Coach Tressel has always managed to keep most of Ohio's best talent at home to play for the Buckeyes, and now any doubts that remained about his ability to recruit out-of-state talent in competition with the other national powers have been convincingly put to rest as the Sweater Vest is putting together a 2009 recruiting class for the ages. Landing Terrelle Pryor and four other Parade All-Americans in 2008 has given the Buckeyes some momentum, and so far the Buckeyes are enjoying the ride. Dan Wismar takes a look at how the '09 class is shaping up for us in his latest.

"I loved it at Michigan. Then I went to Ohio State, and it was like, 'Bye Michigan.'" - Dorian Bell

With those words, the top weakside linebacker prospect in the nation forever endeared himself to Buckeye fans, but he also made a statement about where the recruiting momentum resides in the Big Ten region. Coach Tressel and recruiting coordinator J ohn Petersen put the cherry on top of a stellar 2008 class with the commitment of QB Terrelle Pryor in late-March, and they're off to a running start a month later with 14 commitments already for the Class of 2009 .

Last year at this time OSU had only seven verbal commitments, and they wouldn't receive another until the end of May. That class ended up with 20 players, while the 2009 group will be closer to 25. One reason for the earlier push seems to be the prominent presence of Illinois' Ron Zook in traditional Buckeye recruiting territory. Zook swooped in early on Garfield Heights defensive end **Melvin Fellows**, and got a verbal commitment from him in January. But last week, after hearing the siren song from Columbus for a couple of months, Fellows had a change of heart and switched his commitment to Ohio State. Fellows is an outside speed rusher with both great size and athleticism, and is rated by the Rivals service as the #3 defensive end, and the 29th best player in the country.
Scout.com rates Fellows
as the #8 defensive end in the nation, 74th
overall.

It's useful to remind ourselves that these recruiting ratings often vary widely, and are imprecise at any time, let alone before these kids have even played their senior football seasons. Remember too, that Jim Tressel is known for bringing in under-the-radar recruits (Malcolm Jenkins, Ashton Youboty, Nick Mangold) and turning them into first-round draft picks with coaching and development, while sometimes the most ballyhooed recruits (you know who you are) don't fulfill all those expectations for whatever reasons.

The scouting services do a big job collecting and viewing film and attending games, and they provide a valuable service, but it often appears that the rating are based on the colleges' level of interest in a player as much or more than the other way around. If OSU, Florida and Notre Dame have offered, the guy *must* be good.

That said, ratings do mean *something*, and the kids the Bucks are landing are among the nation's elite talents. Scout.com ranks ten of the Buckeyes' first 14 verbal commitments for 2009 in the Top 10 players in the nation at their positions, and in the top 175 overall. Rivals has seven of the OSU recruits in their top 100 players nationally.

Defensive Recruits

The focus for the 2009 class so far has been on the defensive side of the ball, and Fellows is joined there by another blue-chip defensive lineman, tackle **Johnny Simon** from Youngstown Cardinal Mooney. Simon is Scout's #6 ranked defensive tackle and the 29th ranked player in the nation overall. Johnny is a weight room legend as well, having already benched 225 lbs over 40 times...as a high school junior! Those are numbers that no one at this year's NFL combine for college seniors was able to match. Consider combine leader Vernon Gholston's 37 reps for comparison.

Behind those two defensive line anchors, a star-studded trio of linebackers will arrive in 2009 to fill holes and make tackles.

Dorian Bell , from (Monroeville, PA) Gateway H.S. is the #22 player in the nation according to Rivals, and is Scout's #1 weakside linebacker , and their 5th ranked player overall. In terms of attitude, intelligence and athletic talent, Bell is at the head of the class....the whole package, as they say. At 6'1 225 lbs., Bell runs a 4.5 40, and that speed should

land him at one of the outside LB positions, even though he's tough enough to play the middle. He shouldn't have to...

Jordan Whiting , from (Louisville, KY) Trinity, was the first recruit in this class, giving his verbal in September of last year. He is about the same size as Bell, at 6' 1" 227 lbs, but is rated by the scouting services as a middle linebacker. Scout has him as the #10 MLB , and #184 overall. Rivals also lists Whiting among their top five inside backers nationally. He'll be filling holes for the Buckeyes alongside his good friend....

