There aren't a lot of question marks for a team returning 18 starters from the BCS Championship Game, but the one concerning who will back up Buckeye quarterback Todd Boeckman in 2008 was largely answered Saturday in the OSU Spring Game. And no, he's not a freshman from Jeannette, PA. For his first assigment, we sent new writer Dan Wismar out in the rain to cover the Scarlet & Gray spring game for us, and Dan says the depth in Columbus is as strong as it's ever been in the Tressel era.

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Terrelle Pryor may have been in attendance at the Horseshoe, but it was hard for me to tell from the third row of 'C Deck', with my rain poncho obscuring my peripheral vision and my binoculars clouding up. A steady rain began before the opening kickoff and never really stopped.

But the message permeating the wet weather on Saturday was that the 2008 Buckeyes are loaded. The depth on the roster, especially at the wide receiver, running back, cornerback, defensive end and offensive line positions is as strong as it has been in the Tressel era. Lots of the younger players are proving to be ready for openings where no openings exist. And about ten guys who were first-time starters a year ago are now veterans, hungry to make another run at the national championship.

The Scarlet team won the game 20-7, in large part because they had Boeckman and wide receiver Brian Hartline , as the duo combined for six completions, including a 48-yard strike to the two-yard line that set up the first Scarlet score. Two other important offensive weapons for the Buckeyes, tailback Chris Wells and wide receiver Brian Robiskie , sat this one out, which didn't leave a lot of offensive firepower for the Gray team. The Scarlet was also working with three likely offensive line starters, including tackle Alex Boone , center Jim Cordle and guard Conner Smith . Throw in kicker Aaron Pettrey , who kicked two field goals, including a 48-yarder, and it was pretty clear the Gray team was overmatched. But these games are never about which color wins.

Saturday it was freshman quarterback Joe Bauserman who stole the show with an impressive arm and a steady presence under center and in the pocket for the Gray. He repeatedly found wide receiver Taurian Washington down the field, at one point hooking up with him for a 50 yard touchdown completion that tied the game 7-7, in the second quarter.

Bauserman showed he can make all the throws, hitting sophomores Dane Sanzenbacher and Devon Torrence on some shorter sideline routes, and also demonstrating an ability to roll out, or step up and buy time for himself. After one such scramble, he launched a pass from his own 30 yard line that Washington caught for what would have been his second TD if not for a penalty off the ball. I mention it because Bauserman's throw was 70 yards in the air. And not a high floater. A laser-like, tight spiral. A rope.

The arm strength jumps out at you.

But Joe Bauserman's arm has never been in doubt. The 22-year old freshman had been recruited by the Buckeyes four years ago out of Florida, but opted instead for a professional baseball career as a pitcher. Having scratched that itch, he walked back on with the Buckeyes to compete for a scholarship this year, and it's a safe bet now that he has earned one.

Antonio Henton has been competing with Bauserman to keep the No. 2 quarterback seat warm until Terrelle Pryor comes to town in August, and until today would have to have been considered the favorite for the job. Henton worked behind weaker offensive lines Saturday, playing for the Gray in the first half, and with the Scarlet backups in the second, and he struggled to move the team in the passing game. To be fair, the Gray had trouble running the ball too, hardly Henton's fault.

Henton did show good strength in breaking a couple of tackles that looked like sure sacks, and he's pretty quick for a guy who plays at 236 lbs., but on this day at least, he didn't look ready to take charge in the event of an injury to Boeckman. How much his struggles were attributable to the weaker supporting cast is open to debate, but with Pryor coming in, and two other QB's seemingly ahead of him already, Henton may be seeing his chances for playing time at OSU slipping away.

The loaded Scarlet group also boasted receiver Ray Small and running back Dan "Boom" Herron
, both of whom also had impressive performances. Small (wearing his new number 82) caught several balls from Boeckman from his receiver spot, and returned kicks with a flair we hadn't seen for a while. Small played with an intensity and a toughness on Saturday that OSU fans would love to see carry over to the Fall.

Boom Herron may have been the most impressive running back on the field for either team (although that bar was set pretty low.) The redshirt freshman from Warren Harding only had about 30 yards rushing, but looked pretty good doing it. Herron looks slight (he's 5'10" 195 lbs.) but he's very quick, and seems instinctive in finding running room. He also showed some toughness for inside-the-tackles running that surprised me a little. It looks like Herron will see the field this season, perhaps as both running back and kickoff returner.

Last year's freshman sensation, running back Brandon Saine has been operating from the traditional fullback slot this Spring in a new "Pony" formation that is designed to get Saine and Chris Wells on the field at the same time, and take advantage of the fact that most teams can't defend a fullback who runs a 10.38 100 meters. Saine played for the Gray squad, and had a few uneventful carries in a stifled offense. As immensely talented as Saine is, I have yet to see him display the instincts for the position that Herron teased us with in this game.

On the defensive side of the ball, DE Lawrence Wilson looked fully recovered from the broken leg that cost him the 2007 season, so the spot vacated by Vernon Gholston should be in good hands in 2008. He showed very good quickness off the ball and into the backfield. Sophomores
Thad Gibson
and
Cam Heyward
are both rising stars at defensive end, and coaches have Wilson moving inside to the tackle spot in some pass-rushing situations so all three can rush the passer.

The Bucks lost just Gholston and linebacker Larry Grant as starters from the 2007 defense, which was one of the best in the country, but there are several defensive players who look ready to force their way onto the field this Fall one way or another. Tyler Moeller is a linebacker who barely weighs 200 lbs., but constantly creates havoc in the offensive backfield. They are using him as an outside blitzer, but he can defend the pass...and he hits people. Moeller was all over the place in this game.

Andre Amos also had a standout performance at cornerback for the Gray team. Amos missed most of last season with injuries, but he is an outstanding cover corner with good size, and is a sure and punishing tackler. He probably had a better Spring Game than any other defensive back. All-American Malcolm Jenkins need not be looking over his shoulder at Amos, but the other returning starter Donald Washington might want to check his rearview mirror.

Safety Nate Oliver , inside linebacker Austin Spitler , tackle Dexter Larimore , and starting safety Kurt Coleman all had strong games for the defense.

Offensively, I thought solid games were turned in by Boone and walk-on running back Bo Delande , in addition to Small and Herron. And receiver Taurian Washington is clearly one to watch. He's got "special" written all over him.

Six members of Coach Tressel's heralded recruiting class of 2008 have enrolled early, and have taken part in Spring practice. Two of the offensive linemen, Mike Adams and Michael Brewster sat out the game with injuries, but the other four played Saturday. Receiver Jake Stoneburner had a catch or two for the Scarlet, and J.B. Shugarts started at right tackle for the winners, and more than held his own. He is one massive 18-year old. On defense, inside backer Etienne Sabino and Andrew Sweat both lived up to the press clippings with a few tackles each.

My Offensive MVP's: Joe Bauserman, Brian Hartline, Taurian Washington

My Defensive MVP's: Tyler Moeller, Lawrence Wilson, Andre Amos

The announced attendance of over 76,000 must have been a count of tickets sold, because my guess is there were no more than 50,000 people there. 50,000 damp people.