The Buckeyes are a senior-heavy team in 2010, especially on defense, where they have seven senior starters. The offense remains younger overall, with just four seniors among the regulars, but it's still an experienced unit, with nine starters back from 2009.

For two years now the Ohio State program has been geared toward 2010, the goal being nothing less than an undefeated season. This is not a team with a lot of holes to fill, or questions about who will play at this position or that.

Unlike last year at this time, when their sophomore quarterback Pryor and defenders Cam Heyward and Kurt Coleman were about the only Buckeyes people had heard of, this year's group is more studded with names recognizable around the country. Names like Homan and Boren and Brewster and Saine and Posey and Hines and Chekwa in addition to Pryor and Heyward.

All of which means it's not going to be easy for younger players to make a big splash. As always at Ohio State though, there's a core group of talented kids who have been in the program for at least a year and who are ready to make their marks on OSU football as soon as they're given the opportunity. No matter how the season plays out, several of these lesser-known Buckeyes will emerge in 2010 as the starters of the future. The following exercise will try to identify ten of the guys most likely to enjoy breakout seasons for the Buckeyes in 2010.

The criteria for the list are the same as last year. To begin with, no seniors. Breakout years by seniors are welcome, but this year's contributing seniors have been doing it for a while. All eleven senior starters were starting a year ago. Besides, I'm looking at players who are breaking out into OSU careers beyond 2010.

No true freshmen either. It's safe to predict early playing time for newcomers like Christian Bryant , Jonathan Hankins and

Corey "Philly" Brown
, but this list didn't have breakouts
John Simon
or
Zach Boren
on it a year ago because they didn't already have a year in the program. And this year, some super talents like
Dorian Bell
,
Storm Klein
,
Jonathan Newsome
and
Chris Fields
don't make the list, mostly because they aren't likely to get as much time on the field as the ten guys listed below.

Last year I was arguably accurate on seven out of ten, and of the three players from that group who didn't manage to break out in 2009, Etienne Sabino and Jake Stoneburner are back on this year's list, since I'm convinced their breakouts have simply been delayed, not derailed. The jury is still out on Taurian Washinton , who played his way out of the team's plans for 2009 in the opener.

In no particular order then, here are ten breakout Buckeyes to watch for 2010:

Tyler Moeller - #26 - Safety/Star - Moeller (6' 0", 210) was the honorary 11th man on this list a year ago, having already been lost for the season to injury before it ever got started. An outside linebacker then, he's officially a safety now, and goes into the season as the starter at the Star position in the nickel defense. Moeller
(pictured above)
been dubbed "The Tasmanian Devil", and if he's fully recovered, you'll start to see how he got that name next Thursday night. His strong suits are blitzing and run support, but he's still somewhat unproven in pass coverage. He's officially a senior, but will almost certainly be granted an additional year of eligibility for having missed last season. It will be very interesting to watch the reactions of Moeller's teammates when he makes his first big hit of the 2010 season. I'm guessing it'll be an emotional moment for everyone in Scarlet and Gray.

Andrew Sweat - #42 - Linebacker - The junior from the Pittsburgh area has battled back from offseason knee surgery to claim the starting job at the strongside linebacker position for Jim Heacock's defense. Some camp observers have called him the best linebacker on the team this summer, as he came from back in the pack to play his way into the lineup. Sweat (6' 2",

238) has the versatility to play any of the three linebacker positions, and he matches his physical gifts with maximum effort all the time. He has played on special teams and in spot duty at linebacker in his first two seasons as a Buckeye, and contributed with a forced fumble and an interception in 2009 to go with his 15 tackles. You'll see a smart, strong, and aggressive linebacker as you watch Andrew Sweat this fall. (This guy *had* to make the list...somehow "break out" and Sweat just belong together)

Ben Buchanan - #17 - Punter/Kicker - Buchanan inherits the role of the key man in Coach Tressel's "most important play in football", as the starting punter for the Buckeyes in 2010. He's a third-year sophomore who is an outstanding placekicker as well as a fine punter, but the coaches asked him to concentrate on punting this year, and he responded with a strong spring and summer camp. Buchanan was one of the nation's top kickers two years ago, and the Westerville native stayed home to play for the hometown Buckeyes. He filled in for an ailing Jon Thoma for one game in 2009, but this year the job is his, and I fully expect his talent to surface in a successful season as the OSU punter.

Orhian Johnson - #19 - Safety - Johnson's teammates say he's one of the best overall athletes on the team, and the redshirt sophomore will be making his OSU debut as a starter next week alongside Jermale Hines at safety. (By the way, the name is "OR-ee-uhn", as in DeLorean.) At 6' 2", 205, he brings an element of size to the safety position that OSU has not had in recent years. He was a quarterback as a prep player in Florida, and he'll be functioning as the signal caller for the OSU defense in many situations. In his third year in the program, he's one of just two starters on defense who hasn't had significant playing time coming into 2010. His long wingspan, great leaping ability and ball skills should grab your attention early in the season.

