



No Place Like First

A month ago, Ohio State was a middle-of-the-pack Big Ten basketball team, fading out of the Top 25, looking up at Michigan State, Purdue, Illinois and Wisconsin, and trying to battle back from a 1-3 start in conference play. But a month ago was also the last time the Buckeyes lost a Big Ten game...(January 9th, to be exact).

With [Evan Turner](#), the league's clear MVP, returning to full health, Ohio State (19-6) has run off eight straight Big Ten victories, and the Buckeyes have surged to a three-way tie at the top of the standings. This past week, Turner had a career high 32 points in a Super Sunday [win over Iowa](#), and then with the Buckeye star in foul trouble at Bloomington Wednesday, his wingman [William Buford](#) took over with 21 points, as Ohio State manhandled the Hoosiers, [69-52](#).

As recently as the 1st of February, the Spartans had a 3-game lead in the standings, and it looked like everyone else would fight it out for second place. But just as Ohio State was hitting its stride, Michigan State was stumbling to a three game losing skid, and all of a sudden it's anybody's championship to win, as Illinois, MSU and OSU share the top spot with 9-3 conference marks, with Purdue and Wisconsin within one game of the leaders going into the weekend.

The Man

All Turner has done is place himself at the heart of the national [Player of the Year](#)

conversation by

[leading the Big Ten](#)

in both scoring (19.2) and rebounding (9.3), while ranking second in assists (5.68). How bizarre would it be for a guy to win the national POY award after breaking two vertebrae in his back in the middle of the season? Turner's remarkable comeback and the ensuing resurgence of the Buckeyes have injected some real excitement into a season that didn't look very compelling for Buckeye fans when they rang in the new year.

What figures to make it all the more compelling is the upcoming [schedule](#) for the Bucks as they head into the last five games of the regular season. The next two games for OSU are against conference co-leaders Illinois and Purdue, with a second matchup against the Illini slated for Columbus to close out the Big Ten slate on March 2nd. For Ohio State, the timing appears to be optimal, since they are playing their best basketball of the season over the last few weeks.

The Wingmen

One big reason for that is the recent play of Buford, who really struggled with his shooting early in the season, a problem that seemed to throw the rest of his game out of sync as well. But the sophomore from Toledo has found his stroke, and his confidence on the court has soared ever since. A dynamic 1-2 punch like Turner and Buford on the offensive end, coupled with the solid defense played by all Thad Matta teams, form a combination that should scare any first or second round NCAA opponent.

Speaking of players emerging...junior center [Dallas Lauderdale](#) had a career-best 14 points against Indiana to go with eight boards and

seven

blocked shots, and he's another Buckeye whose game is peaking at the right time of the season.

[David Lighty](#)

and

[Jon Diebler](#)

have identical 12.4 point per game scoring averages, and in general have been doing what veteran players are supposed to do...play smart...play 'D'...and hit the open shot. Lighty especially is having a solid season in all phases. He has always been a superior defensive player, and he's getting to the rim a lot more on offense as he matures.

Ohio State was ranked 13th in the AP Poll and 16th in the USA Today/ESPN coaches poll...and that was before the Indiana blowout. So if you project that kind of ranking out to the second week of March, it's not a stretch to predict at least a Top 20 regular season finish...and an NCAA tournament placement somewhere between a 4-seed and a 6-seed. Who would have predicted *that* as recently as Christmas?

Turner's all-around game would make every OSU contest worth watching even if it weren't a near certainty that they will be his last few appearances in Scarlet and Gray. His numbers already compare favorably with some of the other once-a-decade type talents that we have seen come through Columbus...guys like Clark Kellogg and Jimmy Jackson. All that's left to really cement his legacy at OSU is to lead a run deep into the NCAA tournament.

Are you listening, ET?

Some Guy Named Griffin

Ohio State announced Thursday that their 2010 football recruiting class had grown by one player, as Columbus DeSales running back/defensive back [Adam Griffin had been offered, and had accepted a scholarship](#) to play for the Buckeyes. This newest OSU commitment came out of the blue...his was a name none of the recruiting experts had even talked about in the days leading up to national signing day last week. There's a good reason for that.

You've probably heard by now that Griffin is the son of Ohio State legend Archie Griffin, and it turns out he's a pretty good football player on top of that. All of which makes the whole thing a real feel-good story for any Ohio State fan. But it gets better...

