Things could hardly be looking better for Jim Tressel when he surveys his quarterback situation going into the 2008 season. The Bucks will open against YSU on August 30 with the 2007 First Team All-Big Ten quarterback starting, a backup with the maturity of a senior and the eligibility of a freshman, plus the most highly recruited player in the nation coming in as a true freshman to begin putting his mark on the OSU offense. Dan the Man Wismar takes a look at the Ohio State signal callers in the second installment of his position by position look at this years Buckeyes.

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Quarterback Todd Boeckman is back for his second year as the starter, with his receiving corps returning intact, a Heisman candidate sharing the backfield, and his confidence and command of the system at an all time high. Boeckman may be the first returning conference all-star in a long time to be under fan pressure to perform immediately, due mostly to their intense interest in getting a look at his backup. That would be true freshman Terrelle Pryor, the dual-threat phenom from Jeannette, PA, a kid whose willingness to wait and learn exceeds that of many Buckeye fans, who seem eager to see him to show his stuff immediately.

Tressel will undoubtedly have some plays in the book to utilize Pryor's athleticism, probably including him taking some snaps from center. But if Boeckman were to sustain an injury, especially early in the season, it would likely be 22-year old freshman Joe Bauserman who would be brought on to run Tressel's offense as the backup. Until Pryor demonstrates a command of the whole offense, and also irons out some throwing mechanics with the coaches, fans anxious for him to put on the red cape for the Buckeyes will just have to wait.

Quarterbacks

Projected Starter: Todd Boeckman - 6th yr. Senior; 6' 4" 244 lbs. St. Henry (OH) H.S.

Todd Boeckman bucked the conventional wisdom a bit in 2007, when as a first year starter, he led the Buckeyes to the outright Big Ten championship and a berth in the BCS title game, winning first team All-Big Ten honors in the process. First-year starters aren't supposed to be able to do those things. My personal rule of thumb is that a first-year starter will result in two losses over the course of the season, and it could be fairly said that Boeckman's inexperience did contribute to the Bucks' two defeats. He had two of his worst individual performances in those games, and while there was plenty of blame to go around in both the loss to Illinois and the BCS loss to LSU, Boeckman would probably be the first to admit he didn't play particularly well.

But beginning a new season as the certain starter, with a victory over Michigan and a pressure-packed appearance in the national championship game already on the resume, has Boeckman sporting the look of a team leader. It has been reported that he took the title game loss pretty hard, but he has returned this Spring with a great attitude, and a confidence that the learning experience of 2007, as well as his extra offseason time in film study and in the weight room will serve him well in 2008.

All Boeckman did last year was pass for 2359 yards, and 25 touchdowns, with 14 interceptions. With a 63.9 completion percentage, he easily led the Big Ten in passing efficiency. It was the difference between the way he looked early in the season, and the somewhat more tentative and mistake-prone later performances that was the cause for concern. There was no trace of tentativeness or rust on Boeckman in this year's Spring Game. He connected with Brian Hartline for six completions out of a total of 12, including a 48-yard strike, in his limited appearance. He has developed quite a chemistry with both of the Brians, Hartline and Robiskie, the two leading receivers from 2007, and the receiving corps is deep and talented behind last year's starters. If conditions aren't suitable for passing (like on one

particular rainy day in Ann Arbor last November) Boeckman knows he's got perhaps the best running back in the nation to grind out a couple hundred yards on the ground.

It is *not* true that Boeckman was recruited by John Cooper, and attended OSU during the Clinton administration. It just seems that way. Boeckman is a rare sixth-year senior, having greyshirted in 2003, and redshirted in 2004 to put some distance between himself and Troy Smith. He then backed up Smith and Justin Zwick for two years before ascending to the starter's job in 2007. For Todd Boeckman, the dues have been paid, the mistakes made, and the lessons learned. All that remains is one last opportunity to lead an extremely talented OSU offense to another shot at the glass football.

Reserves:

Terrelle Pryor - Freshman; 6'6" 225 lbs. Jeannette (PA) H.S.

The old adage that the second-string quarterback is the most popular player on the team with the fans may never have been more applicable than it could be with the 2008 Buckeyes. But it might also bring a few fans back down to reality to mention that Terrelle Pryor is the most highly sought quarterback recruit for Ohio State since....Justin Zwick. (To be fair to the young Pryor, click on the link to the his highlight video when you get to the end of this article, and you'll see him doing things that Justin Zwick, who was a fine high school player, never even thought about.)

There is no chance that the nation's top recruit will be redshirted in 2008. He is a unique talent who may only be in

Columbus for three seasons anyway, so he'll find his way to the field. The key questions remaining are about how creative and wide-open the risk-averse Tressel will be in trying to generate touches for Pryor in the offense, or on special teams. Then there's the question of how early in the season we should expect to see him taking snaps from center in the regular offense, as a backup in games the Bucks are able to put out of reach early. That would be the best indicator of how well he is mastering the "big picture" of Tressel's system.

