Pryor was a better runner playing with more accomplished receivers. Miller is a more polished passer playing behind a better offensive line. What they share is the potential to make plays when plays are needed.

Though the coach, the players and the talents of the quarterbacks are different, the switch is the same. Freshman quarterback Braxton Miller will make his first start in the Buckeyes' fourth game of the season, against Colorado on Saturday, just as freshman quarterback Terrelle Pryor made his first career start in the fourth game of 2008.

Both times, the 2-1 Buckeyes were coming off humbling nonconference road losses, most recently, 24-6 at Miami, and back then, 35-3 at USC. Both times, the freshmen unseated seniors. Now it's previous career backup Joe Bauserman; then it was former All-Big Ten quarterback Todd Boeckman.

First-year head coach Luke Fickell observed that 2008 transition as a defensive assistant, and, though he didn't address the comparison directly, he understands that making a quarterback switch is serious business. Though he seems to have known what he planned to do and said the coaching staff considered starting Miller earlier, Fickell was noncommittal in his Tuesday news conference before making the announcement Thursday.

"You've got to make sure you can handle these things in the locker room, and how you handle them professionally is really important for the team, and that's why we didn't make a big deal of it," Fickell said. "I know it is a big deal."

Miller and Pryor are very different quarterbacks in many ways, but the similar progression in their careers invites more comparisons. In his first three games, Miller has accounted for 214 total yards (152 passing, 62 rushing). Pryor in his first three accounted for 216 (87 passing, 129 rushing). Each had one touchdown, and each didn't play much, or at all, in a Week 2 tight win against a MAC team. And each took snaps from center Mike Brewster, then a freshman making his first start, now a senior making his 40th.

It's interesting how much Fickell talked about the way in which the decision was communicated. In 2008, when Pryor started against Troy, both Pryor and Boeckman went in to Saturday expecting to play, with OSU coach Jim Tressel saying publicly he expected the playing time to be 50-50. Then Pryor took all but two snaps, as Tressel in the postgame talked about the list of plays he had designed for Boeckman and never called. An unavoidably uncomfortable situation was made even more awkward.

Fickell hasn't said how much Bauserman will play. It could be very little. But more than 48 hours before kickoff, the fans, the quarterbacks and their teammates understood change is at hand.

Pryor was a better runner playing with more accomplished receivers. Miller is a more polished passer playing behind a better offensive line. What they share is the potential to make plays when plays are needed.

"I think all decisions like that, because they're so publicized, are tough decisions," Fickell said. "You have to think about the morale of the team and how it affects different things like

"He's got a lot of ability, and we'll give him some opportunities to make plays with his ability," Fickell said. "But it's what we think right now the team needs."

that."