I'm always on the lookout for talented new blood for the website, and I hit the jackpot with Dan Wismar, a helluva writer that is going to help us cover the Buckeyes this season while also helping us cover the Browns as well this fall. In his "Buckeye Leaves" piece, Dan fills us in on a myriad of all things Buckeyes. News on the recruiting front, Troy Smith potentially starting against the Browns in week three, rumors of Kosta coming to the Cavs, and which Buckeyes made which pre-season All-America teams.

Notes, thoughts, and links on the Buckeyes:

First, a recruiting update. The Buckeyes have just 10 to 12 slots left in their 2009 football recruiting class, with many of those already being held for specific players. They have about two dozen other offers out, and as precious as those OSU scholarships are becoming, the coaches may still make an offer to one of the top place-kickers in the country. With highly touted Ben Buchanan of Westerville already in the incoming 2008 class, offering Anthony Fera, the nation's top kicker for 2009, would seem to be a low priority. But Fera has OSU connections and is said to love the Buckeyes, and besides, he may be a talent that special teams devotee Tressel just can't pass on. All-State in Texas as a junior, Fera kicked a 58-yard field goal as a freshman at 14. And he punts the ball 70 yards too. Unbelievable.

Sitting with a freshly-minted Ohio State offer is Justin Green, a cornerback-running back from (Louisville) Male H.S., who is being recruited as an "athlete", and who could end up at wide receiver. And

Reid Fragel
, a 6' 7" 255 lb. tight end from Grosse Pointe, MI, is the latest Buckeye commitment for 2009. He's got the feet and the frame to project to an offensive tackle down the road, but will come in at the tight end spot, where the Bucks will be a bit thin after 2008.

The Buckeyes are in strong position with at least five of Florida's top players; running backs Carlos Hyde and Jaamal Berry , defensive backs Vlad Emilien and
Brandon McGee
, and receiver
Duron Carter
, son of Cris. It looks now like Hyde and Berry will be visiting Columbus on June 17, and a commitment from (at least) Hyde could follow soon after that visit. The staff is also assumed to be holding spots for two Glenville kids, OT
Marcus Hall
and DE-OLB
Jonathan Newsome
. If Tressel lands those seven, he could fill out the class with Larry, Curly and Moe, and have a Top 5 rated recruiting class.

Instead, the Buckeyes are still in on several other national recruits to finish off the 2009 class. In addition to the offers above and the 15 commitments, the Buckeyes will probably add a fourth offensive lineman (Chris Watt ?), two more DB's (Core
y Brown
,
Justin Green
?), possibly another defensive end (
Pat Muldoon
?) or tackle, and a fourth wide receiver (
Kraig Appleton
?) to this class. And just maybe, that kicker.

Meanwhile, some top quality kids from Ohio, who find themselves just out of range of an Ohio State offer, will wait to see if the Bucks get turned down by the national

recruits before they commit elsewhere. Several excellent Ohio offensive linemen find themselves with offers from the second tier Big Ten schools and a host of other D-1 offers, but are waiting to see if that call from the Buckeye coaches might yet come in.

Tressel has tinkered with his recruiting strategy in the last two to three years. In past years, after successfully locking up most of Ohio's top players, he has ventured into the ranks of the national recruits, but has been judicious with extending offers, and has shown a willingness to wait until February signing day for a decision from some of the highly sought players. Some of the good homegrown talent can't afford to wait that long for an OSU offer, so if the national blue-chipper ends up going elsewhere, sometimes it's too late to land the really solid regional kid as a fall-back option. A couple of times early in Tressel's tenure, OSU came up second best on signing day for the big name player, leaving the perception that the staff may have settled for less than their first choice.

Today Tressel is operating more from a position of strength, with two consecutive title game appearances, and Terrelle Pryor and others in the fold acting as a draw for the best talent nationally. He has concentrated on identifying the players he wants earlier, offered them earlier, and has been asking for and getting earlier commitments, both from out-of-state kids as well as the best in Ohio. He has shown the ability to reach into Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Illinois and Michigan to grab the players he wants, and the connections with Florida high schools have yielded a steady supply of that state's abundant talent. Tressel has made efficient use of on-campus visits, often using far less than the number of visits he is allotted under NCAA rules, concentrating on the select group of players he really wants, and realistically has a chance to get. The preference is for the quality of the visit, rather than the number of players visiting.

