



This is the 2012 version of the annual column in which I speculate on ten OSU players I think are about to emerge as star-quality talents in the season ahead, throwing in the perennial missed guesses at no extra charge. Even with 16 starters returning, the Buckeyes will be counting on several key players to make the leap from starter to star, and those are the guys we'll try to identify and profile below.

The rules are the same every year...no seniors are on the list. Senior breakouts sometimes happen...but it's rare, and besides, it's against the rules of my list. And no true freshmen are allowed either, although several of them will no doubt be exploding onto the scene in Columbus. (That's next week's column) So everyone on my list has at least two years of eligibility remaining, though one guy in particular may be tempted to go pro a year early after this season.

The majority of Buckeyes on my list are returning starters, and all ten are projected to start in 2012. If I've learned one lesson in five seasons of doing this, it's that it's nutty to project a player to break out if you can't project him to be on the field a whole lot. The list is defense-heavy, including three defenders in the top four that I feel are on the cusp of stardom.

Junior defensive tackle Johnathan Hankins (*#52 above*) is on the list, although just as with Braxton Miller, you could make the case that he broke out a year ago. Hankins is on everybody's preseason All-American team, so his ability is widely known, but I see his breakout as still in the future. And with a year of learning behind him, Miller will be playing in an offense designed for Braxton Miller, so I feel confident in saying his best games are still ahead as well.

Here's my best guess at some Buckeyes we'll see stepping up this fall:

10) [Corey Linsley](#) - C - Junior - 6' 3", 292 lbs. - Boardman (OH) H.S.



Linsley has been the Buckeyes starting center since Urban Meyer first got a look at his personnel on the field this spring. [Linsley](#) had played mostly guard in his OSU career to this point, and while he had worked for a time as a freshman backing up center Mike Brewster, most observers had him penciled in as one of the starters at guard for 2012. Linsley's emergence this spring contributed to the transfer of Brian Bobek, the redshirt freshman many had assumed would be Brewster's successor. The powerfully built junior was a state place-winner in the shot put as a prepster, and he has long been reported to be one of the strongest guys on the team, with a bench press of 500 lbs. Meyer has called him one of the most improved players on the roster, and he'll be part of an offensive line for OSU that should remain intact through 2013.

9) [Curtis Grant](#) - LB - Sophomore - 6' 3", 235 lbs. - (Richmond, VA) Hermitage H.S.



© Dan Harker | the-Ozone.net

[Carlos Hyde](#)



© Dan Harker | the-Ozone.net

[Michael Bennett](#)



[C.J. Barnett](#)



[David Smith](#)



[Bradley Roby](#)



Jonathan Harkins

© Dan Harker | the-Ozone.net

Braxton Miller



photo credits: Jim Davidson and Dan Harker (the Ozone.net, and the Columbus Dispatch)