

Preview: The Big Ten Tournament

Written by {ga=furls}

Wednesday, March 07 2007 7:00 PM -

Furls is back bay-bee ... and here to preview the Big Ten Tournament for us. Furls will stay on the Buckeyes beat for us all the way through their national championship victory on Tuesday, April 3rd. For today, Furls talks conference tourney, and makes his predictions. The fun starts for the scarlet and gray tomorrow at noon, most likely against that school up north.



Let the madness begin, albeit in a slightly sane (for now) state. With the beginning of the major conference tournaments this week, comes the first call to sharpen your pencils, sign on to Google, and start researching Winthrop, Davidson, Belmont, and E. Kentucky. The office brackets are coming, and with them comes the race to identify this year's George Mason.

For the major conferences, conference tournaments are not as important as they are for the "Win and In" conferences. Teams like Belmont and Davidson were fighting to have a postseason; while teams like Ohio State and Kansas are already well established in the tournament. For the Buckeye fan, all this begs the question, what is the importance of the Big Ten tournament to Ohio State? Well there is an obvious answer and a subtle, yet more important answer.

First, let's deal with the obvious. Right now, Ohio State should have a #1 seed locked up, they can only move down. In order for the Buckeyes to fall from their lofty position, they would have to have an early (and ugly) exit from the Big Ten tournament, an outcome that is rather unlikely given their #1 seed in that tournament. As the bracket is drawn now, Ohio State would not have to face a ranked team until the finals. Besides, is there really a difference between being a #1 or a #2 the "Big Dance?" I would say, not really until the sweet sixteen where the number #1s would face a 4 seed at worst. A #2 seed is most likely to see a #3.

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What is more important is hidden by Ohio State's #1 overall ranking, frankly, the team has not played like a #1 team. This team has all the tools necessary to make a deep run in the tournament; solid point guard play, good outside shooting, and good defense in the paint, but has lacked the consistency to get it done. They have struggled with good and poor teams alike, but in the end, they have made the necessary plays to rattle off thirteen consecutive wins.

Oden's play has been consistent over this stretch, but the rest of the team has not. Daequan Cook and Othello Hunter have all but disappeared and the rest of the team seems mired in a shooting slump, eerily similar to last year. The Buckeyes have only shot better than 30% from three in two of their last six games, and have only broken 45% from the floor once. The NCAA tournament is all about timing, who is hot at the right time, and right now the Buckeyes are ice cold. They need this conference tournament to find their collective stroke.

The Buckeyes match up well against anyone because of their rare combination of good guard play and solid post play and they have to be considered the tournaments overwhelming favorites. Unfortunately, expectations alone do not a championship team make (ask the football team about that). So let's take a look at the brackets and see what turns up. Feel free to fill in your bracket now (before I give you the answer key).

Preliminaries

#9 Minnesota vs. #8 Michigan: The fact that I am actually even looking at this game is proof that Swerb is (yet again) in violation of labor laws and existing human rights guidelines. No one should be subjected to a game of this sucktitude. Neither of these teams has a single redeemable quality, and the only way to win this one is not to watch it. Both of these teams play that, "grind the game to a halt and limit possessions" system (that or they are so devoid of talent that it just seems like the game has ground to a halt). In short, they play like old people screw. I am going to pick Michigan, simply because I want Tommy Amaker to keep his job. It is kind of nice know that Thad Matta has an inside track on every good player in Michigan too. Michigan 62-Minnesota 56.

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#7 Michigan State vs. #10 Northwestern: Michigan State has probably done enough to get themselves into the tournament, but I do not expect to see Tom Izzo's team take this tournament lightly. Drew Neitzel is too much for Northwestern by himself, so Northwestern will continue to do what it does best, be the doormat of the Big Ten.... I mean ummm, study things: MSU 71 – NW 53.

1st Round

#1 Ohio State vs. #8 Michigan: Just like football, Ohio State will send the Wolverines home licking their wounds. Adding sweet sugar coating to the victory is the perception that the loss was the result of playing #1 Ohio State, not Tommy Amaker's coaching, and he (just like LLLWLLloyd Carr) will be retained to lose more big games and prized recruits. OSU 72 – UM 61.

#5 Purdue vs. #4 Iowa: After surprising seasons for both both teams, Purdue and Iowa both need to perform well in this tournament to have a shot at getting into the Big Dance. Hell, Iowa has to win it to get in. After several hours of intense calculations, I have determined that it is statistically unlikely that both of these teams will win this game. Therefore, someone will likely be eliminated from NCAA tournament contention. Adam Haluska is a nice story and a good guard, but the Hawkeyes are no match for the Boilermakers and David Teague. Purdue 68 Iowa 62.

#2 Wisconsin vs. #7 MSU: This is my surprise bracket buster... Drew Neitzel and MSU send Alondo Tucker and the Badgers back to the frozen tundra. This MSU team is a lot better than most people give them credit for and I think that they will be too much for a "Butchless" Wisconsin. MSU: 63 Wiscy: 60.

#3 Indiana vs. #6 Illinois: Although I hate Bruce Webber nearly as much as Lloyd Carr, my hands are tied here. Webber's Illini (can I still call them that?) will beat Sampson's Hoosiers like

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they owe them money. Interesting question.... Who sent more text messages to school-aged children last year, Kelvin Sampson or Michael Jackson? Only the F.B.I. knows, God Bless the Patriot Act! Illinois 68- Indiana 63.

Semifinals

#1 Ohio State vs. #5 Purdue: This is a great match up for the Buckeyes, and they should roll Purdue handily, leaving Purdue one win short of making the tournament. OSU: 78 Purdue: 63.

#7 MSU vs. #6 Illinois: The Cinderella story continues and Bruce Weber (complete with his obnoxiously orange neckware) goes home to Illinois (am I still aloud to call it that?) MSU 64 – Illinois 59.

Finals

#1 Ohio State vs. #7 MSU: This should be a great game, just like the last time they played, but I think the Buckeyes should be able to pull it out. The real question is, will a trip to the conference finals be enough to get Drew Neitzel and the Spartans into the tournament. I am not sure, but in a perfect world it should. Ohio State 71 MSU 68.