Storm Klein , of (Newark) Licking Valley. Klein is one of those guys who always appeared to be a lock for the Buckeyes, and he was the second player to commit for 2009. He plays running back and linebacker in high school but is being recruited by Tressel as a defensive player. Scout ranks Klein as their #7 middle linebacker, 125th overall, and he's also in the Rivals Top 250 , at #178. He is 6'2" 225 lbs., and interestingly, Rivals has him listed in their "athlete" position category. I'd love to see an all around athlete like Klein, who is accustomed to handling the ball, be developed into a fullback as a Buckeye. Wherever he ends up on the field, you've got to love the name.

The Buckeyes de-emphasized the defensive backfield last year, bringing in only one cornerback and two safeties. This was an

area of some young depth on the roster at the time, so the 2008 priorities were elsewhere. But Tressel has already secured commitments from two of the top cornerbacks in the country, and a highly ranked hitter of a safety as well for the 2009 class.

C.J. Barnett comes to OSU from Clayton Northmont H.S., the school that produced current Buckeye safety Kurt Coleman. Barnett is more of a pure cover corner than Coleman, with long arms to excel in press coverages, while being perhaps not quite the physical player that Coleman is. Scout ranks Barnett as the #8 cornerback in the nation, and Rivals lists him among their top five corners, and the 53rd best player in the country overall.

Maryland cornerback **Darrell Givens** was one of the guys who decided to join the Buckeyes following last week's Spring Game. Givens is ranked as the nations #7 corner by Scout, and #56 overall. He also makes Rivals Top 250. Givens had offers from the Who's Who of college football, but it was Ohio State that reeled him in.

The Bucks didn't need to go far to land a talented young safety who is ranked among the nation's best at his position. **Jamie Wood** of

nearby Pickerington is a tall, rangy safety with a reputation as a physical force and a hitter. He's an example of how the scouting services adjust their rankings as the top teams' interest increases. Wood's
Scout ranking
went from #17 to #5 after he signed with OSU, and he is now their 81st ranked player overall. Rivals was on Wood earlier, in fact they rate him behind only Bell among Ohio State recruits, and the 26th best player in the country overall. Wood shows versatility and offensive skills as well, having been a standout at wide receiver in high school.

Offensive Recruits

The recruits on offense for 2009 will have to go some to keep up with their defensive counterparts, at least in terms of press clippings. But it could still happen, because the Buckeyes are far from finished, and at least two major national recruits on offense are said to be near locks for Ohio State. The talent already committed on offense is pretty impressive too.

Painesville Harvey wide receiver **Chris Fields** committed almost immediately when the Buckeyes offered on February 19, choosing OSU over offers from Penn State and Illinois, among others. Fields has 4.43 speed, with excellent hands and elusiveness in the open field. Riva Is ranks the local kid the #76 player in the nation overall, and among their top ten receivers. Scout rates Fields #47 among receivers nationally.

Adam Homan , from Coldwater, is the brother of current Buckeye Ross Homan, and like Ross, he starred on both sides of the ball for the Cavaliers. The 6'2" 232 lb. Homan played linebacker and running back, but is being recruited to play at the fullback spot in Columbus. Landing Homan was not exactly a hard sell for the staff, since he has had plenty of exposure to OSU football, and admits that he has wanted to be a Buckeye all his life. He appears to be another workout warrior. At 6'3" and 230 lbs., he looks to be exceptionally strong and well-defined in the upper and lower body. Scout has him ranked as the #4 fullback prospect in the country.

Jordan Hall is another of the Buckeye recruits to commit during the flurry of recruiting activity following the Spring Game. Hall is an excellent all-purpose back in his own right, but is invariably identified as Terrelle Pryor's teammate at Jeannette High School in PA. Hall is smallish at 5'9" and 185 lbs., but his video shows a tough and instinctive runner with good pass receiving skills and perhaps some kick return capabilities. Rivals lists him among their top five all-purpose running backs nationally, and Scout ranks him their #34 running back in the nation. Having played with Pryor for a couple years can't hurt his chances of contributing in Columbus.

