



The start of the 2010 College Basketball season is right around the corner. Ohio State, coming off a 29-8 record last year, tips off against North Carolina A&T on Friday, November 12.

The Buckeyes open the season ranked fourth in the AP poll and fifth in the USA Today poll. After their sweet 16 appearance in last year's NCAA Tournament, the Big Ten Media has selected the Buckeyes to finish second in the league behind Michigan State.

Many of the same faces that won Ohio State a Big Ten Conference Championship last year are back for another run at a title. One glaring exception from last year's roster is Evan Turner, the reigning Naismith Award winner and National player of the year. But even without Turner, there is a lot of talent on this team. Head coach Thad Matta has a solid combination of grizzled veterans and young talent, much like the 2006 team that made it all the way to the National Championship game.

Here is a brief overview of Ohio State's roster. **Projected Starters first:*

David Lighty G/F Senior #23

Lighty, a Cleveland native, is the only remaining member from the heralded recruiting class that produced Greg Oden, Mike Conley Jr., and Daequan Cook. The senior guard has struggled with injuries throughout his college career, but is projected to have a huge year for the Buckeyes. In addition to the four years of experience he brings to the team, Lighty is hands down the best defender on the squad, possessing the ability to lock down the opponents best wing player on any given night. Last year, he averaged 12.6 points a game to go along with four and a half rebounds and three assists. Most people expect his scoring total to increase with the departure of Turner. Don't be surprised to see him bring the ball up the court and run the offense at the beginning of the season while Ohio State tries to figure out who the best option at point guard is.

William Buford G Junior #40

Ohio's Mr. Basketball in 2008, Buford is one of Ohio State's other options at point guard. The 6-5 junior could cause serious problems offensively for opposing teams, as his height would be a matchup nightmare for most point guards. Buford has the potential to be an absolute star this year. After averaging 14.4 last season, the Buckeyes are expecting him to carry a heavier load. Buford has one of the best, if not *the* best, mid-range games in the conference. His ability to come off picks and hit mid-range jumpers is an aspect of his game that has pro-scouts drooling. And it's not just the scoring that has people excited; Buford averaged five and a half rebounds and three assists a game last year as well.

Jon Diebler G Senior #33

For the last three years, Diebler has been Ohio State's deep threat on the floor. Buckeye fans shouldn't expect that to change in 2010.

Ohio's all-time high school leader in points scored is also Ohio State's best three point shooter. Coming in as a freshman, Buckeye fans had high hopes for Diebler, dubbing him "the next J.J. Redick". In his first year, Diebler struggled behind the arch, hitting on just under 29% of his three balls. Fortunately, that percentage has improved each year he's been with the Buckeyes, shooting 41% as a sophomore and 42% as a junior. If the senior wants to improve this year, there are areas of growth. To this point in his career, most of his success has come against opponents who play a zone defense against the Buckeyes. When teams chose to assign defender to chase Diebler around and blanket him behind the arch, he's struggled.

One thing that's blatantly obvious though -- when Diebler is hot, the Buckeyes are nearly impossible to beat.

Dallas Lauderdale F Senior #52

Dallas is Ohio State's returning big man, and what he lacks in offensive skill, he makes up for on the defensive side of the ball. Lauderdale led the Big Ten in blocks last year with 2.1 rejections per game. That number was consistent throughout the year as Big Ten teams continued to challenge him in the lane. His presence inside is deceptive because he's only 6-8 -- but his arms are long enough to pose a serious problem for every center he guards. He only averaged six and a half points last year, but I wouldn't be surprised to see that number spike this season. With opposing teams focusing more of their defensive efforts on Jared Sullinger, Lauderdale will have more room to operate and easier baskets to cash in on.

Jared Sullinger F Freshman #0

The gem of Ohio State's star-studded recruiting class, Sullinger will make an immediate impact for this Buckeyes team. Rated by most recruiting services as the top high school prospect in the country, Jared brings a versatile scoring attack that Ohio State hasn't had in a very long time. The kid has it all; a great low post game, solid rebounding, good hustle and an accurate outside shot.

