

Analysis: The Gator Offense Vs. The Buckeye Defense

Written by {ga=furls}

Sunday, January 07 2007 7:00 PM -

The Florida offense. We've heard all about Urban Meyer's reputation as a great offensive mind. His infatuation with trick plays and other gimmicky things. The spread, and the speed they have on the outside. When it's all said and done, how good are they? How does the Buckeye defense match up with them? Furls delivers the 411 this gameday morning in an excellent piece that breaks down this matchup.



Florida really doesn't have an offense per se. That is not the dig on Florida that it appears to be at first glance; it is just a fact, the Florida Gators really cannot be defined by a specific offense. If I had to call it something I would call it spread option street ball.

Urban Meyer has done a masterful job of creating plays to match up against the defense that he happens to be playing. It sounds so obvious that you would think every coach would do it, but ask Michigan fans, it's not as easy as you think. The only thing consistent about the 2006 version of Urban Meyer's offense is that it is not very consistent in formation, play calling, or results.

It is going to be hard for Ohio State to game plan for the Gators, but there are certain tendencies to watch for, first and foremost is that Urban Meyer has a tendency to render film study worthless by adding a twist. For instance, the Tim Tebow jump pass for a touchdown off of a well established quarterback run. You can be assured that if you have seen it in film, Meyer will probably use it, but there will probably be variations.

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It would not surprise me if Meyer either gave Tebow an option to audible to pass or directly called for a pass several times while showing an option look. Florida has used Percy Harvin to run the ball 36 times this year, an average of nearly three carries per game. I would not be surprised to see Florida attempt a double reverse or something to counter the fact that the Buckeyes will be looking for the reverse, or perhaps even play action off of the reverse.

The Gators have not had a ton of consistency on the offensive side of the ball. They are not a team that has absolutely astonished teams with their looks or their ability to sustain long drives. They count on catching lightning in a bottle several times per game to put the requisite points on the board. They often capitalize on breakdowns in their opponents' defenses over pursuing, break downs in gap discipline, or overly aggressive secondary play. In short, they are as opportunistic on offense as the Buckeyes are on defense.

The Buckeyes actually match up with this style of play very well. Jim Tressel's teams have consistently played an umbrella style of defense (2005 is the exception, keeping the ball and opposing offenses in front. They will surrender the five yard out pattern and give the receiver a bigger cushion. Essentially, this style of offense challenges opponents to remain patient and execute consistently to sustain drives. This is something that most offenses have proved unable to do.

Percy Harvin is fast on the outside. He has Ginn-like speed and the Gators will bend over backward to get him the ball. Harvin is very much like a younger Teddy Ginn, but he is much more decisive than Ginn was; he never seems to get those happy feet that Ginn used to get as he would struggle to score a TD on every touch. He has exceptional speed and versatility, but he also runs routes a lot like Tedd Ginn did when he was a freshman. He does not have a particularly good "jabstep" and has a tendency to round his routes like most young, exceptionally fast receivers. The result is that he is actually easier to cover than his speed would suggest; he will telegraph his routes and his breaks.

With all the press that Harvin gets you would think he was the best receiver on the team, but he is not. He is really the teams third option, very much like Steve Breaston of Michigan; you have to respect him as a deep threat, but he is really more of a distraction than a consistent threat. Dallas Baker and Andre Caldwell each have twice as many catches as Harvin and tend to put up more consistent numbers, although neither have really excelled against the better

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teams in the SEC.

If the Buckeyes can force Florida to sustain drives by not giving up the big play and if they can pressure Chris Leak they will dominate this match up. This Florida team is not geared to sustain twelve play, 5:00 minute, 86 yard drives. They need to stay disciplined, maintain their assignments, and try not to play outside of themselves. If they can do that, they may actually shut out the Gators.

Chris Leak has demonstrated a tendency to make mistakes under pressure particularly if it comes from up the middle. In four years as a starter Leak has thrown 11, 12, 6, and 13 interceptions from 2003 to 2006. To put that number into perspective, Troy Smith has thrown 12 interceptions in his ENTIRE CAREER. This is one of those moments where a team's weakness plays right into their opponent's strengths. The Ohio State defensive line has done a tremendous job rushing the passer, particularly in the middle with All American Quinn Pitcock and David Patterson. Pitcock and Patterson do not have to sack Leak themselves, all they have to do is occupy their blockers and shove them into the backfield.

Gholston will make his plays on the outside and provide the blindside rush. After watching him man handle the Michigan offensive line (and Jake Long), I cannot imagine that Florida has anyone that will be able to consistently stop him. I think Ohio State's front four alone will be able to provide some pressure, but Jim Tressel has demonstrated the ability to generate new and aggressive defensive looks in big games.

So, although, conventional game planning says that Ohio State should take it easy and play a conservative defense against a quirky, gimmicky Florida offense, I think Jim Tressel will pick his battles and attack. Tressel has shown that he likes to blitz Antonio Smith from the nickelback position and I think that is something to watch for, but I think the majority of the pressure and blitzing will come up the middle, particularly with the linebackers.

I generally do not write about the kicking game, but Florida's kicker is so bad that it requires mentioning. Chris Hetland's longest kick of the season is 33 yards and he was a mere 4-13 for

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the season. The guy is so bad that he is only useful for extra points. Should this game go into overtime the Gators will have drive ten yards just to give themselves a reasonable chance at the field goal. I cannot fathom that a major program has a kicker this bad and he could cost them the game.