By any measure, the 2009-10 OSU basketball season has been a rousing success. Just having a chance to watch the nation's best all-around college player has been a rare treat for Buckeye fans. Even as the individual awards and team trophies accumulate though, I can't shake the feeling that this team isn't built for NCAA Tournament success.

The Buckeyes are to be congratulated for winning a share of the Big Ten title and advancing (as of this writing) to the finals of the conference tournament. When the season began, the received wisdom had OSU in the second tier of Big Ten teams, trailing the likes of Purdue, Michigan State and Wisconsin as preseason favorites. Coach Thad Matta has done a remarkable job in compiling a 26-7 record, surviving the loss of Evan Turner for a month, and also finishing at the top of the conference standings without a bonafide low post scorer or a true point guard.

In hindsight, it's pretty clear now that the reason people underrated the Buckeyes was that almost nobody predicted the monster season Evan Turner would have.

The individual awards continue to roll in for Turner, who cemented forever his legacy in Buckeye lore with an incredible buzzer-beater to stun Michigan in Friday's Big Ten quarterfinal. So far, Turner has collected the Sporting News POY award, and the Big Ten POY award, with many more similar honors no doubt yet to come.

And of course he hasn't done it alone. Among the supporting cast, David Lighty has bounced back this year with a solid season as a second option on offense, and William Buford is emerging as a special talent in his own right. Jon Diebler will leave OSU after next season having obliterated the career records for 3-pointers at Ohio State, and Dallas Lauderdale has been a force on defense in the middle, even if his offensive contributions have been minimal.

The double-overtime win over Illinois Saturday probably wrapped up a No. 2 seed for OSU in the NCAA Tournament, and may have gotten the Illini into the tourney as well. And the Buckeyes have played very well down the stretch, winning 13 of their last 15 regular season games, losing only to Top 10 teams Purdue and West Virginia.

But having said all that, I'm still skeptical about OSU's chances to win more than a game or two in the NCAA's. Naturally, I hope I'm wrong....and as always, there's a case to be made for the more optimistic view. Let's take that view first...

Half Full:

- Evan Turner . OSU has him. The other guys don't. At the risk of hyperbole...I'll venture that at the moment, he's the college version of LeBron. In the NCAA's, you need to have a go-to guy, and Turner is the consummate one. He can be unstoppable one-on-one going to the hoop...or pulling up for short jumpers. He has a complete game; he's unselfish, a good free-throw shooter, an excellent rebounder and a sound defender.

- As a team, the Buckeyes are as athletic as anyone. They can be suffocating on defense with their length and athleticism, to say nothing of the tenacity that Matta instills in them.

- They are well-coached. I'm tired of hearing detractors *(are you listening Simmons?)* who say Thad Matta
is all recruiting, and does less with more on the court. You don't win NCAA tournament games with three different schools and take two different schools to the Elite Eight, and post nine straight 20-win seasons by recruiting alone. You don't win Coach of the Year awards in three different conferences just by being persuasive in prospects' living rooms. It's time to give the man his due.

- They are a veteran team. The core group of Lighty, Turner, Diebler and Lauderdale has played together for three years, with Buford a part of it for two seasons. The familiarity with each other can pay dividends in tight games.

Half Empty:

I hate to be a wet blanket where the Buckeyes are concerned, but for every reason that exists to be an optimist about OSU's NCAA tournament prospects, there is a cause for concern. Here are a few of mine...

- The Buckeyes are not a good ball-handling team. Turner has merited passing grades playing the point, but they can struggle against a good press, and against a team that goes after the ball aggressively on defense in the half court. Turner had a worse than usual 10 turnovers against Illinois Saturday, highlighting the problems this team can have handling the ball.

- The Buckeyes are not a good free-throw shooting team, having ranked 10th in the Big Ten this year, at 69% from the line. Free-throw shooting can be crucial at tourney time, and you can be sure that OSU opponents will be trying to foul someone other than Turner if the Bucks are

nursing a small lead late in the game.

- As athletic as the Buckeyes are, they don't have great size in the front court, and I suspect they will struggle to match up with teams that do. The Big Ten was not a big conference this year, and OSU was able to succeed with quickness and teamwork. If a team can go down low early and get a couple fouls on Dallas Lauderdale, the Bucks could be in "big" trouble.

- The Buckeyes lack depth, and despite Matta's cute quip on playing his best players as much as 40 minutes a game ("rest in April") , there is bound to be a fatigue factor that sets in at this point in the season. Any foul trouble affecting one of the starters compounds the problem of not having bench players in whom the coach has demonstrated his confidence.

- This is a "streaky" team. Of course, this could be a bullet point for the "half full" view as well, because streaks go both ways, but consistency is still preferable. One bad streak of offensive or defensive performance against a quality opponent can lose the game for you in March.

