Ohio State's incoming class of 26 freshmen was ranked 11th nationally by Rivals.com and fifth by Scout.com, so it's not as if these guys were unheralded. But numerous players, including some below-the-radar recruits, have jumped out in camp.

Quarterback Braxton Miller takes the snap for Ohio State, drops back and throws to tight end Jeff Heuerman crossing the middle or sees receiver Devin Smith open and throws to him instead.

Or this one: Defensive tackle Michael Bennett disrupts a run play, and outside linebacker Ryan Shazier ranges over to make the tackle before the runner can turn upfield.

All five of those players are freshmen, so the temptation is to envision such plays not happening until 2012 or beyond. But they could happen this season.

And it's not only those five players who have a chance to make an impact from what is looking like a promising freshman class.

"We've been impressed with the freshman group," coach Luke Fickell said. "As a whole, it's been amazing. I know, since probably day one of camp, we've been impressed with that group as a whole.

"I can assure you, they're going to see a lot of playing time. Those guys will definitely be a big factor in who we are this year."

Odds are that no freshmen will start in next Saturday's opener against Akron, though Miller is competing with senior Joe Bauserman, and Shazier might get the nod if Etienne Sabino's broken hand prevents him from playing. But there's little doubt that plenty of freshmen will get their chance at significant playing time early.

“I think it’s realistic to see a lot of them contribute,” Fickell said. “How much? I don’t know. We’ll see how they take their opportunities and run with them.”

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Because of his position, Miller has been the most watched freshman. He’s hardly a finished product, but his athleticism and humility have impressed the Buckeyes.

Smith and Evan Spencer, the son of former Ohio State running back Tim Spencer, have lessened the concern about an unproven receiving corps. And Heuerman plays with a confidence that belies his youth.

Defensively, Bennett has been among the more impressive linemen and might be joined by fellow freshman Joel Hale in what the Buckeyes want to be an eight-player line rotation.

As for Shazier, his speed and instincts have largely overcome concerns about his slight 212-pound frame. In the secondary, Doran Grant has made a strong push for playing time.

Among the surprises about this year’s class is that middle linebacker Curtis Grant has struggled. Rated the No. 2 overall recruit nationally by Rivals, Grant has had some trouble adjusting to the speed of the college game.

“I’m not going to lie: The first couple of weeks, mentally, I got down into a little hole,” Grant said on Sunday. I wasn’t really used to that fast pace.”

He said it would be premature to say that he has seen the light at the end of the tunnel.

“I’d say I’m a quarter there, but not all the way there,” Grant said.

Linebackers coach Mike Vrabel has been in Grant’s ear all camp, alternatively chiding and encouraging him. Vrabel said Saturday’s jersey scrimmage, in which Grant blocked a punt in the end zone, was his best day of practice. If Grant continues to catch on, an already promising class could become even more special.

Fickell said the coaching staff has not begun having discussions about redshirting any of the freshmen. He doesn’t want his players thinking that way.

“We want to play them all,” Fickell said. “We want to play all the guys who are capable of helping the team. We tell them that from the get-go. That way, they understand what our expectations are for them.”

Those expectations are only growing.