Redshirting is so 2001. The new paradigm in college football is the immediate contributor and this is facilitated by early graduation and early enrollment. Early enrollment allows incoming freshmen to participate in spring drills, setting stand out players up for immediate impact. Additionally, this development now makes the months of May and June (traditionally college football's slowest months) some of the most crucial. This said, the Buckeyes are fully immersed in the formulation of their 2009 recruting class. And it is shaping up to be specatacular.

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For proof, one only needs to look to the 2008 recruiting class. In Tressel's recruiting magnum opus thus far offensive linemen J.B. Shugarts, Mike Adams, and Michael Brewster all reported early. The result is that all three appear to be on the inside track for positions in the 2008 two deep, and as openings on the line appear for the 2009 season, all three have positioned themselves to immediately step into starting roles with the benefit of a year's worth of back up experience.

The same type of scenario can be seen in the 2008 linebacker standouts Etienne Sabino and Andrew Sweat. Both players had the kind of spring that is almost certain to propel them into some immediate playtime next year, possibly at linebacker but at least on special teams, and with the departure of Freeman and Laurinaitis following the 2008 season, both players will be poised in prime position

to challenge for starting positions in 2009.

With the newfound onus on early enrollment, early recruiting has become key, and this year the Buckeyes find themselves way out ahead of the game. Ohio State has already secured the verbal commitments of fourteen highly ranked players, putting the Buckeyes far ahead of their prime competition in the Big Ten; Michigan, Illinois, and Penn State. The Buckeyes early roll actually has them poised to put together another top five national class, but there are still some holes to fill. I expect the Buckeyes to add at least seven more players to the class of 2009, and here are some of the obvious needs and some of the names being tossed around.

1. Running Back: With the impending 2008 departure of Chris and Maurice Wells, the Buckeyes will need to add some depth at the position. Right now, the Buckeyes have Brandon Saine and Boom Herron ready to step in, but that puts the Buckeyes one injury away from putting a gaping hole in the roster.

The Buckeyes have already secured the commitment of Jordan Hall for the 2009 class, but Hall projects as more of a scat back than an every down Big Ten pounder. The Buckeyes will be looking to secure one more back and appear to be viable contenders for either Jamaal Berry or Carlos Hyde. Berry compares favorably to a Robert Smith/Brandon Saine whereas Hyde is more of an Eddie George/Chris Wells type. I give the Buckeyes about an 80% chance of securing a commitment from one of these players, and I think that Hyde would be the more likely of the two. Hyde is originally from the Cincinnati area, moved to Florida two years ago, and has followed the Buckeyes his whole life.

2. Offensive Line: The veteran laden 2008 offensive line will suffer substantial graduation losses in Rehring, Boone, and Person. While the Buckeyes were fortunate to garner the services of three of the nations top recruits in their 2008 class, there are still several holes opening up for the class of 2009 to fill. So far the Buckeyes have secured the commitments of Jack Mewhort

and
Corey Linsley
who project as interior linemen, but there is still space for at least one or two more linemen.

The Buckeyes appear to be pushing hard for Glenville standout Marcus Hall, but the Buckeyes are not alone as Hall, one of the nation's top five tackle prospects, already has nearly thirty offers from a typical who's who list of college football teams. The Buckeyes are rumored to be early leaders, but Hall still seems to be marketing his services pretty aggressively, so I would not hold my breath for a Hall commitment.

The Buckeyes also have an offer on the table for Illinois stand out Chris Watt . Watt's interest in Ohio State is a bit unclear and again, he projects as an interior lineman. In a sense right now, all of Ohio State's "tackle" eggs are in one basket. Personally, I think that Hall is holding out for an offer from USC, with Mike Adams and B.J. Shugarts already on the roster who can blame him?

3. Defensive Backs: Following this season the Buckeyes will lose the services of Malcolm Jenkins and probably Donald Washington. Jenkins is out of eligibility and will certainly be a first round pick, but Washington, who actually has better combine measurables (4.44 forty, 11'2" broad jump, and 41" vertical), could sneak into the first round as well.