Sullinger is the most decorated recruit to come to Ohio State since Greg Oden. During his senior season of high school, Jared accumulated a ton of national attention to go along with multiple awards. He was the 2010 High School Naismith winner, 2010 Parade Magazine Player of the Year in addition to being selected as a McDonald's All-American.

Sullinger will give a huge boost to a frontcourt that struggled against the bigger teams they faced last year.

Aaron Craft PG Freshman #4

Craft is probably the most natural point guard on the team, but won't be the starter with talents like Lighty, Buford and Diebler ahead of him (at least to begin the season). Still, Craft should see the court and put in meaningful minutes as a backup. Rumors coming out of preseason practice say that Craft might challenge Lighty as the best defender on the team. In addition to playing lock down, one-on-one defense, Craft also has a knack for getting into lanes and picking off errant passes. During his senior year of high school, he averaged over three steals a game. But like Lighty, it's not all defense for this guard. Craft is an excellent passer and can score from anywhere on the court.

Deshaun Thomas F Freshman #1

Thomas is another heralded recruit from this year's freshman class, rated as the top small forward in the country by most recruiting services. Like Sullinger, Thomas was a McDonald's All-American last year and played in the All-America game with his future teammate. Thomas played his high school basketball in Indiana and was named Mr. Basketball in the state after his senior year. He is a *fantastic* scorer on offense and also possesses good shot blocking ability.

Lenzelle Smith, Jr. G Freshman #32

Another member of the talented 2010 class, Smith hasn't been able to show much of anything to the coaches in preseason practice due to a wrist injury. Smith is a talented player though, possessing rare size/strength for a guard. He uses that size advantage to post up smaller point guards, creating a lot of open looks for shooters (which will be a huge advantage when Diebler, Lighty and Buford are on the floor). After being held out of Ohio State's preseason practices (and exhibition game against Walsh), Smith is expected to return to the team and play this season. How many minutes he gets remains to be seen because he's behind Craft in the pecking order.

Jordan Sibert G Freshman #2

Sibert is more of an athletic, rangy guard than he is a point guard. He excels when he's finding holes in the defense and using his speed to come off picks or back-door cuts. There might not be enough minutes for him to grab this year, but the Buckeyes have a good talent to build off of with this freshman.

J.D. Weatherspoon F Freshman #15

Weatherspoon was a surprising commitment for Ohio State in 2010 as he was originally committed to play for Xavier. After head coach Sean Miller left the Musketeers for Arizona, Weatherspoon decided to join forces with his former high school teammate, Sullinger, and the Ohio State Buckeyes. J.D. is very athletic for a forward and excels in transition as much as he does on the low block. He plays good defense and is very hard to move when he's set in a defensive stance, but he'll need to spend some time in Columbus developing a perimeter game. Still, this freshman is too talented not to see the court early.

Eddie Days G Senior #10

Days made the team back in 2009 as a walk on and has had a limited impact on the court. He played a total of seven minutes in four games last year (against Presbyterian, Indiana, Northwestern and Illinois), collecting one rebound and one steal on the season. Days will likely have a similar year, only seeing the court in mop-up duty.

Nikola Kecman F Junior #24

Nikola, originally from Serbia, will likely miss most (if not all) of this season with a torn ACL. Knee injuries are a recurring issue for Kecman as he injured the same knee last year. With the players in front of him, his impact on the team would have been minimal. Last year, even with the lack of depth in the frontcourt, Nikola only appeared in 13 games, and mostly when the contests were in hand during the second half.

Evan Ravenel F Junior #30

Ravenel is a transfer that the Buckeyes picked up this summer from Boston College. Transfer rules will force him to sit out this year, but when he's eligible to play next year, Ohio State will have a fantastic defensive big man at their disposal. Ravenel is mainly a shot blocker, and rebounds the ball well. He played in 39 games for Boston College before transferring, and will add depth to a frontcourt that will need it next year with the loss of Dallas Lauderdale.

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With four of five starters back from last year's Big Ten Championship team, combined with a talented group of young guys from the 2010 recruiting class -- the Ohio State Buckeyes should have another fantastic year under Head Coach Thad Matta.

Picture courtesy of TheOzone.net