



How deep is deep enough for Thad Matta? Can his Buckeyes go deep into the tournament with a seven-man rotation? Without very much to critique in Matta's 26-2 team, the possibility that they could wear down at tournament time has become an area of concern...or at least something to talk about. The concern is not totally without foundation. I don't think it's why they [lost by three points](#) to No. 6 Tennessee in the Sweet 16 a year ago, but lots of program observers thought they looked weary that day.

If worrying about the Buckeyes running out of gas is keeping you awake nights, it's worth recalling that Matta had an even shallower bench last season than he's working with in 2010-11. Evan Turner and four of this year's starters (David Lighty, Jon Diebler, William Buford and Dallas Lauderdale) carried an even bigger load than this year's top seven is doing. [Lighty](#), at 32.2 minutes per game this year, played 36.3 mpg in 2009-10. Likewise, [Diebler](#) (37.2 in 2009, 34.6 in 2010), [Buford](#) (34.4 in 2009, 31.4 in 2010) and [Lauderdale](#) (25.1 in 2009, 17.1 in 2010) are all playing fewer minutes this season.

If the bench looks thin to you this year, remember that in 2009-10, all they had was P.J. Hill giving Matta some decent minutes backing up Turner at the point, and Kyle Madsen as the only frontcourt substitute. Madsen was a minimal offensive threat who played mostly when Lauderdale got into foul trouble. That's about it.

No slam on those guys, but this was the No. 2 team in the country when they lost to the Volunteers, and whatever Hill and Madsen were, they were not [Aaron Craft](#) and [Deshaun Thomas](#). The Buckeyes are noticeably deeper this year for that reason alone. And come to think of it...it actually is for that reason alone.

The rest of that [2009-2010 roster](#) was filled with walk-ons, injured Europeans and a former manager with [a website](#). This year, after his top seven, Matta checks out his bench and sees a couple of talented freshman guards in [Lenzelle Smith](#) and [Jordan Sibert](#), but after that, it's more walk-ons and injured Europeans. Three freshmen are already getting major playing time, with [Jared Sullinger](#) starting, and Matta using Craft and Thomas, both also first-year guys, as the first and only players off the bench in competitive games.

One member of Matta's star-studded freshman class, J.D. Weatherspoon, is inactive at the moment due to academic issues, and the roster is further lightened by the offseason transfer of Walter Offut, and the fact that [Evan Ravenel](#), a transfer from Boston College, must sit out this season. [Nicola Kecman](#) has had ongoing injury problems and has yet to help the program on the court in three seasons. So seven guys it is.

I'm sure Matta wishes he had a deeper bench too, but who can blame him for betting that playing slightly-winded seniors gives him a better chance to win than giving more minutes to mistake-prone freshmen? Sibert and Smith could be starting this year for several Big Ten teams, but those teams don't have as much on the line as Thad Matta does as the calendar flips to March. Anyone criticizing Matta for not utilizing more players better pack an argument for more minutes by Sibert and Smith. Good luck with that.

The issue isn't going away for Matta and the Buckeyes. They might lose all five starters from this team if Sullinger and Buford are both lured to the NBA...a distinct possibility. But even if Sully stays, next year's version of the Bucks will again rely on a very small core of experienced players and a [truckload of talented freshmen](#). It's the Matta way.

Asked this time last year about the workload he requires of his starters, Matta's half-serious reply was "They can rest in April". To prepare for that workload, Matta has his players in great condition. He pushes, and they respond. Matta has also been quoted as saying "We recruit guys to play 40 ", and his practice routine of two hours at full-go prepares them to go the whole game if he needs them to.

As far as the way the season ended a year ago, my working theory is that Turner became too much of a go-to guy at the end of the season. He was so dynamic and so reliable that the tendency was to give it to him in crunch time and watch him go, and I think opponents zeroed in on him and beat him up late in the year.

