

This is the second in a series of position group previews for the 2009 Ohio State Buckeyes.



Ohio State's wide receiver corps in 2009 returns just 40% of last year's receptions after a pair of Buckeye starters for the last two seasons moved on to play on Sundays. The talented but inexperienced group that succeeds them is as good an example as any position unit on the '09 Buckeyes of the overall team need for unproven players to step up with productivity and with leadership.

The top three returning receivers, Dane Sanzenbacher (21 rec.), Ray Small (18 rec.) and DeVier Posey (11 rec.) combined for fewer receptions than team leader Brian Robiskie (42 rec, 8 TD) hauled in for OSU in 2008. Robiskie is going home...straight up I-71 to Cleveland to wear the orange hat, and his running mate Brian Hartline will be joining Ted Ginn Jr. [with the Dolphins](#)

Robiskie and Hartline started all 13 games for OSU in 2008, and rarely came off the field while a game outcome was still in doubt.

All Hartline did last year was catch six of the team's nine longest receptions of the season, four for touchdowns. For a couple of guys not widely regarded as 'big play' type receivers, and downgraded by some for not possessing blazing speed, Robiskie and Hartline showed the NFL scouts enough to make them second and fourth round picks respectively. Playing with a true freshman quarterback in a run-oriented offensive system, the duo had 14 of the team's 16 longest receptions in 2008, and 12 of the 14 TD receptions by wide receivers. Whatever they may have lacked in pure speed, they made up for with athleticism, technique, hands and toughness. These guys will be missed in Columbus.

Putting wide receivers into the NFL is another of the great traditions in OSU football. Without getting into an archival search (like we did with [Buckeye linebackers](#)), the names of Warfield, Carter, Glenn, Galloway, Boston, Jenkins, Gonzalez, Holmes, and Ginn flow easily to mind. And there's every reason to think there's some future NFL talent on the this year's Bucks too.

The 2009 team will feature a core group of six guys who will probably divide the playing time more evenly than the veteran unit did last year. Small, Sanzenbacher and Posey will be backed up by juniors Taurian Washington and Grant Schwartz, and sophomore Lamaar Thomas. That group will be pushed by three incoming freshmen, all with lots of prep press clippings and primed to make their own mark on a Buckeye tradition.

Here's a closer look at the OSU wide receivers for 2009:

Starters

[Ray Small](#) - #82 - Senior; 5' 11" 180 lbs. (Cleveland, OH) Glenville H.S.

Small is the lone senior receiver on scholarship at OSU, and a big year in 2009 from the speedster from Cleveland would go a long way toward stabilizing this unit and removing some of the uncertainty about how productive they can be. Although Small has accumulated 46 catches for 484 yards and 3 touchdowns in his career at Ohio State, it has taken him three years to do it, and those numbers have so far fallen short of what the expectations were for the kid who was unfairly dubbed "the next Ted Ginn Jr." when he followed Ginn out of Glenville in 2006. His OSU career has been marked by a litany of off-the-field issues ranging from academic concerns to team rules violations, and those things have cost him playing time, whether they were matters of formal suspensions or just cases of being out of favor with the coaching staff.

When he is on the field though, his talent is unmistakable. He is very quick and elusive in the open field, possessing good hands and excellent straightaway speed. Small represents not only the most experienced receiver on the roster, but also the most productive punt return man as well. He has 45 career punt returns for 517 yards, an 11.5 yd. average, with one touchdown and a long of 80 yds. No other returning player has more than one return. Small seems anxious to put his past troubles behind him for his senior year, but even as of this writing, his prospects of contributing to the team this season are still in question. He needs to complete some summer academic work satisfactorily in order to be cleared to play in the fall. Resolving this major question mark in a positive way could be a huge lift for the fortunes of the Buckeyes in 2009. Lots of people are pulling for Ray Small to finish off his OSU career in a big way.

[DeVier Posey](#) - #8 - Sophomore; 6' 3" 205 lbs. (Cincinnati) LaSalle H.S.

If Small's fortunes are key to Ohio State's success at the receiver position in 2009, DeVier Posey's continued development is just as crucial. Posey worked his way onto the field last year as a true freshman, and contributed 11 receptions for 117 yds. and one touchdown, a 25-yarder in his first ever college game against YSU. He came into the OSU program as one of the top five rated prep receivers in the country, and his overall ability was apparent from the start. Posey was a three-sport star at LaSalle, setting school records in track in the 200 and 400 meters, and lettering in basketball for three years. He brings the complete package

physically...size, speed, hands and leaping ability, which he complements with a fluid and poised playing style that commands your attention when he's on the field.

In the Spring Game Posey seemed to be clicking with Terrelle Pryor, and the two sophomores will undoubtedly be looking to develop that chemistry further when the season gets underway. He is one of several Buckeyes that played a bit under the radar last year for whom great things are being predicted for 2009. I'm fully expecting a breakout season for Posey, as OSU opponents will be trying to force Pryor to throw the ball, and Posey will likely be the most talented receiver on the field for Ohio State. When I talked earlier about current Buckeye receivers with NFL-type talent, I was thinking mostly about #8.

[Dane Sanzenbacher](#) - #12 - Junior; 5' 11" 175 lbs. (Toledo) Central Catholic H.S.

