passing game when I see it. [More on the OSU tight ends](#) .

The Buckeye kicking game is in good hands again, with senior Ryan Pretorius handling placement kicks, backed up by Aaron Pettrey, who will also kick off. Punter A. J. Trapasso is another returning starter on the special teams.

Last year the Penguins acquitted themselves fairly well on defense against OSU, holding Wells to only 46 yards on 16 carries, and the Buckeyes to 147 yards on 41 carries overall. They did that mostly on the strong play of defensive tackle Mychal Savage and a solid group of senior linebackers. Savage (6'3" and 305) is back this year as a Captain for the Penguins, and is arguably the best player on the team. Those linebackers aren't back though, and that could spell trouble for a YSU defense that could get worn down pretty quickly by the star-studded Buckeyes.

The defensive secondary for YSU is a veteran group, led by seniors D'Angelo Wilson and Jarvis Richards, but if the Penguins concentrate too much on Wells, the Bucks can go to a confident Boeckman at the helm of a potent passing attack, and see how well the corners hold up for four quarters against the big receivers for OSU.

The Buckeyes should be able to score until Coach Tressel says to stop.

Things to watch for when OSU is on offense...new faces and key positions

Does QB Boeckman show a new confidence and presence?

How does #70, Bryant Browning perform at right tackle

The OSU debut of #1, Boom Herron at running back

The OSU debut of #85, freshman DeVier Posey at wide receiver

The job the offensive line does on YSU's DT Mychal Savage

The contribution of new starter, fullback Brandon Smith.

Will the team come out flat on offense like last year in the opener?

Watch for when some guy named Pryor (#2) gets into the game...and see if he's any good.

Buckeye Defense vs YSU Offense

The last time anybody besides Tom Zetts started a game at quarterback for Youngstown State, the Florida Marlins had just won the World Series and we were still looking for Saddam Hussein in Iraq. But the four-year starter is gone now, and his replacement, junior Todd Rowan (6'3" and 215), has only taken a handful of snaps in his two years as a backup.

The Penguins will be launching a whole new offensive system in 2008 as well as breaking in a new signal-caller. They'll be running the spread offense, with a no-huddle wrinkle to it, and trying their best to get the ball to their most talented athlete, 6'0" and 205 lb. wide receiver Ferlando Williams (#1). Williams will return kicks, take shotgun snaps, run reverses, and even throw the ball. He had one pass attempt in the OSU game last year.

With two untested junior running backs in (Iowa transfer) Dan Brown and Jabari Scott, the Penguins will rely on a deep receiving corps and an All-American caliber tight end in Derrick Bush (6'4" and 270). Along with Williams at the receiver spots, the Penguins have an experienced group including senior Da' Michael Horne and junior Aaron Pitts as well as JC transfer Donald Jones.

Center and team captain Brad Samsa, and senior tackle Tyler Booth anchor the offensive line as three-year starters. Offensive coordinator Brian Wright will have to count on his young quarterback getting the new system down in a hurry, or failing that, getting out of this game in one piece. That's because the Buckeyes are loaded on defense, and will come into the opener tired of hitting each other, and ready to hunt flightless Antarctic fowl.

First among the concerns of Penguin quarterback Rowan might well be OSU defensive ends Lawrence Wilson (#87) and Cameron Heyward (#97), and their backups Thaddeus Gibson and Robert Rose. Defensive end might just be the strongest and deepest position on the OSU roster, even considering the loss of Vernon Gholston to the NFL's Jets. Throw in promising redshirt freshman Solomon Thomas, senior Curtis Terry, and sophomore Mark Johnson, and the Buckeyes are seven deep, and that's before they unleash true freshman Keith Wells, an early favorite of OSU coaches.

All four defensive tackles are back from last season, and Todd Denlinger (#92) and Nader Abdallah (#93) will be the starters, backed up by Brett Larimore and Doug Worthington. The Buckeyes will be looking for more consistent play from their defensive tackles in '08, as all four were in their first years as major contributors last year. Look for DE's Heyward and Rose to move inside to tackle on some passing downs, as a way to get pass-rushing phenom Thaddeus Gibson onto the field opposite Wilson, to give the Bucks their best pass-rushing foursome. [More on the OSU defensive line](#) .

The OSU linebackers are led by returning Butkus Award winner James Laurinaitis (#33) in the middle, and veteran Marcus Freeman (#1) at the strongside (Sam) position. Joining them in the starting group will be sophomore Ross Homan (#51) at the weakside (Will) linebacker spot. Laurinaitis is capably backed by junior Austin Spitler and true freshman Etienne Sabino. The other OSU reserves at linebacker have speed to burn, with Tyler Moeller, Brian Rolle and LB/safety Jermale Hines backing up at the outside spots, and getting on the field in certain nickel and blitz packages for Jim Heacock's defense. Freshman Andrew Sweat will probably contribute on special teams along with Sabino and the other reserves. [More on the OSU linebackers](#) .

The defensive backfield for the '08 Buckeyes will be a strength of the team, even as they weather two-game suspensions for one starter and one second-teamer to begin the season. All-American cornerback Malcolm Jenkins (#2) fronts that

group, and he'll be joined by up and coming sophomore Chimdi Chekwa (#5) at the other corner, at least until suspended two-year starter Donald Washington returns for the third game of the season. Both starting safeties from 2007 return this season, and Kurt Coleman (#4) and Anderson Russell (#21) look ready to take their games up a notch in 2008. Shaun Lane and Andre Amos are the first backups at corner, and Devon Torrence has moved back to cornerback after working at receiver in 2007. Aaron Gant and Nate Oliver will be the first safeties off the bench for the YSU game. Senior Jamario O'Neal will return to his backup spot for the USC game, after serving his suspension. [More on the OSU defensive backs](#)

On special teams, the Bucks will open the season using Brandon Saine and Dan 'Boom' Herron on kickoff returns, and Ray Small and Brian Hartline on punt returns.

Things to watch for when OSU is on defense...new faces and key positions....

Will it be a breakout year for DE Lawrence Wilson (#87)?

Watch DE Thad Gibson (#90) when he comes in as designated pass rusher...

Will the play of the defensive tackles control the line of scrimmage, and free the linebackers to make plays?

Will the DB's, especially the safeties, show better hands, and grab some interceptions?

Does new starter at linebacker, Ross Homan (#51) look like a future star?

How often will DE's Heyward or Rose move inside to tackle and replace the starting DT's?

Will a bigger, stronger Kurt Coleman (#4) and a fully recovered Anderson Russell (#21) become big playmakers at the safety spots?

This game will be a showcase for the 2008 Buckeyes personnel and for their offensive and defensive schemes. Even at that, what we see this week will be a limited version of the sets that the team will eventually use. The opponent on this day is almost incidental to what is going on. YSU is severely outmanned, and will take their \$650,000 guarantee and be grateful. The Buckeyes will be looking to get Chris Wells started on a possible run to the Heisman, and to get the first game action for Terrelle Pryor out of the way. They will want to get game film on as many young players as they can, and of course come out of the game injury free. Without having an idea of how long the starters will play for the Buckeyes, I'll guesstimate the final score at 44-6 Ohio State.

Links:

[OSU-YSU Game Notes from OSU Athletic Department \(pdf\)](#)

[2008 OSU Football Roster](#)

[Official YSU Football Home Page](#)

[YSU 2008 Football Roster](#)