Turner was even more of a one-man show than that. He was not only the go-to guy in the clutch, but overall he was the leading scorer, the leading rebounder and the point guard! I do think he looked tired at times in the tournament, for all the obvious reasons. He took it on willingly, but I think he really was asked to do too much for his team.

Turner has been replaced as leading scorer this year by Sullinger, while his point guard duties have been assumed by the more natural 1-guard in Craft, who plays almost 29 minutes per game. The rebounding load is more spread out, with Sullinger picking up most of the slack, but in almost every way, this year's team is more balanced and unpredictable on offense.

This season, any one of five Buckeyes could be considered a "go-to guy" depending on the situation. Who would be concerned about either Buford or Diebler being asked to take a game-winning 3-point shot? Or having Craft or Lighty take it to the rim in a pressure situation? Of course Sullinger is the more obvious go-to choice if going down low is the percentage play. No one can be overplayed, and all of them are unselfish.

If they make it to the Sweet 16 again, there will be no shortage of teams that can match up with Ohio State athletically, like Tennessee was able to do last year, and it will come down to execution to determine who wins. But this team is more versatile and a lot more balanced with the true post presence, and believe it or not.... deeper than last year's group that had the national Player of the Year, and won a Big Ten co-championship and the Big Ten Tournament.

So far, the Buckeyes have made their opponents tired more than the other way around, and I

don't foresee this bunch getting hurt by fatigue in the tournament. Whatever happens, they'll rest in April.

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The NCAA hammer has come down recently in the form of multi-game suspensions for Tennessee's Bruce Pearl and Connecticut's Jim Calhoun. Pearl served an eight game suspension earlier in the season, and Calhoun has received a three-game ban, deferred until next season, for recruiting violations.

This is not the first rodeo with NCAA violations for either program, and just this week, [additional troubles](#)

have arisen for Pearl, including allegations that he misled NCAA investigators. (They hate that.) For more on UT, see this

[11W post](#) on the Pearl situation, and OSU's Aaron Craft's role in it.

[Opinions vary](#) on whether the penalties imposed on Calhoun are severe enough, and you can decide for yourself after looking at [the details](#) of the violations, but from where I sit it looks like Calhoun's "legend" status and his pair of NCAA titles may have served to cut him some slack from the bigwigs.

Officially, the NCAA finds Calhoun guilty of the nebulous charge of "failing to create an atmosphere of compliance" in the program. Sounds serious....but apparently not serious enough to keep the Huskies from getting an invitation to the NCAA's annual postseason dance.

Calhoun may be hanging it up soon due to health problems, and Pearl may not survive these

latest revelations, but the bottom line is that for the moment, nothing these guys have done has moved their respective schools to clean house.

At the same time these stories are in the news, the example of the University of Indiana stands in stark contrast to the way Tennessee and UConn have dealt with unethical behavior by their coaching staffs. Indiana did clean house, and started over at the bottom, with a new athletic director, a new coach and a new set of players. And it has been tough.

[Rick Bozick](#) of the Louisville Courier Journal chronicles the reinvention of Hoosier basketball following the school's decision to start fresh rather than trying to weather the sanctions and keep a flawed regime in place. Tom Crean's Hoosiers have suffered through three seasons of uncharacteristically bad basketball for IU, and about all they have to show for it so far is hope.

The Hoosiers are 3-12 in Big Ten play, with a Sunday date in Columbus next up. They have yet to win a road game this season, and they haven't won on the road in Big Ten play for three years. Crean has already been granted a large share of patience from the fans, but there may finally be [some light](#) at the end of the tunnel. He's got Cody Zeller, a 6' 11" McDonalds All-American coming in next year to build around, and his proud fan base knows it can hardly get worse.

Indiana basketball fans can take some degree of comfort in knowing they did the right thing by cleaning up their program top to bottom. But if three years of bottom-feeding is the price a program has to pay for doing the right thing, it's no wonder that other schools opt instead to muddle through, sanctions and all.

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Back next week with a report on how the Buckeyes fared at the NFL combine in Indianapolis.

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