Sanzenbacher will be entering his third season as a contributor at receiver for Ohio State. He had 12 catches as a freshman, and 21 more last year in the process of building a reputation as a reliable performer out of the slot receiver position. He'll likely begin the season as the starter there based on his experience and productivity. Sanzenbacher may not have ideal size for a wide receiver, but he demonstrated his toughness on a number of occasions last year, when it seemed like he was regularly the recipient of vicious hits from opposing defenders, always managing to absorb the blows and come back strong.

Not always getting credit for his legitimate speed (he was a H.S. state finalist in the 400 meters) Sanzenbacher contributed a few big plays for the 2008 Buckeyes, including a 53 yard reception against Penn State, the second longest reception of the OSU season, and a 35-yard catch against Michigan. He has two career touchdowns, one of which came in his first game as a Buckeye in 2007. Dane is an excellent overall athlete, and maybe as importantly, he's a good football player, a fact that has obviously not gone unnoticed by OSU coaches.

Off the Bench

[Taurian Washington](#) - #5 - Junior; 6' 2" 180 lbs. (Orchard Lake, MI) St. Mary Prep

For two years now, Taurian Washington has been making OSU football observers take notice of his ability...that is, except when the Buckeyes are playing games that count. The junior from Michigan has been patiently waiting for his chance to contribute, and all indications are that he will see considerable playing time in 2009. If they gave out a lifetime achievement award for performances in Spring Games, Washington might walk away with it. In each of the last two April intrasquad exhibitions, Washington has looked like he could be the next big thing, only to then remain on the sidelines when the regular season began. Whatever the reasons for the coaches' past decisions, Washington's athleticism is off the charts, and he has moved into the two-deep as a third-year player. Look for him to play a significant role off the bench for the

Bucks this fall.

[Lamaar Thomas](#) - #7 - Sophomore; 5' 11" 186 lbs. (Ft. Washington, MD) Friendly H.S.

Another national recruit with the potential to make his name a household word in Buckeye Nation this year is the man they nicknamed "Flash".....Lamaar Thomas, an explosive offensive threat who will be starting his second season in Columbus ready to contribute to what looks to be a faster and more wide-open OSU offense. One of the fastest Buckeyes, Thomas had just four catches as a true freshman, for 29 yards, but as the season went along, he emerged as the primary kickoff return specialist for the Bucks, bringing back 16 returns for 345 yards, a 21.6 yd. average, with a long of 37 yards. Thomas played running back in high school, and has the versatility to be used in a variety of formations as either a rushing or receiving threat.

[Grant Schwartz](#) - #6 - Junior; 6' 0" 194 lbs. (Dana Point, CA) Dana Hills H.S.

Schwartz is another outstanding overall athlete who has moved around a bit since arriving at OSU three years ago. A quarterback in high school in California, Schwartz started out as a safety in Columbus before converting to receiver after two seasons. He didn't register any receptions last season, but showed well in the spring and worked his way up the depth chart after contributing mostly on special teams in 2008.

Incoming

The Buckeyes had good success recruiting at the wide receiver position this past year, and they have three promising kids coming in this fall to join Coach Hazell's troops.

[James Jackson](#) - #15 - Freshman - 5' 10" 180 lbs. Grand Ledge (MI) H.S.

I've heard it reported that the day James Jackson arrived on campus, he became the fastest player on the OSU team. A state 100 meter dash champ, Jackson enrolled early and went through spring football, which may translate to an advantage for him in what could be a battle for early playing time with his fellow freshmen. A rumored move to cornerback didn't materialize, and Jackson showed some flashes in the spring game with three catches from the WR spot. The coaches may have the opportunity to redshirt all three true freshmen this year, but it wouldn't surprise me to see Jackson on the field sometime in 2009.

[Chris Fields](#) - #80 - Freshman; 6' 0" 180 lbs. (Painesville, OH) Harvey H.S.

Fields is a local product, and one of the top rated receivers nationally, based in part on his explosive speed (4.43) and his long, graceful stride. Fields was selected first team all-state in Ohio as a senior, after posting 61 catches and 16 TD's. It's quite possible that the coaches will take advantage of their depth at the position and allow Fields to redshirt in 2009 (although predicting such things is always dicey) while it's clear that there's a lot of raw talent waiting to be tapped in the young man from Painesville.

[Duron Carter](#) - #9 - Freshman; 6' 3" 185 lbs. (Ft. Lauderdale, FL) St. Thomas Aquinas H.S.

Recruiting experts have suggested that, of the incoming OSU wide receiver recruits, Duron Carter might be the best prepared to compete for early playing time in Columbus. Small wonder. Carter is the son of Buckeye legend Cris Carter, and has been getting coaching on the finer points of receiver play all his life. The young Carter's game is strikingly similar to dad's...the same size and body type...adequate, but not blazing speed...great hands...advanced route-running skills...and a penchant for finding the end zone.

It will be interesting to see how this wide receiver unit progresses over the course of the season. It's hard to overstate the importance of getting some leadership from either the lone senior Ray Small, or from others yet unidentified, to help Terrelle Pryor establish himself as a bonafide passing threat... especially early in the season.

Using the tight ends and/or running backs more in the passing game might be an option, if the same overall lack of game experience wasn't a factor at those positions as well. I think the talent will eventually rise to the occasion, but there is such a shortage of experience at all the skill positions on offense, that it could be very tough going early (read: USC game) for the passing attack.

If you'd like to feel better about the situation, I guess I'd say the long view of the impressive young talent at the position is as reassuring as the short term concerns are troubling. The best case scenario may be for everyone to just grow up....in a hurry.