This year, it looks like the OSU class will be nearly complete before the end of summer, so they are well ahead of the pace set in the recent past in terms of numbers, and also ahead of other major programs nationally this year. By September, the few slots remaining for the Bucks will have the nametags filled out in pencil, and signing day in February could be rather anti-climactic. This is by design, as Tressel wants to spend the Fall of the year concentrating more on

winning football games than on entertaining high school seniors and their parents.

Misc. OSU Notes

* Chad Ford's NBA Mock Draft has the Cavaliers taking Buckeye big man Kosta Koufos with the 19th pick. I'm no NBA draftnik, but I like Chris Douglas-Roberts from Memphis, a 6'6" shooting guard that I think would complement LeBron nicely. But the Cavs need bigs, and the Canton kid would be a popular choice with fans.

* It now looks likely that Troy Smith will come into Cleveland Browns Stadium in Week 3 as the Ravens' starting quarterback. In Baltimore, it's news that Troy Smith is confident . Not around here. Ever since the 2007 Draft, I have anticipated this homecoming for Smith, and wondered what it would feel like for me over in Section 129, to pull for the team playing against Troy Smith for the first time ever. If it happens that the opposing QB is Brady Quinn that day, I'll be experiencing double cognitive dissonance. But I can only imagine the feeling Troy Smith will have, living his childhood dream, taking the field as an NFL quarterback in his hometown. Wow. I trust my all-consuming contempt for the Ravens as a team will help me stay on message. Go orange hats!

* I stumbled on a Troy Smith fanpage , but one clearly done by a Baltimore Raven fan. The first line of Troy's bio reads "Troy Smith was born on July 20, 1984 in Glenville, Ohio." (Actually, the purple gave it away)

* Glad to see Gene Smith has put to rest rumors that he might consider leaving the Athletic Director position at Ohio State to take the vacant spot at Notre Dame, where he is an alumnus. The OSU Athletic Department put out a statement Tuesday in which Smith said he would not be a candidate for the Notre Dame position. Smith inherited a great situation from Andy Geiger, but he deserves

credit in his own right for upgrading some of the minor sports...wrestling, soccer, lacrosse and swimming come to mind...while maintaining the commitment to having the best facilities anywhere. Besides, any other A.D. position in the country is a demotion from the job he has now.

* There is a pretty good YouTube video of 2007 Buckeye football highlights , if you've got seven minutes to spare, and need to get psyched for the season. As you watch some of the Chris Wells highlights, consider the monster year he could have on a completely healthy ankle for 12 games. He had 1600 yards last season playing part time in several games. He had only about 65 yards combined in the YSU and Akron games, two of the weaker OSU opponents, as the coaches protected him from senseless aggravation of the ankle injury. I think it's realistic to project 1800 yards, even if he sits down in the second half of some early-season blowouts. The Big Ten will be weak enough to allow for some possible 200-yard games...you know, besides Michigan.

* If you have any doubt that the national college football media is pulling for anyone but the Buckeyes to make the BCS championship game, consider this quote from Lindy's 2008 College Football Preview. In the context of rating the September 13th OSU-USC game the No. 1 non-conference attraction of the upcoming season, the magazine has this to say:

"The college football world (non-Buckeye division) is united in hoping to see the Trojans win big, vastly decreasing Ohio State's chances of making a third straight mockery of the national title game."

I suppose we'll have to put up with this kind of abuse until OSU pounds somebody convincingly in the title game. I like to remind myself that these smug pronouncements come from the same "experts" who voted the Buckeyes the No.1 team in the country at the end of the regular season in both 2006 and 2007.

* Speaking of the preseason preview magazines, the Buckeyes are faring well in the polling of the experts, as you might expect. Although none of them have OSU ranked No. 1 in their rankings, consistently high expectations for the Bucks by Lindy's (#3), Athlon's (#2), Phil Steele's(#2) and Surefire Scouting (#2) put OSU

at the top of the Consensus Poll , as if that means anything in June. And no one anywhere is picking a team other than Ohio State to win the Big Ten Conference.

* Individual recognition for OSU players is not hard to come by in the preseason either. Linebacker James Laurinaitis and running back Chris Wells are First Team All-Americans for Lindy's, Athlon's and Phil Steele's publications, (as well as for anyone else who's been paying attention.) Cornerback Malcolm Jenkins was selected First Team by Lindy's and Steele's, and Second Team by Athlon's.

Steele's also rated OT Alex Boone and LB Marcus Freeman as First Team All-Americans, with Guard Steve Rehring making his Third Team. Boone made Lindy's Second Team roster.