Ohio State will return two thirds of their starters from 2011, but only three of their ten coaches from a year ago. Defensive co-coordinator Luke Fickell is the only coach with any significant tenure on the Buckeye staff, as the two other returning assistants, running backs coach Stan Drayton and defensive line coach Mike Vrabel, will both be entering just their second season in Columbus.

Urban Meyer brought in six new assistants to the staff, and we'll profile them below so they won't be total strangers when you see them on the sidelines this fall. Almost to a man, Meyer's new assistants have strong Ohio ties, to go along with reputations as top-notch recruiters. Meyer knows he needs a deep coaching bench because historically his programs have lost coordinators and other assistants to head-coaching opportunities elsewhere.

Meyer hired a young, like-minded offensive coordinator in Tom Herman, and strengthened the defensive staff with Everett Withers, who will be co-defensive coordinator along with Fickell. All three of those coordinators might be head coaching candidates at other schools down the road, but for the moment, the Buckeye staff has a wealth of talent and experience at the top.

Now about that bench. The new OSU staff of assistants includes three veteran coaches with longstanding ties to Ohio high school and college football, and one youngster from Columbus with a familiar OSU-related grandfather.

First year tight ends coach Tim Hinton started as a graduate assistant at OSU and had a successful run at (Marion) Harding H.S. before moving up to college ball, and new cornerbacks coach Kerry Coombs built a powerhouse at Cincinnati Colerain before joining the college coaching ranks.

Offensive line coach Ed Warinner *(pictured above)* is an Ohioan who played at Mount Union and began his coaching career at the University of Akron. And Meyer's new wide receivers coach Zach Smith grew up in Dublin, the grandson of Earle Bruce, and worked for Meyer at Florida for five seasons.

Here's a closer look at the 2012 additions to the Ohio State football coaching staff:

Everett Withers - Asst. Head Coach / Defensive Co-coordinator / Safeties Coach

Like his co-coordinator Luke Fickell, Everett Withers wound up as head coach of a major college football program due to the sudden if not unexpected termination of his boss. Just before last season, his fourth year with the North Carolina Tar Heels, he was elevated to interim head coach following the firing of Butch Davis. His 2011 Heels went 7-5 in the regular season before dropping the Independence Bowl to Missouri. Now with the Buckeyes, Withers returns to his specialty area of defense, where he built a top-ranked unit at Carolina. His Tar Heel defense ranked sixth in the nation in total defense in 2009 and 30th in 2010.

Withers spent the 2007 season as defensive coordinator at the University of Minnesota, and from 2001-2006 he was the defensive backs coach for the NFL Tennessee Titans. Prior coaching stops included University of Texas, University of Louisville, and the New Orleans Saints, where he was a quality control coach on defense in 1994. He comes to Columbus with a reputation as an extremely bright, organized and hard-working coach. He is said to be a master of the techniques of defensive backs, and an effective and motivating teacher of those techniques.

As consistently solid as the recent OSU defenses have been, the play at the safety position has not often been singled out for praise. With Withers in charge of this talented group of kids going forward, don't be surprised to see that change. In All Big Ten pick C.J. Barnett, along with Christian Bryant and Orhian Johnson, Withers has an experienced group to work with.

It will be most interesting to see what kind of stamp Withers is able to put on the OSU defense overall as co-coordinator, and how he and Fickell work together to maintain a tradition of defensive excellence in Columbus.

Links:

Video: Withers talks to ESPN"s Adam Rittenberg

ESPN Blog: Q&A with Everett Withers

Radio interview of Withers by Adam Neft on 97.1 The Fan

A Closer Look at Everett Withers - Brandon Castel - The-Ozone.net

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Kerry Coombs - Cornerbacks Coach

Coombs comes to OSU after five years (2007-2011) as defensive backs coach at the University of Cincinnati, the last two seasons serving also as Associate Head Coach for the Bearcats. Coombs made his Ohio football name as the head coach at (Cincinnati) Colerain High School for 16 years, compiling a 161-34 record, and winning the Division I state championship with his unbeaten 2004 team. He was the last addition to Meyer's staff, coming on board after Bill Sheridan, Meyer's initial hire, changed his mind and decided to return to the NFL shortly after he accepted the OSU position.

Like so many of Meyer's assistants, Coombs' college football roots were in Division III, where he played on University of Dayton's national championship team in 1980. Coombs coached defensive backs as well as special teams at UC, and three of his DB's were drafted into the NFL. His first year at UC, the Bearcats led the NCAA in interceptions with 26.

Coombs got noticed at OSU very early this spring, with an animated, vocal approach to his job. His constant, barking exhortation to his cornerback charges could be heard above most everything else during the early spring indoor workout sessions. As the spring practices wore on however, observers said the chatter became infectious , and soon Coombs was not the only one doing the talking.

Cincinnati is a region of the state where OSU has not fared particularly well in recruiting for many years, and it is expected that Coombs' lifelong ties to the area will help in that regard. And his experience working with NFL-caliber corners at UC should be exciting for the top three returning Buckeye cornerbacks, Bradley Roby, Travis Howard and Doran Grant, all three of whom have the potential to eventually play on Sundays. Coombs' teams have traditionally been known for a ball-hawking style, with a lot of emphasis on interceptions and other turnovers. Bring it on.

Links:

Coombs took unusual path to OSU - Toledo Blade

Kerry Coombs - What a Show - Tony Gerdeman - The-Ozone.net

YouTube - The Sounds of Camp 2011 - Coombs miked at UC camp

Tom Herman - Offensive Coordinator / Quarterbacks Coach

Tom Herman has some ties to Ohio too...but just barely. He was born in Cincinnati, but raised and schooled in southern California, where he played Div. III football at Cal Lutheran. The 35-year old Herman came to the attention of Urban Meyer after he implemented his spread offense with spectacular results in two of college football's notorious wastelands...Rice and Iowa State. Herman has referred to his system in those days as "the underdog offense" because his teams were operating with a pronounced talent deficit compared to most of the teams on their schedule. He'll need to find a new name for it in Columbus.

