(one in a series of position group previews of the 2010 Buckeyes)

The Buckeyes will hit the ground running with a loaded linebacker corps in 2010, returning everyone but Austin Spitler from last season's unit. There are promising youngsters two-deep at every backup position...and the competition for playing time among them ought to be fierce. That's because returning seniors Ross Homan and Brian Rolle rarely take a play off, and defensive coordinator Jim Heacock plays with just two linebackers as much as 50% of the time.

Rolle and Homan...(how 'bout "Ross and Rolle"?) combined in 2009 for 203 tackles, six interceptions, 12 tackles for loss, and three fumble recoveries. No wonder Heacock and linebacker coach Luke Fickell have a hard time taking either one off the field.

The team hasn't announced their official field leaders for this fall but Homan and Rolle are both Buckeye captains waiting to happen as Homan begins his third year as a starter at OSU, and Rolle his second. They learned the job description of senior leader from James Laurinaitis and Marcus Freeman before them, and both appear more than ready to assume the position.

Etienne Sabino will man the strongside spot in the base defense, as Fickell unleashes one of his best athletes on the opposition after grooming him on special teams and in backup duty for two years. If ever a player looked "ready" to start, it's this 6' 3", 247 lb. junior from Florida. His performance will help dictate on what percentage of snaps Heacock chooses to use three linebackers instead of five defensive backs. Based on what we've seen of Sabino so far, he's going to make that decision a tough one.

Linebackers Playing Safety

Two players who were officially listed as linebackers last season are being called safeties this fall, but their roles remain much the same as before. It was (then LB) Jermale Hines who came on at the Star position as the fifth DB last year when Spitler came off the field, and this season, Hines takes over full-time duty at one of the safety spots. I include Hines here because...well, you can put an "S" before his name...but he's a linebacker at heart.

And competing for the starting job at the hybrid Star position this year will be Tyler Moeller , another former linebacker who will work with the safeties in 2010 and try to come back from missing the entire 2009 season with a head injury. By itself, Moeller's presence on the field will be a motivating force for the Bucks this year, given what he's been through . Anything they get from him that resembles the Tasmanian Devil style of play he showed before the injury is a bonus. Again, the safety label is mere semantics based on how they are expected to use Moeller.
(No thumbnails on Hines and Moeller below with the LB's...we'll play along with the safety thing)

The Bench

We talk about depth every year, and of course OSU always has the talent funnel full of young players with stellar high school credentials. But this year there truly is an embarrassment of riches backing up the Buckeye starters at linebacker. Storm Klein, Dorian Bell, Jordan Whiting, Andrew Sweat and Jonathan Newsome make up the next wave of OSU linebackers, and all arrived in Columbus with a lot of press clippings and all-State awards.

Klein and Newsome played last year as freshmen, mostly on special teams, while Whiting and Bell redshirted in 2009 and retain four years of eligibility. Sweat is a versatile junior who is attempting to come back from an offseason surgery. Barring injury to starters though, OSU fans may have to wait until 2011 before they see what these kids can do on defense. In the meantime, they'll be relied upon to make the hits on the special teams units.

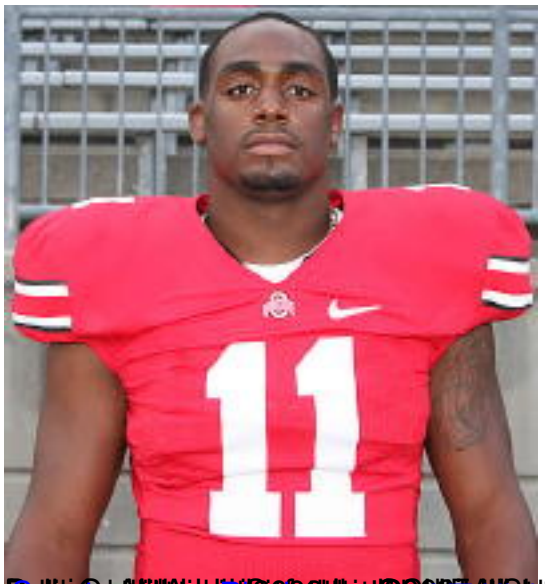
Incoming freshmen Scott McVey and David Durham might get a look on special teams as well, but a better bet for both of them might be a redshirt year, considering the talent logjam ahead of them.

Here's some more detail on the 2010 Buckeye linebackers...

Ross Homan - #51 - Senior 6' 2", 230 Coldwater (OH) H.S.

[redacted]

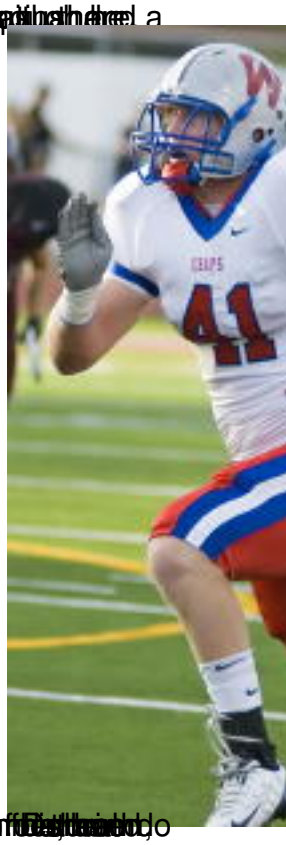
[redacted]



[illegible] this

[illegible]

[illegible]



[illegible]