As the story goes ([Ken Gordon](#) tells it in his *Dispatch* piece) Griffin called Tressel to ask if he could walk on to play for the Buckeyes, and after thinking it over, the OSU coach decided to go one better and offer Griffin a scholarship. Tressel has had some good luck with 'legacy' recruits in his time at OSU...not even primarily on the field, but in the area of intangibles...as Tressel says..."that ability to help others know just how special this place is".

Guys like Dionte Johnson (son of Pepper), Shaun Lane (Garcia), and Stan White Jr. are all players that might not have been Buckeyes based solely on their football skills, but all added something positive to the program while they were here. With a total of only 85 scholarships at his disposal, there's no such thing as an "extra" one for Jim Tressel. The fact that he somehow came up with one this week for a 5' 9", 185 lb. defensive back...(especially since he didn't even have to do it to get the kid on the team)...is yet another reminder of the classiness of this coach.

(Thanks to CDT for digging up this YouTube [video of Adam Griffin](#) highlights)

We haven't spent a lot of time or effort in this space reporting on women's sports at OSU, or on some of the non-revenue sports for men, but hey...it's a slow week, so what the heck? Besides, a couple of less celebrated OSU squads are piling up some achievements worth noticing....

Grappling With the Best

The OSU wrestling team is ranked #4 in the nation, and at 16-1 they have just three more dual meets before the Big Ten Tournament and the NCAA Championships get underway. The Bucks are rolling through the conference [schedule](#), unbeaten at 5-0 as they travel to 18th-ranked Illinois Friday night. The big showdown is next Friday (2/19) at Iowa, as OSU will once again try to take down the greatest college wrestling program of all time.

For the last two years, Tom Ryan's Buckeyes have finished second in the NCAA Championships behind the Hawkeyes, who won their 21st and 22nd NCAA titles in '08 and '09. Last year Iowa overcame a substantial OSU lead on the final day, winning the team championship without having an individual champion and nosing out OSU with 96.5 points to the Buckeyes' 92.

Dual meets and tournament wrestling are two entirely different animals, and while the Iowa dual meet next Friday will be important, the Bucks would probably rather come out on top of the Hawkeyes in the NCAA's, where the winners earn the right to be called "National Champions". If you get Big Ten Network and have any appreciation at all for collegiate wrestling, check these guys out. BTN will be showing the Iowa dual meet on a tape delay basis, and you know you'll be watching the best college wrestling there is.

OSU has an array of great athletes in football and basketball among other sports, but I'm thinking...in a hypothetical contest to determine overall athletic ability...give me, say... [Reece Humphrey](#)

,
[Lance Palmer](#)

and

[Colt Sponseller](#)

...and you can have your pick of any three guys you want from Tressel's or Matta's programs, or any other OSU team...and I like my chances. Just sayin'.

Domination by the OSU Ladies

Jim Foster's Lady Buckeyes basketball team accomplished something on Thursday night that no other Big Ten basketball team...men or women...has ever achieved. With [their 75-45 rout](#) of second place Purdue, the Buckeyes (24-3, 12-2) clinched at least a share of their *sixth*

consecutive Big Ten championship, a level of domination unmatched in league history. Securing the outright conference title is a mere formality awaiting the next OSU victory, as the Bucks enjoy a

[four-game lead](#)

over their closest pursuers, with four league

[games to play](#)

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The Purdue win was a statement game for Foster's troops in more ways than one. Not only was it a chance to clinch the conference title, but Purdue had handed OSU one of their two Big Ten losses back on Jan. 25, and the Buckeye players thought the Lady Boilermakers had run their mouths a little too much after that game, and strutted into Columbus a bit too confident. A 26-6 run by the Buckeyes to start the game put an end to any Purdue confidence issue, and the rout was on.

The 7th-ranked Buckeyes are led by 2-time Big Ten Player of the Year, junior center [Jantel Lavender](#), who leads the conference in scoring (20.8) and field goal percentage (.508), and is second in rebounding (10.4). And the Buckeyes' sophomore point guard [Samantha Prahalis](#) is still finding out how good she can be. Last year's Big Ten Freshman of the Year, Prahalis is averaging 16.5 points a game, good for 6th in the league, and she leads the conference in assists, averaging 8.07 per game. No other Big Ten player has an assist average over five.

What can you say about the job Coach Foster has done with this program? They haven't had the kind of NCAA Tournament success that they had hoped for, but that too can change. Foster and his charges are 18-0 at home this season, an OSU women's basketball record for home wins, and Foster's career mark at home as OSU coach is 126-9, and 99-5 since the '04-'05 season.

Congratulations are in order for the entire program.

Till next time, gang....Go Bucks!