Thad Matta's OSU basketball team has played nine Big Ten games, and has stayed within one game of .500 for that entire stretch. We'll catch up with the Buckeye cagers after they pulled above that mark once again on Saturday afternoon. Football recruiting is wrapping up this week, and Jim Tressel is trying to finish strong by landing a local five-star player for the Class of 2009. OSU coaches were jilted by one quarterback prospect, but then landed another. Details, plus other Buckeye news and notes in today's edition of Buckeye Leaves.

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Roundball Report

Two weeks ago, Matta's Baby Bucks were 3-2 in conference play, and first-year players like freshmen William Buford and B.J. Mullens, and JC transfer Jeremie Simmons were coming on strong. But with junior forward David Lighty still sitting on the bench in street clothes, the Bucks were about to run into two of the nationally-ranked teams from the Big Ten, with games at home against Michigan State , and at Illinois

.

Ohio State would come up short in both of those contests to drop to 3-4 in the league, and it looked like their glaring inexperience had finally caught up with them. But someone forgot to tell these kids that they were supposed to fade quietly from the Big Ten race.

Michigan had cracked the Top 25 earlier in the season, so Wednesday night's matchup with the Wolverines in Columbus was not expected to be a walkover like November's
. The game was crucial for the Bucks, who needed a victory to even their conference record, and as it turned out they put the Wolves away early. Ohio State ran out to an 18-point lead and never trailed, spanking the Wolverines by a 72-54 count
, and sweeping the season series from the CornMen.

Then the Buckeyes (15-5, 5-4) climbed back over the .500 mark in Big Ten play Saturday, coming from behind to beat Indiana 93-81 in Bloomington, and completed another series sweep over the reeling Hoosiers (5-15, 0-8). Matta is down to just nine healthy scholarship players these days, and his core group, consisting of starters Evan Turner, Jon Diebler, Jeremie Simmons, Dallas Lauderdale and William Buford, is getting game experience by the truckload.

In the win over Indiana, OSU got career-high point totals from Evan Turner (29 pts.), William Buford (24 pts.), and point guard Jeremie Simmons (17 pts.), while Jon Diebler threw in five 3's in seven attempts and finished with 21 points. Turner and Diebler have become the Buckeyes' 'Iron Men' in Lighty's absence, with Diebler playing all 40 minutes against the Hoosiers, and Turner 39. Buford visited the bench for just three minutes in this one, a workload earned by the freshman's stellar play of late, and necessitated by Matta's thin bench.

In fact, it's kind of amazing that the Bucks scored 93 points in this game with only four players making a field goal. Backup point guard P.J. Hill's two free throws were the only OSU points not scored by Turner, Diebler, Simmons or Buford. OSU centers Lauderdale and Mullens didn't get in the scoring book, and combined for just six rebounds.

Indiana led at the half, and managed to keep the score reasonably close in the second, mostly on the strength of their 3-point shooting. Matt Roth came off the

Hoosier bench to lead his team in scoring with 29 points. Roth, a kid who looks like he stepped onto the IU campus straight out of the 8th Grade, was throwing in threes all the way from Wabash late in the game, keeping the Buckeye lead near single digits, and finishing an impressive 9 of 11 from long range.

Looking ahead from the halfway point of the Big Ten schedule, it would appear that if the Bucks can put up an identical 5-4 mark in the second half, the 20-9 overall record and a 10-8 Big Ten mark going into the conference tournament should land them a spot in the NCAA's. Any less than that, and it may be touch and go.

QB or Not QB?

The stretch run to the 2009 football recruiting campaign has been something of an anticlimax for Coach Tressel, Recruiting Coordinator John Petersen and the OSU staff. They had 24 commitments by Labor Day, and the last few weeks have been devoted to a final push for three or four big time national talents to round out a class that is already ranked in the top five nationally.

