

scUM Of All Fears: Part V

Written by {ga=furls}

Thursday, November 16 2006 7:00 PM -

In this, the final installment in Furls five part look at The Game tomorrow, he takes a look at each teams rushing attack, as well as what he expects each teams general game plan to be. Furls game preview extraordinaire will post late tonight. We're almost there Buckeye fans.



[Click here for Part I - Ohio State Defensive Line vs. Michigan Offensive Line](#)

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Running & The Game Plan

At the beginning of the season, all anyone could talk about is how a team with nine new starters on defense could be ranked #1 in the nation.

After a rocky start against the run that dialogue seemed well justified. Frankly, at the beginning of the season, the rush defense of the Buckeyes appeared vulnerable and if you can't stop teams from running the ball, you can't stop them at all.

Much of the dialogue about Michigan going into the season was about its vaunted running game, so this appeared like a collision that might not come out very well for the Buckeyes, but

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what people failed to realize is that Jim Tressel teams improve by leaps and bounds from week to week. If you are going to beat the Buckeyes you must do it early or the task becomes much harder.

The Buckeye's rush defense is arguably the most improved aspect of this team. At the beginning of the season this team gave up 175 yards on the ground to a MAC team and then followed that up by giving up 172 to Texas and another 140 to Penn State. The Buckeyes play against the run has been so good of late that they have brought their average rushing yards per game down to about 90, but lets not kid ourselves, Minnesota, Indiana, and Illinois are not Michigan.

Can the Buckeyes stop Mike Hart and the Wolverines on the ground? Well that is the difficult question, but a better question is how much do the Buckeyes have to shut down Mike Hart? Do they need to hold him to about 3 yards per carry and 60 or so for the game? Can them let him run willy-nilly and rely on an opportunistic defense to get the important stops?

Well, the Buckeyes actually have several factors working in their favor. The Buckeyes clearly have the more explosive offense and generally when teams start feeling the pressure of an offense like this, they tend to give up on their own game plan and try to match them big play for big play. Once that team falls behind, they must completely abandon the run and attempt to make plays down the field. Patience is a virtue that football coaches cannot afford.

I am not convinced that the Buckeyes can afford to let Hart run willy-nilly and hope for turnovers. Mike Hart does not fumble the ball, he is the anti-Wells, and the Wolverines are not afraid to give it to him 30 times in the game. Unfortunately for Hart, he cannot count on much help from the rest of the Wolverine's skilled position players.

The lack of vertical passing game, or horizontal passing game for that matter, means that the Buckeyes should be able to load up against the run and that should keep Hart under control for the most part. Michigan's lack of depth at the wide receiver position means that they really cannot force the Buckeyes into advantageous personnel packages for the Wolverines. Yes, the

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Wolverines could put four receivers on the field, but I am not sure how much Ohio State has to really respect that. So while Michigan holds the advantage up front, the Wolverine's weakness on the outside at wide receiver essentially nullifies that advantage by bringing an eighth man into the box.

The linebackers on the outside are going to have to step up and do a better job getting off blocks and filling gaps. All year long Buckeyes linebackers have been a couple of seconds late filling their gaps and getting off blocks, allowing the play to pick up several yards before the stop. If the Buckeyes linebackers can get off their blocks, this game will not be close.

The Buckeyes will have a ton of trouble running the ball. The Buckeyes have not really been able to blow anyone, except Minnesota, off the line of scrimmage all year long and this Michigan front four is better than anything the Buckeyes have seen.

This does not mean that it is going to be impossible for the Buckeyes to run the ball, but what it does mean is that the Buckeyes may have to get creative to be effective at it (read that as doing the opposite of what they did against Illinois). The Buckeyes are going to have to use the penetration of the Michigan front four against them using trap blocks, delays, and counters.

Expect to see the Buckeyes spread the field in order to run the ball using designed runs for Troy Smith, but those are a bit obvious and will probably not be as common as you think. Faking the draw and then throwing down the field would probably be very effective in this set because every time they see the Buckeyes line up five-wide, the Wolverines will be watching for the quarterback draw.

The key to the Buckeyes running in a traditional set will be Alex Boone and Doug Datish. Boone is probably the nastiest lineman on this team, and his physical play sets the tone for the entire line. If Boone can fire off and finish his blocks without holding the Buckeyes may be able to go around the left side of the line some, but in order for the play to get to the left side, Datish and the interior line are going to have to keep Alan Branch away from the play. Alan Branch is the Big Tens version of a young Ted Washington. He is the Wolverine's interior rush defense.

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You cannot run the ball if you cannot keep the DTs from taking the hand off!

In the end, Michigan needs the running game a lot more than Ohio State does. The Buckeyes can win this game solely on Troy Smith's arm and the depth of the wide receivers coupled with Michigan's horrible secondary. Michigan CANNOT win this game on Chad Henne's arm. If Mike Hart cannot carry this team on his back, then his team is doomed.