You can never recruit too many corners and as evidenced by the recent commitment and decommitment
of
Darrell Givens
you cannot necessarily count on every eighteen year old that does commit to actually show up on campus. It is generally better to recruit cornerbacks than safeties, as cornerbacks generally transition to safety better than vice versa, and so far the Buckeyes already have commitments from elite prospects
C.J. Barnett
(CB) and
Jamie Wood
(safety), but they will still need to fill at least on more spot in the secondary.

Right now the Buckeyes have outstanding scholarship offers to Frankie Telfort ,
E.J. Banks

,
Dominic Clark
, and
Vladimir Emilien
. I am not sure that the Buckeyes will be able to pull in any of these highly sought after out of state prospects, but the one that I hear most frequently discussed is Emilien. The Buckeyes still have a lot of work to do there.

In an interesting development, the Buckeyes offered a scholarship to Ohio State 2009 commit Dorian Bell's Gateway teammate Corey Brown less than one week after Givens backed out of his verbal to Ohio State. Brown has already received in excess of 30 scholarship offers, but you would have to think that Dorian Bell might be able to influence his teammate. Bell was the guy that said, ""I loved it at Michigan. Then I went to Ohio State, and it was like, 'Bye Michigan.'" There was a lot of talk that Bell was pretty active in attempting to secure an offer for his teammate.

4. Defensive Tackle: The interior defensive line has been an issue at Ohio State since the 2002 season. Pitcock and Patterson were a terrific tandem, but the overall depth on the inside has been problematic. The Buckeyes were able to land the services of Garret Goebel for the 2008 class, and that should help some down the road, but the Buckeyes will have holes to fill beginning with the departure of Abdallah in 2008, Doug Worthington and Todd Denlinger in 2009, and Dex Larimore in 2010.

So far the Buckeyes have secured the commitment of the only "true" DT prospect that they offered, John Simon . Corey Adams (a DE/DT prospect) is the only other obvious DT offer on the table from the Buckeyes, and frankly I think the Scottsdale, AZ native is a bit of a pipe dream. The Buckeyes currently have offered about a half a dozen different DE prospects (a position where they do not have an impending depth crisis) and some of them do appear to have the physicality required to move inside, but most of the players are so highly ranked at DE it would be a real surprise to see any of them move in. So for right now, the Buckeyes long term plans on the inside is a bit of an enigma. Personally, I would expect to see the Buckeyes offer at least one more DT in the upcoming June camps.

5. WR/Athlete: The 2008 will mark a distinct transition in the Ohio State Buckeyes. Ohio State will field a very seasoned team this year, and ultimately I

think that will influence some of the decisions of borderline players (like Brian Hartline and Donald Washington) to leave in much the same manner that influenced a few of this years borderline players (like Laurinaitis, Robiskie, Boone, Freeman, and Jenkins) to stay this year. So I expect that the Buckeyes will have to replace their number one and number two receivers. That said, 2009 will mark Ray Small's last year of eligibility, but it appears as though the Buckeyes have already found his replacement in the 2009 class, Harvey's Chris Fields
.

DeVier Posey is a logical replacement for Brian Robiskie, but the Buckeyes are still lacking a polished second option on the outside. The Buckeyes are likely to land Duron Carter in an attempt to fill that role. Duron is the son of Buckeye alum and fan favorite Cris Carter. The elder Carter played for the Buckeyes from 1984-1986 and held most of the school's receiving records when he left. Cris has been an outspoken and active alumnus since leaving and it seems likely that his son will accept his offer from Ohio State.

Current 2009 Commitments:

Dorian Bell
Jack Mewhort
Jamie Wood
C.J. Barnett
Corey Linsley
John Simon
Melvin Fellows
James Jackson
Storm Klein
Jordan Hall
Adam Homan
Jordan Whiting
Chris Fields
Zach Boren