There was a lot of talk this week about a famous OSU basketball player playing his last home game as a Buckeye on Senior Night against Illinois. Ohio State basketball had given him a stage, and he had created a legend.

No...not Evan Turner . The Big Ten MVP and favorite for national player of the year isn't the guy who had the entire OSU student section outfitted in T-shirts with the name of his fan club on them Tuesday night in Columbus.

That would be Mark Titus ...the last man down at the end of Thad Matta's bench...the guy with the career high of three points in a game. And yet, he's the second-biggest celebrity on the 2010 Buckeyes.

For his part, Turner has said he wanted to "leave a mark" at Ohio State before he moved on, and he has done exactly that this year, with a combination of great resilience off the court, and great determination and athleticism on it. So how does the scrub who never plays get all the students to plug his blog on their chests? Isn't it the superstar who's supposed to have the logo?

If Turner has created an OSU basketball legend, then what Mark Titus has created might better be called a brand. His notoriety has nothing to do with any special athleticism he has shown Ohio State fans, though we've seen brief glimpses of some...in 30-second bursts of court time. In the absence of a great vertical leap, Titus uses wit and words to entertain fans. What playing time he gets is almost entirely on his online playground ....which is not to say the man doesn't have basketball skills. Here's his video answer to the doubters.

By all accounts, Titus is a great teammate and probably the most popular player on the team, but it's the online persona that has made Bill Simmons want to interview him, SportsNation want to talk about him , and hundreds of students want to be seen with the shirt. His "mark" on OSU basketball is of an altogether new variety.

Titus didn't so much create an online character as compellingly reveal the real-life character he *is*. It seems to me that his appeal is in the authenticity of his voice. That, and in his refusal to take too seriously the all-too-serious world of big time college sports.

The T-shirt thing has been done...but with the blog and the Twitter feed and the Facebook page...it feels safe to say that Mark Titus is a unique 21st Century phenomenon in college athletics. Sure, other college players are into social networking, but unlike Titus, they're players first and web operators second.

Titus breaks the mold, because he got famous for *not* being a player.

Fame is fleeting though. Titus is graduating and his (and our) window into the inner sanctum of OSU athletics is closing. As it is with Turner, it's sad to see it coming to an end, because both have influenced OSU sports for the better.

Rows of Zeroes

Titus fans are disappointed if he puts any mark on the stat sheet on the rare occasions when he gets into the game at all. His customary stat line of one (garbage-time) minute played...followed by twelve zeroes...is what gave Titus' Club Trillion blog its name, and it's his knack for being likeable and funny as a writer that has earned him a broad cult following since he started writing Club Trillion in 2008.

Consider; over two million visitors to the blog in the last year...or over 12,000 followers on Twitter ...(for a little perspective, The Cleveland Browns have 10,000 followers). He has moved enough "Club Tril" T-shirts to donate $10,000 to charity. So what's the attraction?

You'll have to browse the blog for yourself to get a feel....(15 months worth of archives to look at if you're inclined)...but it turns out a lot of people can relate to a practical joking bench-warmer with a self-deprecating sense of humor, and the fertile ground of a major university campus to mine for blogging material.

Titus was a good enough high school basketball player to have been offered a chance to play at Harvard...so he's obviously smart enough to get in there too. Early in his Ohio State basketball career, he was known mostly as "that guy with Greg Oden", according to a New York Times

feature on him
*(yes, there's a New York Times feature)*
, and in his four years as a Buckeye, Titus has watched a lot of good basketball.

No one had a better seat than Titus for the 2007 NCAA Finals when the Buckeyes played Florida for everything. He picked up an NIT championship ring the following year, and this season, playing the role of 14th man for a coach who played most competitive games with six guys, Titus owns a piece of the Big Ten championship. Not bad for a guy who started out at Ohio State as a team manager before earning a roster spot.

Counting His Embraces

The blog itself is not about serious things for the most part. Even some serious things...like getting stuck in an elevator
...wind up funny. He
*is*
a college student after all. And as you might imagine, stuff that's hilarious to an OSU homer obviously wouldn't play as well north of the border. In conclusion...screw them anyway. This recent entry
about hating Purdue is as good an example as any of the Titus touch. He refers to his good friend Turner as "The Villain" at Club Trillion...for example...

*"Losing is no fun and losing to Purdue is even worse, but losing to this Purdue team is more upsetting than the thought of The Villain dating my sister."*

When you're not playing in the game, keeping a count of which opposing players give you more than the simple post-game handshake becomes an important undertaking. Does he get the floppy fish handshake...the standard grip...or the more friendly and valued one-armed embrace? Titus keeps track...and he's convinced opposing teams know it (probably skewing his empirical research.)

Who knows what becomes of Titus and his relative celebrity now that he's losing his privileged vantage point at the end of the bench for Ohio State. All indications are he'll be a success at whatever he chooses to be when (if?) he grows up. But it's a safe bet that OSU basketball will be a little less interesting next year when Club Trillion is no longer holding regular meetings at Value City Arena. One hopes the blog lives on, at least for a while.

Thanks for the memories ET. Thanks for the archives, Mark.

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Loose Leaves

Thaddeus Gibson helped himself bigtime at the combine in Indy last week. Unfortunately he was the only former Buckeye to do so, but more on that in a moment. Gibson did 32 reps in the bench press, and then ran consistently in the low 4.7's in the 40. Better yet, he showed the scouts he has all the mobility and athleticism to be a natural outside linebacker in the NFL at 6' 2", 243. Here he makes one of SI's "risers" . I'm now hearing second round at least for Gibson, a definite upgrade from the 3rd or 4th round grade they had on Thad coming in. The prolific Marcus Hartman of BSB compiled a few scouting reports on Gibson over at his Cus Words blog.

Doug Worthington and Kurt Coleman limited their activities in Indy due to injuries, with Coleman declining to run the 40 until OSU's Pro Day, March 12. Worthington pulled a muscle in the bench press, and didn't run for that reason. Kicker Aaron Pettrey had his knee worked over by a slew of NFL team doctors, and went 10-15 on his field goal attempts. None of the three made himself any money in Indianapolis.

Several more former Buckeyes; Jim Cordle, Todd Denlinger, Austin Spitler, Lawrence Wilson and Jake Ballard will also work out for NFL scouts on the 12th.

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If you're an NFL Draft junkie, check out Daniel Jeremiah at MoveTheSticks.com . Jeremiah is a former Browns and Ravens scout who probably puts out as much or more good content on his Twitter feed
as he does at the blog. He does regular podcasts as well.

Not everybody "does" Twitter of course, but the coverage of the Indy combine by dozens of scouts, sportswriters, commentators and amateur draftniks on Twitter was really something to behold. We were getting reports on 40-times barely more than 4.5 seconds after they were run. Imagine the potential of the technology when applied to *important* events.

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Four Big Ten coaches made this Rivals listing of college football coaches on the hot seat. The seats of Minnesota's Tim Brewster and Bill Lynch of Indiana are said to be hot enough to be uncomfortable. Compared to those guys then, Rich Rodriguez and Illinois' Ron Zook can only be considered out of the frying pan and into the fire.

I give Rodriguez about eight and a half more months at Michigan...I'm thinking sometime around Thanksgiving. Just a guess.

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No other Big Ten school has ever won the conference championships in football and both men's and women's basketball in the same year. Ohio State just accomplished that feat for the third

time.

These are the good old days.

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