After cutting his teeth at Sam Houston State and Texas State over six seasons, Herman landed at Rice in 2007 as offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach, and his underdog offense took off. Quarterback Chase Clement passed for 3,377 yards in '07, and Herman's Owls offense

averaged over 31 points per game, but couldn't overcome a defense that gave up 42.9 per contest. The Owls went 3-7 in Herman's first year as offensive coordinator, but rebounded to a 10-3 record in 2008, when they racked up 41.3 ppg on offense, and Clement passed for 4,119 yds, with 44 TD's and just 7 interceptions running Herman's spread. At Rice!

Those numbers landed Herman a step up to the Big 12 in Ames with the Cyclones. His offenses at Iowa State didn't produce the gaudy passing numbers he put up at Rice, but by 2011, a more balanced attack produced almost 390 yards per game of offense in a much tougher conference, upsetting 2nd-ranked Oklahoma State along the way.

Herman told Lesmerises in March that Ohio State will run a "a [shot]gun, spread, run-oriented football team that has tremendous balance through the play-action pass. We want to be no-huddle, we want to be up-tempo and use that to our advantage. And we want to be balanced. We want to run the football first to set up the throwing game." Meyer calls Herman "one of the bright young minds in college football", and OSU fans are brimming with anticipation of the "new look" Buckeye offense for 2012.

Links:

Video of QB Drills with Tom Herman at OSU

Herman interview with Doug Lesmerises - Plain Dealer - March 2012

Stressing the Defense: Tom Herman Edition - Ross Fulton - Eleven Warriors

Big Ten Blog - Q&A with Tom Herman

Zach Smith - Wide Receivers Coach

First-year OSU wide receivers coach Zach Smith thinks he had the best teacher possible to learn how to coach receivers. He worked under Urban Meyer at Florida for five years (2005-09) as a quality control assistant. "The greatest receivers coach to coach the game is our head coach," Smith said of Meyer this spring.

Not only did Meyer give a career-starting opportunity to the grandson of his friend and mentor Earle Bruce, he put him in a position to coach quality receivers like Percy Harvin and Aaron Hernandez, not to mention earning two national championship rings for the trophy case before he turned 30. Smith left Florida for an chance at a full-time coaching spot when Meyer assistant Doc Holliday went to Marshall in 2010. He then took a similar job as receivers coach and special teams coordinator at Temple in 2011, working with Steve Addazio, another former Meyer disciple.

Now the Dublin native is coming home to Ohio State, and he is tasked with coaching a unit Meyer has called “the least prepared group I’ve ever been around.” Meyer’s not so subtle bad-mouthing of his wide receiver corps may turn out to be a blessing for Smith, since the Buckeye pass catchers are tired of hearing about the lack of “playmakers” , and are seriously motivated to prove Meyer wrong on the field.

In the meantime, Meyer knows what he’s getting. "I know what a quality coach Zach is. He knows my system inside and out and he teaches the system the way I want it to be taught." Smith’s OSU receivers may be short on productivity...no Buckeye receiver caught more than 14 passes a year ago...but he has several guys with at least a year of experience in the spotlight. Now with his dream job firmly in his grasp, he’ll be trying to make “the greatest receiver coach” happy with his choice of assistants. Oh...and make grandpa proud too.

Links:

Born this Way - Austin Ward - ESPN - Buckeye Nation

Video: Zach Smith’s Introductory Press Conference

Zach Smith’s To-Do List - Tony Gerdeman - The-Ozone.net

Ed Warinner - Co-Offensive Coordinator / Offensive Line Coach

Tom Herman has stressed that the Buckeyes are not going to abandon the rushing attack under Urban Meyer, and new offensive line coach Ed Warinner will be charged with coordinating the Buckeye running game along with his O-Line duties. It is a job he has held several times since he began his career in 1984 coaching running backs at Akron. In fact, wherever Warriner has coached, his teams have run the ball effectively if not spectacularly. BTN.com's Tom Dienhart has called Warinner, "one of the nation's most respected—and underrated—offensive minds.

After a college career at D-III Mount Union where he played football and baseball, Warinner coached at Akron and Michigan State before landing at Army for 13 years (1987-99) where he developed as an offensive line coach and coordinator as the Cadets were leading the nation in rushing three times. As O-Line coach at Air Force in 2002, Warinner helped the Falcons average 307 yards rushing per game, to lead the nation.

Warinner provides depth for Meyer's staff, in that he has experience as an offensive coordinator, both at Army and at Kansas, where his 2007 Jayhawks offense averaged 479.8 yards and 42.8 points per game in a 12-1 season that included an Orange Bowl win over Virginia Tech. He has coordinated successful running games and offensive lines at Illinois (2005-06) and most recently at Notre Dame (2010-11)

Warinner's offensive lines will do as much or more zone blocking this year than the traditional power-blocking schemes used by OSU in the past, and Buckeye fans long frustrated by what they view as under-performing units up front will get a chance to see a different approach come September.

Links:

Q&A with Ed Warinner - Tom Dienhart - BTN.com

Q&A with Warinner at the WHAC - The-Ozone.net

Offensive line transforming under new coach - Bill Rabinowitz - Columbus Dispatch

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Tim Hinton - Tight Ends and Fullbacks Coach / Recruiting Coordinator

(photo credit: Tom Davison - The Ozone.net)