After his formal commitment, the OSU coaches sent Pryor back to Jeannette with a copy of the playbook, and had been in regular contact with him before players arrived in Columbus in June to begin physical testing and evaluation. Pryor has done a good job of familiarizing himself with the offense, and is reportedly an eager and hard-working student of the game.

When Pryor let national signing day in February come and go without a commitment, he was portrayed by some in the media as something of a prima donna, dragging out the process because he liked all the attention. From what I have been able to observe, the reality is nothing like that. The young man had apparently decided very early that he wanted to attend OSU and play for Jim Tressel, and deferred his decision only in deference to his father's wishes that he give the home state team, Penn State, a closer look. He has worked hard with the weights all summer, according to his high school coach, and has put on several pounds of new muscle. Pryor has never insisted on early playing time, or on having the system revolve around him. He is a fierce competitor, and all indications are

that he is a great teammate and a very coachable kid.

Now that he's in Columbus, and the hype meets the hope, there's cause for caution and patience. In the latest Buckeye Sports Bulletin, Editor Mark Rea agreed. He said "Pryor is just a freshman. Give him a little time - say, somewhere around the middle of the second quarter on August 30."

Works for me.

(Correction: In a recent edition of the "Buckeye Leaves" column, I quoted a *Columbus Dispatch* article as reporting that when Pryor arrived in Columbus last month, the training staff had measured his height at 6 ft, 3 1/2 inches, well under his long reported height of 6' 6". I now have it from an unimpeachable source close to the program, that the information in the Dispatch was incorrect, and that Pryor had in fact measured just over 6' 5". Sorry for having trusted a newspaper for accuracy.)

Joe Bauserman - RS Freshman; 6' 2" 220 lbs. (Tallahassee, FL) Lincoln H.S.

Joe Bauserman has been connected to the OSU football program for almost as long as Todd Boeckman has...and he's only a freshman. Bauserman originally committed to the Buckeyes for the 2004 season, and planned to greyshirt (delay enrollment until January, 2005) after the example of Boeckman the year before, as a way to delay

by one year the onset of his four years of eligibility.

But Bauserman also had other options, and was able to see Troy Smith, Justin Zwick and Boeckman ahead of him on the depth chart. Being possessed of a 94 mph fastball, Bauserman opted to sign with the Pittsburgh Pirates after they drafted him in the fourth round, instead of enrolling at OSU. Three baseball seasons later, still in Class A, and with some shoulder tendonitis, Bauserman called Jim Tressel to see if the Bucks might still be interested.

Back in college at age 21, Bauserman walked on for the Buckeyes, and played quarterback for the scout team in 2007, taking a redshirt year while learning the offense. He had an encouraging showing in the Spring Game this past April, the first opportunity Buckeye fans have had to see him play. He completed 7 of 14 attempts for 125 yards, and had a 51-yard TD strike to Taurian Washington that showed off his powerful right arm.

Bauserman looked composed and prepared in his first appearance in an OSU uniform. He showed the ability to make all the throws, from screens to long sideline routes and deep balls. He displayed patience in the pocket, and reacted well to the rush, stepping up or rolling out several times to buy time, and then going downfield. When

Bauserman established himself as the top backup to Boeckman with that performance, the handwriting was on the wall for Antonio Henton, last season's third stringer. Henton recently announced his transfer to Georgia Southern for the 2008 season.

Now 22 years old, Joe Bauserman has to be considered Tressel's first option if Boeckman is unable to play for any reason, at least until Terrelle Pryor figures out where the WHAC is located. His maturity and overall athleticism, as well as his apparent comfort with the entire offense, make him an attractive backup, while Pryor learns the ropes...and beyond.

Orhian Johnson - Freshman; 6' 4" 190 lbs. Gulfport (FL) Boca Ciega H.S.

My listing of true freshman Orhian Johnson with the quarterbacks is mostly speculative, since the young man from Florida was recruited by the Bucks originally as a safety. Johnson did play quarterback for his last two years of high school, and he did generate interest from several schools as a QB. As a senior at Gulfport, he threw for over 1200 yards and 15 touchdowns.

What's more, the Buckeyes find themselves a bit thin at the position following the transfers of Rob Schoenhoft and Antonio Henton after the 2007 season. Pryor was the only QB recruited in the 2008 class, and the smaller 2007 recruiting class had no quarterbacks at all. Henton was the only QB recruit in the class of 2006, so that means in three years, OSU has one quarterback (Pryor) to show for their recruiting efforts.

Someone has to play QB for the scout team, and it doesn't make a lot of sense for any of the three guys listed above to do it. Another incoming freshman that played the position in high school, and might be given a shot is...

Zach Domicone - Freshman; 6' 3" 215 lbs. Beavercreek (OH) H. S.

Domicone was also recruited by OSU as a safety, but rushed for over 1100 yards from the quarterback position as a senior. He runs a 4.45 40, and sported offers from Oklahoma and Nebraska before picking the Buckeyes.

Links:

Terrelle Pryor highlight video

OSU 2008 Roster (excluding freshmen not yet enrolled)

2008 Incoming Freshmen

This is the second in a series on the 2008 Ohio State Buckeyes. See the first installment here:

Meet the 2008 Buckeyes: Offensive Line