Jake Stoneburner - #11 - Tight End - A couple of members of the touted class of 2008 already have 20 or more starts on their OSU resumes, so by comparison you could say Stoneburner is a late-bloomer. He was, after all, one of the more highly regarded members of that class coming out of Dublin Coffman in Columbus. His first year was plagued by injuries, and last season he saw some action, but played behind Jake Ballard, who was a superior run blocker. This year though, the 6' 5", 250 lb. third-year sophomore is very much a part of the OSU offensive game plan, and he has developed quite a rapport with his quarterback Pryor. They have worked hard with the coaches this spring and summer to get the ball to "Stoney" down the middle of the field, to take advantage of his 4.6 speed and the matchup problems he can cause for opposing linebackers and safeties. He'll be much more than a last resort option for Pryor in 2010, and I think we'll see him mature into a potent offensive weapon for the

Buckeyes.

Adam Bellamy - #93 - Defensive Tackle - The Buckeyes need some of their younger defensive linemen to grow up in a hurry to provide quality depth for that unit this year, and Bellamy's versatility and rapid development make him a good candidate to help fill that bill. This year the coaches have the redshirt freshman from Aurora working at both tackle and strongside end, and they're impressed with his quick feet for a guy with his size (6' 4", 295) and power. Right now he's one of the first two tackles off the bench behind John Simon and Dexter Larimore, so he should see enough field time in Coach Heacock's regular line rotation to show what he can do and make his case for a starting job next season. So far Bellamy has been a pleasant surprise, and by the end of the season he could be looked at as a future standout on the defensive line.

Etienne Sabino - #6 - Linebacker - For two years now, Sabino has been contributing as a special teamer and flashing the eye-popping athleticism that made him a five-star recruit out of Miami in 2008. To this point though, he has been playing behind some very good linebackers at Ohio State while waiting for the chance to show that he has the instincts and discipline in the defensive system to be effective executing it. He was penciled in as the starter at the Sam linebacker spot this spring, and only the sensational August performance of Andrew Sweat has the coaches hedging their bets on who their starter will be. There may not be enough playing time for both Sweat and Sabino to "break out" in 2010 at the Sam, especially since they'll come off the field when the Bucks go to five DB's in the nickel. Somehow though, I expect Sabino to see enough action to realize some of his immense potential and make a significant contribution to the defense.

Jaamal Berry - #4 - Running Back - The Buckeyes have excellent depth at the running back position this year, and redshirt freshman Jaamal Berry (5' 10", 200) is one big reason they feel good about their tailback situation. Berry took a redshirt year in 2009 after struggling with a hamstring injury, but the Miami, Florida native is back at 100% this fall. Berry's calling card is his quickness and acceleration through the line. He is elusive in space and deceptively strong between the tackles. He's got reasonably good hands too, and figures to be dangerous on screens and outlet throws. Berry joins Jordan Hall as the first two options off the bench behind Saine and Herron (and Hall would be on this list too, had he not broken out for almost 250 yards in 2009). The only question mark is how many carries and/or receptions Berry will accumulate in a backup role this year. The coaches can go at least five deep at tailback this year with little drop off. A productive start for Berry could open the gates to a regular role for him in the Buckeye backfield

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Travis Howard - #18 - Cornerback - This must be the year for the Miami contingent to break out for OSU, as Howard makes the third consecutive Miami kid on our list. Howard is a third-year sophomore who has been often talked about in Buckeye circles as the next great corner for Ohio State. He's the #3 corner right now behind Chekwa and Torrence, but he's #3 with a bullet. He's the prototype big OSU corner at 6' 0", 190, and physically he's the complete package...ball skills, loose hips, closing speed, and sound tackling technique. Then there's the attitude....the kid plays with a certain edge that you like to see in a corner. Injuries have been the problem for Howard in his first two seasons in Columbus, and he sat out most of spring ball this year with a hip problem. In Saturday's jersey scrimmage though, he played with the No. 1 defense and had a very impressive showing. If either of the Buckeyes' senior corners goes down, Howard appears to be more than ready to step up.

Corey Brown - #3 - Cornerback - It would be fairly appropriate to say "see Travis Howard" when talking about young Corey Brown, the redshirt freshman corner from Monroeville, PA. Of course he's his own man, but the two are physically very similar...Brown is also 6' 0", 190, and like Howard, Brown just exudes athleticism and toughness. He was also filling in as a starter with the No. 1 defense in Saturday's scrimmage, and he played like he belonged on the first team. Brown was a high school All-American at wide receiver and defensive back, and he has tremendous leaping ability, excellent hands and a long wingspan. He appears to anticipate very well, and breaks well on the ball in the air. Brown could be an intimidating presence at corner at OSU for a long time with his off-the-charts athletic ability, plus a tough, physical style of play. In fact, with four years of eligibility remaining, and already in the two-deep, Brown looks like a good bet to be a fixture at cornerback for the Buckeyes for years to come.

That group is heavy on the defensive side, for sure....with seven defenders and just two offensive guys and one kicker. But that's the way it shakes out. The offense this year is a very veteran group, with limited opportunities for breakouts on that side of the ball. You could make a case for one of the young offensive linemen, like Jack Mewhort, or one of the wide receivers like Fields or Washington or James Jackson...possibly even a QB like Kenny Guiton, if....God forbid....Pryor would get hurt. But there's going to be a lot more rotating of players on defense, and thus, more chances for up-and-coming talent to shine there.

Many of these names are already familiar to the informed OSU fan, but by the end of the 2010 season, they should all be household words in Buckeye territory.