The Buckeyes were gutted at wide reciever this off-season, as Anthony Gonzalez and Roy Hall will be catching passes from Peyton Manning on Sundays, and Ted Ginn Jr. will be taking back kicks for the Miami Dolphins. The team returns a pair of reliable starters in Brian Robiskie and Brian Hartline, but Furls is a little worried at the depth the Buckeyes have behind that tandem. Furls previews the Buckeye wideouts for us.

Gone:

Ted Ginn Jr.
Anthony Gonzalez
Roy Hall

The Replacements:

Depends on who you talk to

There is no question that the losses at wide receiver were about as substantial as they could be. The Buckeyes lost three players (two as juniors) to the NFL Draft. Hall and Gonzalez will both be shagging balls for Peyton Manning in Indianapolis and Ginn will be returning punts for the Miami Dolphins. Who will step up in the vacuum they created on the outside? The answer is not as clear as we would all hope for a multitude of reasons.

Let's start with what we know, Brian Robiskie and Brian Hartline are the only players returning with any significant play-time, and they have locked up the first two wide receiver openings. After some rigorous math, I was able to conclude that this means the Buckeyes still need two more wide receivers to fill a four wide set, yet there are no upperclassmen to step in and fill those slots.

So Robiskie and Hartline are the only returning players from last year's great four and five wide receiver sets, but I still do not feel that these two are known commodities. Were they as good as we thought they were, or were they the beneficiaries of the attention that opposing teams had to pay to Ginn and Gonzalez last year? Only time will tell.

Following the NFL Draft, I said that the Buckeyes were going to need Devon Lyons, Albert Dukes, or Ray Small to step up in

order to give Hartline and Robiskie some relief in the secondary. If the opposition does not have to respect Ohio State's third option, than it is going to be rough going for the two primary options.

Unfortunately it appears as though none of the above listed candidates will be ready to step up. Small will miss at least the opener with an ankle injury, and one has to begin to wonder if Small will have the necessary durability to succeed as a full time slot receiver. Dukes and Lyons continue to be somewhat disappointing, but it appears that a couple of footnotes from Ohio State's 2007 recruiting class may be ready to step up and pick up the upperclassmen's slack.

Freshman wide receivers Taurian Washington and Dane Sanzenbacher are currently engaged in a pitched battle to secure the vacancy left open by Small's injury. Early indications are that Sanzenbacher all but has the spot locked up by his heady play and his ability to quickly grasp the offense, but Washington's athleticism and hands have caught the attention of the entire coaching staff.

Rumors out of camp indicate that the 2007 Buckeyes may not be as entrenched in "Tressel-Ball" as early reports may have led you to believe, but in order for the Buckeyes to emerge as a viable aerial threat they will have to have better

than average production from their wide receivers. Right now, I think that this group is going to be ordinary, but with the emergence of Hartline, Robiskie, Washington, and Sanzenbacher the future looks bright. We just have to hope that the future arrives sometime between now and the ninth game of the season.

Returning Star: Brian Robiskie

We all saw what Robo was capable of last year when he was the third option, now this begs the question what is he capable of as the primary option? We shall know soon enough.

Emerging Star: Brian Hartline

Hartline has a grittiness as a WR that reminds me of Anthony Gonzalez, additionally, Hartline has that same deceptive speed. Last year Hartline was awarded the "Jack Tatum Hit of the Week Award" on a couple of occasions, my gut tells me that he won't be on special teams this year.

Star of the Future: Dane Sanzenbacher

Sanzenbacher is turning heads with smart play and his ability to learn the play book quickly. I suspect that his quick learning curve and the Buckeyes vacancies will ruin any chance of him red-shirting this year. Sanzenbacher is small and not quite as athletic as a typical Ohio State wide receiver, but by the end of this season you will know how to pronounce his name.