There is general agreement among OSU football observers that the Buckeyes' chances for a championship season in 2010 depend to a large extent on Terrelle Pryor's continued improvement as a passer. The return of his top two wide receivers from last year should make that goal more attainable, and the influx of young talent into the receiver corps promises a strong pass-catching unit at Ohio State well into the future.

DeVier Posey and Dane Sanzenbacher were on the receiving end of 96 of Pryor's 167 completions in 2009, and 14 of his 18 touchdown passes. Those two will again be the mainstays of an OSU passing attack that figures to spread the ball around a bit more this year. Tailback Brandon Saine was third on the team in receiving last year with 17 grabs, including two TD's, and overall, 75% of Pryor's completions and 17 of his 18 touchdown passes went to players who return for 2010.

Best of the Rest

Seniors Taurian Washington and Grant Schwartz and redshirt freshman Chris Fields are in line to be the next three receivers on the field for the Buckeyes this fall. Despite their tenure, Washington and Schwartz haven't seen much action as Buckeyes. Washington had three catches as a freshman in 2007, but none since, and Schwartz is still looking for his first career reception after switching positions from safety midway through his OSU career. Both have had excellent spring and summer sessions though, and are expected to make the most of their final seasons in Columbus.

Including Fields, six of the ten scholarship receivers on the OSU roster still have four years of eligibility beginning this fall. So however talented they may be, they remain untested under fire, and the 2010 season will be the proving ground for starting receiver spots in 2011 and beyond. Fields and James Jackson arrived last year and took redshirt seasons in '09, and they are

joined in that first-year group this fall by four true freshman that are collectively one of the best crops of wide receivers in the country for the class of 2010.

Just to take the word of one talent evaluator, Phil Steele had Corey Brown (#18), James Louis (#32) and Tyrone Williams (#60) all ranked among the best freshman wideouts in the nation. The fourth freshman is Columbus native Verlon Reed, a dynamic overall athlete who starred at quarterback and defensive back as a prep player, and will start out at OSU in a new position at receiver.

Just as true freshman Duron Carter won the #3 wide receiver job last year, one or more of the youngsters could step up as the season progresses to claim that role in the offense. Carter's 13 receptions from 2009 should be replaceable without too much trouble, given the assembled talent and the enviable opportunity. Ray Small's contribution of 15 receptions is the only other production lost from the 2009 team at receiver.

Seriously This Time

It has become something of a running joke in the media to report before each and every season that Jim Tressel's Buckeyes will try to do more to incorporate the tight end into the passing attack. Good intentions and annual discussions by the coaching staff aside, it simply hasn't happened in recent years. Last year, starting tight end Jake Ballard had 14 receptions for a 10.7 yard average, and no touchdowns. To spare you the high math, that's about one completion per game. Considering the track record, you couldn't be blamed for doubting what comes next.

The difference in 2010 is that there has been considerable evidence in the spring and now the fall practices that they are committed to getting the ball to starting tight end Jake Stoneburner early and often... and for that matter, throwing to the running backs and fullbacks a lot more as well.

Part of the change in strategy has to do with Stoneburner's ability as a downfield receiving threat, more so than as an in-line blocker, an area where he still needs to improve. And it's also a function of Pryor's ongoing development. With experience has come more comfort in the pocket, the patience to check down to his third or fourth read on a passing play, and the ability to deliver the ball to the tight end or to an outlet running back instead of just taking off on a scramble.

And third, as a group the running backs (and Boren at fullback) are also showing greater aptitude as receivers than did some RB groups in recent years. Last year running backs and fullbacks combined for 34 receptions, and tight ends for 16. Call me crazy, but I expect the catches by running backs to hit at least 50 this year, and Stoneburner should have at least 30 receptions at tight end. No kidding.

Here are some more particulars on the Buckeye wide receivers and tight ends for the coming season...

Wide Receivers

DeVier Posey - #8 - Junior 6' 2" 200 (Cincinnati, OH) LaSalle H.S.

Posey did exactly what was expected of him as an OSU sophomore in 2009. He broke out as a legitimate #1 receiver with 60 receptions for 828 yards and eight touchdowns. He saved his best game for last, as the receiving star of the Rose Bowl, with 8 receptions for 101 yards and the game-clinching touchdown catch in the fourth quarter. Playing as the #3 receiver behind Robiskie and Hartline as a freshman in 2008, Posey had 11 catches for 117 yards and one TD, but he had flashed the potential that was then fulfilled in his memorable sophomore season.

As the No. 1 option for Pryor, at times Posey became too predictable a target for his quarterback, but being the focus of the defensive coverage didn't seem to faze him, and as the season progressed, the coaches got more and more creative in their use of Posey as a weapon. That included calling his number on a double reverse pass play that resulted in a touchdown pass to Dane Sanzenbacher against New Mexico State. After Pryor, Posey is perhaps the most irreplaceable player on the Buckeye offense in 2010. And he's one of a handful of OSU juniors that could opt to leave early after this season for the NFL. OSU fans are hoping he'll be here for two more seasons starring in highlight films like these...

Posey 2009 highlight video - Rose Bowl 2010 Posey highlights

Scout page - Rivals page

Dane Sanzenbacher - #12 - Senior 5' 11" 180 (Toledo, OH) Central Catholic H.S.

In his first game as an OSU freshman in 2007, Sanzenbacher caught a TD pass from Todd Boeckman against Youngstown State for his first career reception, and the senior from Toledo has been catching everything thrown his way ever since. He had 12 receptions as a freshman and then 21 more in 2008 as he moved into the regular rotation as a sophomore. Along the way, Sanzenbacher started building a reputation as for toughness and fearlessness as he repeatedly bounced back from wicked hits after pass receptions. He missed one game with a concussion after one such hit in '08, but more often than not he'd shake it off and play on.

Sanzenbacher became the No. 2 receiver last year and responded with 36 catches and six TD's, and he too had a big game in the Rose Bowl as Pryor was setting career highs for attempts and completions. Dane had 9 catches for 64 yards against Oregon, many of them coming on slants and quick hitters. He had at least one reception in every game but one in 2009, showing off the hands that Tressel turned to when his punt returner Ray Small was out, and is turning to again this year in making Sanzenbacher his holder for placement kicks. Sanzenbacher scored the first Ohio State points of the 2007 and the 2009 seasons. Marshall take note.

Scout page - Rivals page

Taurian Washington - #5 - Senior 6' 1" 181 (Orchard Lake, MI) St. Mary Prep