- The Buckeyes are mostly a one-shot-and-done team on the offensive end. They ranked dead last in the conference in offensive rebounding, both in numbers of offensive boards per game, and as a percentage of potential offensive rebounds.

I'm not predicting an early exit for the Buckeyes from the Big Dance...just saying it wouldn't surprise me. Now, having sufficiently covered my butt, we'll move on.

There is Football News...

Pryor's surgery rehab, OSU's Pro Day for NFL scouts, and early morning football workouts were all in the news in the last week, so we'll try to get you up to date on all that and more in the Ohio State football program...

Terrelle Pryor appears to be 100% recovered from the arthroscopic knee surgery he underwent on Feb. 10. He took part in the full gamut of drills and exercises that the team went through in last week's 6:00 a.m. workouts at the Woody. Any concern of mine about the aftermath of the procedure were put to rest by a photo of Pryor carrying a teammate on his back piggyback-style in one of the many drills dreamed up by the coaches for winter conditioning. If the coaches had the slightest reservation about the strength or stability of their star quarterback's knee, they wouldn't have permitted him to do that drill.

The early conditioning drills broke up the players' brief, two-month break since the bowl game, and provided media with their first look at how some of the guys have been at work on their bodies. Several reports mentioned how offensive tackles J.B. Shugarts, Mike Adams and Marcus Hall looked like they have trimmed down, and looked fit. In fact, all the offensive linemen were reportedly leaner and looking faster and quicker. Boom Herron, Devon Torrence and Ross Homan were also turning heads with newly "cut" physiques.

Maybe the best news of the week was the report that Tyler Moeller is back working with the team. Moeller was projected as a possible starter in 2009 at outside linebacker, but sat out the season after suffering a serious head injury when he was assaulted in a restaurant last summer. Moeller is working exclusively with the safeties this year, though he has not yet been cleared to play this fall. And a trial date has been set for the thug (fittingly named Decker) who sucker-punched Moeller.

Former Buckeye Bobby Carpenter, now with the Cowboys, showed up to work out with the Bucks.

Tim May from *The Dispatch* and Tony Gerdeman from the O-Zone both got up early and filed reports from the conditioning workouts.

The OSU Pro Day for NFL scouts was held Friday, 3/12, and 17 former OSU players worked out for the guys who play on Sundays. Another half dozen or so players from other schools took advantage of the venue to show their wares to the pros.

It has long been a given that of the former Buckeyes, Thad Gibson would be the first to come off the draft board this April. Gibson got a lot of positive attention at the Indy combines when he did 32 reps at 225 lbs, and then ran a very respectable 4.71 in the 40. His stock as a future NFL outside linebacker had been going up even before the Columbus workouts Friday.

Running on astroturf in Columbus, Gibson ran a 4.63 (and a 4.51 on one charitable stopwatch) to dazzle the scouts once again, virtually assuring him of selection somewhere in the second round, (according, that is, to people who get paid to predict these things). There seems to be a lot of interest in Gibson on the part of the Steelers. They had several key people there to see Gibson's workout.

Kurt Coleman, who has been trying to market himself as a guy capable of playing either corner or safety in the NFL, was reasonably happy with his 40 times of 4.48 and 4.55, and a 34 in. vertical, as well as with his performance in the other drills. Coleman is projected by most experts as a 4th or 5th round pick. (Anybody know of an NFL team that needs safeties and has several extra late round picks?)

Other notable 40 times for OSU alums: Anderson Russell (4.51), Austin Spitler (4.81, 4.78), Ray Small (4.43, 4.52), Lawrence Wilson (4.83), Doug Worthington (5.1), Rob Rose (4.76, 4.79).

Tony Gerdeman has a nice write-up on OSU's Pro Day.

At a different venue, Kent State's Jameson Konz had an impressive Pro Day performance.

Loose Leaves

Mark Titus isn't the only Buckeye basketball player with a *New York Times* feature article. Here OSU star point guard
Samantha Prahalis is profiled
by the Gray Lady.

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At SI.com, Seth Davis selects OSU's David Lighty as Captain of his All-Glue Team.

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Jim Tressel spoke in Canton at the Hall of Fame Luncheon Club last week, and there's a six-minute video of some of his remarks along with an article about it here .

In a nifty double-dip , Columbus Northland star, and OSU recruit Jared Sullinger was named the 2010 Naismith National Boys High School Player of the Year, and his father, James "Satch" Sullinger was named the 2010 Naismith National Boy's High School Coach of the Year. The Sullingers collaborated on Northland's undefeated season and No. 1 national ranking in the
USA Today
poll.

Now *that's* cool.

Till next time.....O-H.....