Furls continued look at the 2007 Ohio State Buckeyes football team continues for us this evening as our Buckeye Insider takes a look at the teams secondary for us. In my view, and it sounds like Furls view, Malcolm Jenkins and Donald Washington may be the best set of corners in college football by the end of the year. And the safety position also has the potential to be great as well. The opener is two weeks from today!

Gone:

Brandon Mitchell (Safety)

Antonio Smith (CB)

The Replacements:

Unclear

This unit, more than any other on the team, has vacancies available for the taking. There are no clear front-runners to replace either Antonio Smith or Brandon Mitchell. While the return of safety Anderson Russell, fresh off of a knee injury, will help solidify this unit, it is still unclear whether he will play at the same level that characterized the beginning of the 2006 campaign.

Based on last season, I would have to think that Donald Washington will emerge to play opposite pre-season All American favorite, Malcolm Jenkins. Washington, or whoever takes this spot, will have to play well early because teams are going to avoid throwing to Jenkins' side of the field.

Things are equally murky at the nickel back spot where it looks like it will be a pitched battle between Chimdi Chekwa and Andre Amos. Amos had to be considered the front-runner going into this match up, but he was hampered with a knee injury this spring, and in his absence Chekwa was impressive. New cornerbacks coach, Taver Johnson, seems impresses with Chekwa recently commenting that Chimdi has been a pleasant surprise this year. Personally, I am a bit concerned about Chekwa's speed, but we will see what happens.

Jemario O'Neal has had a rather disappointing career in the Ohio State secondary. He came in with all the hype expected of a speedster from Glenville, but he has not been able to fill the shoes of fellow Tarblooder, Donte Whitner. O'Neal has been very frustrating because he has all kinds of playmaking ability, but he has been unable to parlay that potential into actuality on a consistent basis.

This will probably be O'Neal's last real shot to hold a starting job. If he does not turn heads this summer Kurt Coleman will take his job at free safety. Coleman is nowhere near as fast as O'Neal (who is?), but he has proven to be a playmaker on special teams and in limited reps on the defensive side of the ball.

Patterson and Russell will be competing hard for the strong safety job. Both players have shown that they can competently play the position, but I think the deciding factor will be Russell's recovery from knee surgery. If he recovers to 90% before the season starts then it will be his job to lose, but I can see a situation where Patterson could move to free safety as a consolation prize if Coleman does not show the requisite speed and O'Neal continues to disappoint.

All things considered, there are a lot of questions in this secondary and very few of the roles are actually well defined, but Ohio State's athleticism in the secondary will allow for some flexibility, but the lack of the depth back there could be a real issue. The Buckeyes are just one or two injuries away from being susceptible down the field, although given Ohio State's front seven, I do not anticipate that many teams will be able to fully capitalize on this should it emerge as a problem.

The Star: Malcolm Jenkins

Enjoy it while it lasts. Jenkins, an early favorite for the Thorpe and All American honors, will be a first round draft choice next year. Frankly, he was probably one of the best last year, but was kind of lost in the national shuffle. Barring injury, he will probably be a top 10 pick.

The Rising Star: Donald Washington

He has great speed and better make up speed (hopefully he does not use that much). He was very good last year as a true freshman, providing not only solid coverage, but big play ability

(remember the goal line fumble in Austin last year?). I hope Washington is up to the challenge this year. Playing opposite Jenkins, opposing teams are going to dial his number frequently, particularly early in the season.

Star of the Future: Chimdi Chekwa

He is not the fastest corner in NCAA football, but he does play with great instinct and reacts well to receivers. He has very good hips, and I think this year is going to be a bit of a coming out party for him.