The quarterback position at Ohio State has an excellent long term outlook, although none of the immediate backups for Terrelle Pryor inspires great confidence. Strangely enough then, depth is barely a concern at quarterback for this team, so obvious is it that Pryor is the only QB capable of getting the Buckeyes to their goal. The bench is irrelevant. Without Pryor, OSU is an average offensive team. He is far and away the team's most irreplaceable player...and in case you haven't heard, the future is now for Ohio State.

By the time he completed his sophomore year at OSU, Pryor had amassed 3405 passing yards and thrown 30 touchdown passes. He had rushed for 1410 yards and scored 13 rushing touchdowns. The Buckeyes are 19-3* with Pryor as their starter, and they have either won or shared the Big Ten championship, *and* have gone to BCS bowl games in both of his first two seasons in Columbus.

It is a measure of both the insatiable expectations of the OSU fan base, and of his otherworldly potential as a player, that Terrelle Pryor is often said to be still unproven as a college quarterback. In other words...he hasn't won a national title yet, and we still don't know how good he's going to get. These pass for problems in Columbus.

The Unthinkable

Anything that requires significant playing time for OSU's backup quarterbacks, other than garbage time minutes in games long decided, qualifies as "unthinkable" this season. That would mean a serious injury to Pryor, and that would mean the 2010 season is shot in the head.

The only other quarterback with any OSU game experience at all is Joe Bauserman, and he seems to have regressed somewhat from where he was two years ago. Kenny Guiton flashed some arm and some feet in the Spring Game this year, but he won't win you the Big Ten, let alone the BCS title. And the staff is very happy with what they've seen so far from true freshman Taylor Graham, but "true freshman" is really all you need to hear.

To state again the now blindingly obvious...the 2010 OSU season - at least the part with the national championship aspirations - hinges on Terrelle Pryor's ongoing good health.

Growing Up

Musburger wondered aloud during the Rose Bowl if Pryor wasn't the most scrutinized player in college football. If anything, the ante has been upped this season, with the Buckeyes a national title contender and Pryor the returning Rose Bowl MVP. Pryor is used to the pressure, but this season he appears to be embracing it. The maturation of Pryor is evident in lots of ways.

He says of himself that he is a more humble and mature person, and a better teammate, since a mid-season 2009 catharsis roughly coinciding with the upset loss at Purdue. Everyone knows you can't tell a college sophomore anything, but Pryor got some kind of message, and the guy whose teammates thought he was "a punk" when he first arrived on campus, is now being praised by those same teammates for his leadership and work ethic.

Now, some people wouldn't care if he lifted laptops in his spare time as long as he could throw the down-out and go, and run a 4.37 at 6' 6", 233...so it's important to note that the maturation of Terrelle Pryor is translating nicely to the football field as well.

In my three opportunities to see him play since the Rose Bowl, Pryor has shown continued improvement with his throwing mechanics and footwork, with more of an over the top throwing motion and carefully choreographed steps. Just as importantly, he is more decisive and increasingly accurate throwing the ball. I think you'll also see a physically maturing Pryor this year. He is clearly bigger and more defined in the upper body this summer.

Pryor seems to have a more comfortable, relaxed presence, in or out of the pocket. He is now more confident and quick in checking down to his third and fourth reads on pass plays, which in the new and improved Buckeye offense often means throwing to tight ends, tailbacks or the fullback. Only the limited contact rules enforced at intrasquad scrimmages and games kept him from showing more of his improvisational scrambling magic.

At 100%

What we do know is that Pryor is healthier now following a minor knee procedure this winter than he was for the last three or four games of 2009. The realization that he was being "held back" by the coaching staff in that Rose Bowl game should be sobering for Ohio State's 2010 opponents, and exciting for its fans.

All indications are that the OSU pass protection will be solid in 2010, and you don't want to see Pryor forced to scramble too often....or do you? It is a unique dimension that Pryor adds to his team's level of confidence...the knowledge that some of the *best* plays will quite possibly be the

ones that *don't* work out as planned.

Of course Pryor is not without his detractors. In a survey of Big Ten players, he was voted most overrated. His lack of experience with a sophisticated pass offense and his less than textbook passing mechanics were well documented when he arrived in Columbus, and those flaws in his game have often been apparent as he has progressed, sometimes slowly, under Tressel's tutelage, and that of position coach Nick Siciliano.

So the people who say he's still unproven as a complete quarterback have a legitimate point. They can feel free to hash it out with the people who say he's going to win the Heisman Trophy. The two are not mutually exclusive.

Tressel has said that the Rose Bowl offensive scheme would be the *starting* point for the 2010 season, and that they will be progressing from there. Spring and summer practices have borne that out, and the expansion of the OSU playbook is a direct result of the greater level of confidence Tressel has in Terrelle Pryor. It's a confidence that Pryor has earned through hard work and game experience. On Thursday night Buckeye fans will be able to judge for themselves how the Terrelle Pryor Project is going.

(- really 19-4...Pryor was not given an official QB start in the 2009 Fiesta Bowl vs. Texas, since he lined up at WR on the game's first play, with Boeckman at QB)*

Here's how the 2010 Ohio State quarterbacks line up:

Terrelle Pryor - #2 - Junior 6' 6" 233 Jeannette (PA) H.S.