It wasn't until fairly recently that the OSU staff began showing signs that they really wanted to bring in a quarterback in the 2009 class. It's bound to be difficult to recruit a highly-rated quarterback one year after signing the top player in the nation at the position, and for most of the recruiting season it appeared that Tressel would just pass on a signal-caller this year, and put on a push for a blue-chipper in 2010 and/or 2011 to succeed Terrelle Pryor as the Buckeye QB. But that was before five-star prospect Tajh Boyd became available.

Boyd had been a highly sought dual-threat quarterback prospect from the start, and he thought he had found a home on two previous occasions. The young man from Hampton, Virginia committed first to West Virginia, and then later to Tennessee, both times decommitting after those schools made coaching changes in the offseason. The Buckeyes got involved in his recruitment after new coach Lane Kiffin ran him off at Tennessee, and in the final weeks of the long recruiting cycle, the Buckeyes were reported to be right in the thick of it for Boyd's services, competing with Oregon and Clemson for his commitment.

Boyd announced last weekend that he would make his final choice public at a

Tuesday press conference, and then according to multiple sources, gave a verbal commitment to the Buckeye staff on Monday evening, and confirmed it again Tuesday morning, the day of the announcment. On the basis of the verbal, the OSU staff gave the word to their other QB prospect that they would not be able to offer him a scholarship, and instead made a formal offer for 2010 to junior Devin Gardner of Michigan, one of the top QB's in the nation for next season (who would probably have received an OSU offer in any event.)

Later that day, in a demonstration of the timeless rule that you never know what an 18-year old is going to do, Boyd announced his commitment to....Clemson. The blindsided Buckeye coaching staff scrambled to go back to their backup prospect, but he had already commited elsewhere after getting the bad news from OSU. To put it charitably, Boyd was less than honest with...well, just about everybody in the process, and one hopes he grows up a bit before he takes over a college football team at quarterback.

A Quick Pick Up

Having convinced themselves that including a QB in the 2009 class was a good idea (Joe Bauserman is the only other scholarship QB on the roster behind Pryor), the coaches then turned to Kenny Guiton , from Aldine (Texas) Eisenhower, a player they had been recruiting for just a short time, and Guiton immediately accepted the OSU offer to join the 2009 class.

Guiton is about 6'3" according to his coach, and weighs just 176 lbs. He was ranked the 53rd best QB in the nation by Scout, but he played on a high school team that competed at a very high level, and one that is putting more than a dozen seniors into FBS college programs. He is said to have excellent mobility (although not great speed...4.6), a very good pocket presence and an accurate throwing arm with a quick release. This is move for depth on the Buckeye roster, and protects the team in the event of an injury to Pryor or Bauserman. They will undoubtedly be looking to add quarterbacks in each of the next two recruiting cycles with guys like Gardner (2010) and Braxton Miller (2011) on the radar.

Last Call

The addition of Guiton leaves just one major question mark as to the makeup of the 2009 recruiting class. Marcus Hall , the 6'5" 300 lb. offensive tackle from Glenville, is widely expected to become a Buckeye before signing day this week, following in a long tradition of Tarblooders heading down I-71 to Columbus. He has visited Miami, and the Hurricanes are thought to be OSU's only real competition, even though he'll be visiting Tennessee this weekend. An announcement could come from Hall as early as Monday. We'll have a special 2009 Recruiting edition of Buckeye Leaves up next weekend following national letter-of-intent day this coming Thursday.

Loose Leaves

- With the win over Indiana, Thad Matta became the second fastest coach to reach 50 Big Ten wins for Ohio State, at 50-25. Fred Taylor won 50 of his first 61 league games. It was also the first time Matta's Buckeyes have won a game in Bloomington.

- Several mock drafts are predicting that the Browns will select OSU's Malcolm Jenkins with the #5 selection of the NFL Draft. (I'm okay with that, although I'd prefer to see Aaron Curry sitting there when it's our turn.) James Laurinaitis' stock appears to be slipping somewhat, as the Buckeye linebacker is now showing up between picks 20-30 on some draft boards, after being in most people's top 10 a month ago.