Jack Mewhort was the first offensive lineman to verbally commit to the Bucks in the 2009 class. The 6'6" 285 lb. offensive tackle from St. Johns Christian in Toledo possesses that rare combination of power and speed, and that made him one of the first in-state prospects to be offered by Ohio State, an offer he accepted on December 29. OSU offensive line coach Jim Bollman has said he wants to bring in four recruits to his group in this class, and the #14 tackle in the country, as ranked by Scout, gets the offensive line group off to a good start.

The offensive line got a second verbal commitment on April 28, when **Corey Linsley**, a guard prospect from (Youngstown) Boardman gave his commitment to the OSU coaching staff. Linsley had been offered by Stanford, Michigan and Notre Dame, but he said it came down to Ohio State being "No. 1 in my heart", so the 6'4" 285 lb. dual-sport athlete decided to follow his heart to Columbus. Linsley was a state meet qualifier in the discus event for Boardman, and also participated in the shot put. Scout ranks him as the #5 guard prospect in the country.

Any report about players coming in for the 2009 season would not be complete without mentioning the transfer of Justin Boren to the Buckeyes from that other Big Ten school north of here. Boren was Honorable Mention All-Big Ten in 2007, and his ability and experience should fit right in when the Bucks lose three starters off the offensive line after this season. Boren is not allowed to be on scholarship since he transferred within the conference, so his addition to the team will not affect the number of scholarships available for 2009 recruits.

And Justin's younger brother, **Zack Boren** of Pickerington, became the latest Buckeye verbal, when the 6'1" 255 lb. fullback/ inside linebacker gave his commitment to OSU coaches on Wednesday 4/30, just days after the announcement of Justin's transfer. The Bucks are piling up fullback prospects, and that's where they plan to use Boren according to the early reports.

On the Radar

With the 2009 class still only half-full, any evaluation of it is premature, but keep in mind that there are at least two more major offensive talents that many observers feel are leaning heavily toward the Buckeyes and will be in Scarlet and Gray when it's all said and done. And there are still four or five top Florida prospects on the Buckeye radar, while they continues to pursue and compete for the very best players in the nation.

There would be widespread shock in Buckeye Country if star offensive tackle **Marcus Hall** from Glenville were headed anywhere but down I-71 to Columbus to play his

college ball. Hall is rated by Scout as a "five star" talent, and in the top two or three nationally at the tackle position. He seems to be following the traditional script for players in Coach Ted Ginn Sr.'s Glenville program. That is, to postpone a commitment until late in the process, which keeps the college recruiters coming around to see Glenville's star players, giving more exposure to Coach Ginn's lesser known, but still D-1 caliber athletes. But count on Marcus Hall to be a Buckeye.

The Buckeyes want to bring two tailbacks in with the 2009 class, and it looks now like they may land one of the nation's fastest rising prospects from South Florida. **Jaamal Berry** from Miami Palmetto, has been shooting up the recruiting charts with a bullet, and the 5'11' 185 lb. speedster now holds offers from Florida, Florida State, LSU, Michigan and a dozen other national powers, but he was said to be "pumped" about his offer from the Buckeyes, and his attendance at the Spring Game with four other top Florida prospects seems to have really turned his head. Scout recently upgraded Berry to their #5 running back. Rivals has him in their top five

tailbacks nationally now that he has made the country take notice.

One of those Florida kids who accompanied Berry on his Columbus visit was wide receiver prospect **Duron Carter**, from Ft. Lauderdale St. Thomas Aquinas, who has now also been offered by the Buckeyes. OSU would seem to hold a significant advantage in Carter's recruitment, since his dad is Buckeye legend Cris Carter, but Duron is still considering offers from Auburn, LSU and Florida along with TSUN. (He wouldn't, would he?) I like the Buckeyes' chances with this legacy recruit.

Coach Tressel has always managed to keep most of Ohio's best talent at home to play for the Buckeyes, and now any doubts that remained about his ability to recruit out-of-state talent in competition with the other national powers have been convincingly put to rest. He and his staff have done well in Florida, and the last several years have shown that they can get the players they want from Pennsylvania and Michigan as well. So far in 2009, the Buckeyes are having it their way in recruiting, and the whole staff seems to be hitting their stride with the

process. Landing Terrelle Pryor and four other Parade All-Americans in 2008 has given them some momentum, and so far the Buckeyes are enjoying the ride.

Recruiting Links:

Scout Top 300

Rivals Top 250

Buckeye 2009 Commits

Buckeyes 2008 Class