The junior from Pennsylvania is the straw that stirs the Buckeye drink. He was the leading rusher for the Buckeyes in 2009 (779 yards), although the coaches would prefer that statistic not be repeated this year. Pryor had 18 TD's passing last season, against 11 interceptions, but he had only two picks in the Bucks' five game winning streak to close the regular season. The knee injury suffered in the New Mexico State game might have helped him in the long run, forcing him to focus on handing the ball off and executing in the passing game, and ruling out almost all planned rushing attempts for him down the stretch.

Twice in 2009 Pryor rushed for over 100 yards and passed for over 200 in a game, becoming just the second OSU quarterback (Troy Smith) to do so. Those 100-yard rushing days may be numbered from this point on, as Tressel plans to protect his star by not subjecting him to the pounding a regular diet of 15-20 rushing attempts per game can dish out. Pryor came to Columbus largely because he trusted Tressel to make a pro quarterback out of him. He had plenty of possible college destinations with offenses built around a rushing QB, but that's not what he wanted. The Rose Bowl proved for one game that Pryor could be that passing quarterback...and more. Now the goal is to prove it over an entire season...oh yeah...and to win every game along the way.

Pryor 2009 Highlight video

Pryor 2008 Highlight video

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Joe Bauserman - #14 - Junior 6' 1" 233 (Strasburg, VA) Lincoln H.S.

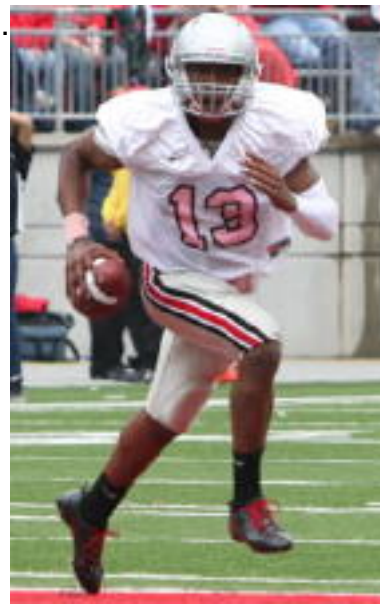
OSU recruited Bauserman way back in 2003, but the all-state high school quarterback was also

a blue-chip pitcher, and he opted for a baseball contract with the Pirates organization in 2004. By 2007 he was back asking Jim Tressel for another shot at college football and he joined the Buckeyes that year as a walk-on, and redshirted. In two seasons as a backup in 2008 and 2009, Bauserman has played in 11 games, and has completed nine of his 25 pass attempts for 140 total yards. That is the sum total of the game experience for Ohio State behind Pryor at the quarterback position, and it explains the high priority being placed on keeping #2 healthy.

Bauserman will be 25 in a month, and is entering his fourth year in the program, so he would be ready mentally, and in terms of maturity, to take over in the event of an injury. But in terms of experience, he might as well be 19. Bauserman will be on the field for every game this season in his role as the starting holder for field goals and extra points. But if he's taking snaps from under center, OSU fans should hope it's because the Buckeyes are up four touchdowns.

Scout page - Rivals page

Kenny Guiton - #13 - R-Freshman 6' 2" 190 (Houston, TX) Eisenhower H.S.



Guiton was one of the last signees for the 2009 recruiting class, committing just before signing day last year. The addition raised some eyebrows in Columbus since Guiton wasn't on the radar of any of the recruiting experts, and he said he would have ended up at Prairie View had the OSU offer not come along. But the young man from deep in the heart of Texas has made the most of every opportunity since he arrived. He made the travel squad in 2009 despite redshirting, and then was the undisputed star of this year's Spring Game, completing 11 of 21 attempts, including two touchdown passes. He drove the Gray team to the game-winning score by leading an 88-yard drive in the game's final minutes. Taurian Washington, the man who caught both of Guiton's TD throws, can tell him how much Spring Game success matters once the season starts, but Guiton's confidence has to be brimming as a result of his performance in

April, and he is a serious contender to take the backup QB job away from Bauserman in 2010.

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Taylor Graham - #19 - Freshman 6' 4" 225 (Wheaton, IL) North H.S.

It has been commonly assumed in Columbus that all the Buckeye backup quarterbacks are just keeping the seat warm for the arrival in 2011 of Braxton Miller , the Next Big Thing at QB for Ohio State. But this August, Taylor Graham has served notice that he too will be in the quarterback conversation at Ohio State from 2011 on. The son of former OSU starter Kent Graham (1991), he has shown excellent poise and an accurate and powerful throwing arm, as he grabbed the attention of OSU coaches in practice, and then performed well in last week's jersey scrimmage. Unofficially, he was 6 of 8 for 55 yards, and he delivered the ball with zip and accuracy on a variety of throws. He missed portions of two high school seasons with a series of leg injuries, but was still ranked among the top 20 prep QB's in the nation last year. Graham is a good bet to redshirt in 2010, but the OSU staff thinks they have a winner in this legacy recruit from Illinois.

Scout page - Rivals page

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