

## Big Ten Champs!!!

Written by {ga=furls}

Sunday, March 11 2007 7:00 PM -

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March Madness week is finally here, and it couldn't have been ushered in any better than by yesterday afternoon's thoroughly enjoyable ass whoopin' of the third ranked Badgers for the Big Ten title. Furls recaps the dominating performance by The Thad Five, and looks ahead to the Buckeyes chances of going all the way in The Big Dance. The Bucks play Central Connecticut State Thursday night at 7:40 PM EST.



For the last couple of weeks Buckeyes fans have been subjected to the chrono-biased (new word I made up) ramblings of the big media talking heads. They say things like, "Ohio State is too young to make a run," or "they lack experience." News flash, now that high school seniors must go to college for one year, the best players in the NCAA are the freshman. These are the same guys that would be lottery picks in other years.

Who are the players most likely to be drafted one and two in this summer's NBA Draft? Kevin Durant and Greg Oden, both freshmen. So it should not surprise anyone that Ohio State's other stand out freshman, Mike Conley, was the man of the hour for Ohio State in the Big Ten Championship game, as his top ranked Buckeyes handed the third ranked Badgers their second loss in as many weeks.

Conley came up huge when the Buckeyes needed him most, while Greg Oden sat on the bench for most of the first half of the game with foul trouble. Conley repeatedly showed that he has the best first step in the NCAA and may be the best dribble penetration passer in all of major college hoops. That is what makes him so deadly, he can take anyone off the dribble at any time and if the defense rotates over to help, he will kick the ball out or further underneath for the easy score. If Conley had a better perimeter shot he would be a top ten pick in this years NBA draft, after just one year in school.

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The beating that Ohio State put on Wisconsin was probably the best Ohio State has looked this year, and it is reason for some very real optimism heading into the tournament. The Buckeyes did not execute exceptionally on offense, but they did shoot better than they have of late, knocking down shots at a 45% clip. All that is well and good, but the most impressive aspect of the Buckeyes game was their play on defense, with or without Oden.

The defensive play does not really show up on a stat sheet, there was not a lot of steals or blocks, but Wisconsin was unable to get anywhere against the Bucks whether they were in zone or man. The effort was exceptional and is further demonstrated by the effect the Buckeyes had on Alando Tucker, Big Ten Player of the Year, who was held scoreless for the first 16:19 of the game ... missing his first seven shots. Heck, Wisconsin's second best scorer, Kammron Taylor, did not score until there was 16 minutes left in the game.

To say that defense wins championships is such a cliché that it's hard for me to even type it, but after watching the Buckeyes smother a top five team, holding them under 50 points for the second time in a week, it's hard not to wonder how far this defensive play can take them. This team is defensively stacked. Everyone knows about what a defensive animal Oden is, but how many people have seen what a difference Othello Hunter, David Lighty, and Mike Conley are making on the defensive end?

Ron Lewis, Jamar Butler, and Daequan Cook have been struggling mightily on the offensive end but have continued to play hard and contribute away from the ball. If the Buckeyes can get these guys going offensively, they will be very hard to deal with in the tournament.

Speaking of the tournament, what's the deal with the snub that the Buckeyes received from the selection committee? Somehow they fell from #1 to #3 in the nation by winning their conference tournament. I guess they should've lost three or four games in February (like UNC and Florida) to garner the support of the selection committee. I guess they probably figured that since the Buckeyes lost to both of these teams during the regular season that they could not seed them above those teams. Well, that was then and this is now. UNC won a close game at home against an Oden-less Buckeyes team, and Florida played a one handed Oden five games back from a six-month layoff. Neither game is really indicative of the team Ohio State has on the court now.

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I expect to see teams flood the middle and give the Buckeyes the outside shot, and they will have to make it if they want to advance. Normally, given the way that they have shot the ball I would be betting against them, but after watching them play defense today ... I am not so sure. If they score over 65 I like their chances against just about anyone, and six straight wins is a very reasonable proposition.