

Reading Into The Roster

Written by {ga=furls}

Friday, August 29 2008 7:00 PM -

Ohio State released its two/three deep roster for the Youngstown State game this last Monday. With so many returning starters there really was not a lot of room for controversy or major shake-ups yet there was some. On the morning of the Buckeyes first game, Furls takes a look at the Buckeye season opening depth chart, giving us his thoughts and analysis on some of the more controversial decisions made by Tressel.



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Without further adieu, the roster:

OFFENSE (starter, backup)

LT - Boone, Miller, Adams

LG - Rehring, Sika

C - Cordle, Moses, Brewster

RG - Person, C. Smith

RT - Browning, Kerr, Shugarts

TE - Nicol and Ballard (co-starters), B. Smith

WR - Robiskie, Sanzenbacher

WR - Hartline, Small

QB - Boeckman, Bauserman, Pryor

TB - Chris Wells, Herron, M. Wells

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FB - B. Smith, R. Lukens

DEFENSE

DE - Lawrence Wilson, Gibson, Terry

DT - Heyward, Rose

NT - Abdallah, Worthington

DT - Denlinger, Larimore

WLB - Homan, Rolle

MLB - Laurinaitis, Spitler

SLB - Freeman, Moeller

BC - Jenkins, Amos, Torrence

FC - Chekwa, Lane

SS - Coleman, Gant

FS - Russell, Hines

PR - Small, Hartline

KR - Saine, Herron

Now looking through this, there are probably a couple of things that caught your eye. The two deep lists a two back, two wide receiver look that the we will probably see quite a bit of this season, but it does not directly answer one of the lingering questions going into the 2008 season; who will be the #3 this year?

This was largely believed to be a three horse race between Ray Small, Dane Sanzenbacher, and Taurian Washington, all of whom had solid springs and camps. Well, the coaching staff has decided and in three wide receiver sets we will see Sanzenbacher, not Small or Washington. That is going to be a bit disappointing to Buckeye fans that were pleading for more speed at the wide receiver position after a National Championship game in which LSU coach Les Miles stated that he was sure that Ohio State's passing game would not be able to beat his Tigers. According to Jim Tressel the job was not won necessarily by physical talents alone, but by Sanzenbacher's mastery of the playbook and crisp routes. Now that said, hopefully he can correct the drops that characterized his play last year. Slower, shorter possession receivers cannot afford to drop balls

after running perfect routes.

A perfunctory glance at the defensive backfield roster may have raised your eyebrows a bit. Chekwa and Hines appear in the two deep, but remember that Washington and O'Neal are both suspended for the first two games of the season. While that definitely explains their absence from the roster it does not guarantee that they will immediately reemerge back to their normal positions. O'Neal has habitually underperformed and Washington has spent the better part of the last six months in Jim Tressel's dog house. Jermale Hines and Chimdi Chekwa have capitalized on these opportunities and are really turning heads. Tressel gushed about Hines' play at his Thursday practice press conference stating, "I'm not sure I've ever seen a guy that can go line up at positions and probably doesn't need to be coached. I mean, he's just got natural instincts and an understanding of the game of football." That is a pretty rave review as far as the Senator goes.

Nader Abdallah has moved into a starting position at defensive tackle. That is a bit surprising in that up until now Abdallah's Ohio State career had been very disappointing. The coaches were high on him going into the LSU game last year and his momentum carried through into camp. In the end, I am not sure if his starting position is a strong statement about the emergence of Nader Abdallah, a statement about Worthington's off the field issues (DUI arrest), or Worthington's on the field issues. Let's just say that the first year of the "Doug Worthington Experiment" yielded mixed results.

Marcus Freeman's move from the weakside to the strongside is official. That was a bit of a surprise since Freeman himself has said that he plays better outside and in space, away from traffic. Putting him on the overloaded side of the line of scrimmage seems to be a strange change, but the workout warrior clearly has the strength to take on the traffic. Given Freeman's exceptional speed, this has to make you wonder if the Buckeyes are looking to make a fundamental change in some of their defensive schemes. Moving Freeman into the "Sam" position puts him in a position to potentially use his great speed in man coverage

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against opposing tight ends. This is a much more profound development that may go unnoticed by most fans due to the versatility it will provide the defense.

The final and probably most stunning development was the emergence of Dan "Boom" Herron as the second running back. Most who follow the program closely, myself included, believed that Saine's spot as the second back was guaranteed as long as he was well enough to play. Since Tressel said that he was "95%," I was certain he would be Beanie's first back up, but apparently, there was more to the rave reviews of Boom's camp than typical lip service. Obviously since Saine and Herron both appear in the kick returning depth chart, they both have great speed. Saine is clearly faster than Herron, but there is more to the running back position than great straight-line speed. I think most coaches would prefer burst, vision, and acceleration to high-end speed. Whether Herron remains perched above Saine for the duration of the season has yet to be seen, but it is certain that Herron, a red shirt freshman, has vaulted Maurice Wells, a senior, and that is a significant statement given the way that Tressel and his staff value loyal seniors like Wells.