

Preview: Ohio State at Washington

Written by {ga=furls}

Friday, September 14 2007 7:00 PM -

Well, here we go Buckeye Nation. The seasons first test. A cross country trip to Seattle to play at the 2-0 Washington Huskies, led by former Notre Dame coach Tyrone Willingham. The Huskies manhandled Boise State last week, and freshman quarterback Jake Locker has been dynamic in leading Washington to their first two wins. But how do the Buckeyes match up against the Huskies? How will this thing play out today? Furls fills us in with his preview of today's contest. GO BUCKS!



The Buckeyes are off to an easy 2-0 start this season, but all is not well in the state of Ohio. The veteran offensive line and promising stable of running backs have underachieved, but the Buckeyes have still managed to win running away (excuse the pun) against clearly overmatched intrastate teams.

All that ends this week, in a nationally televised game in which many experts are putting the Buckeyes on "upset alert." Why wouldn't they? The last time anyone outside of the Buckeye state saw Ohio State play they were manhandled by the Gators. I have come to the conclusion that most national analysts do not actually watch college football; they just read box scores and regurgitate the numbers they see. If you didn't actually watch the Ohio State game last week, then the scores would lead you to believe that Ohio State was in big trouble.

If you were one of about seven people in the world that have the Big Ten Channel and you were actually able to see the game, your opinion may be a bit different. While it is true that Ohio State was self-destructing while running a limited playbook, they were never actually in any trouble; the defense ensured that. Think about it, Ohio State turned the ball over FIVE times and Akron's offense never even lined up to kick a field goal. The entire game had a very controlled feel to it.

This game will not. If the Buckeyes do not come to play then the Huskies will make them pay. These days, Notre Dame's handling of the Tyrone Willingham

Preview: Ohio State at Washington

Written by {ga=furls}

Friday, September 14 2007 7:00 PM -

situation and the subsequent lifetime contract (10 years \$30 million) awarded to everyone's favorite weeble, Charlie Weis, isn't looking like such a great deal. All of a sudden Willingham's Huskies look good and the Golden Domers, well, they don't.

Without Further ado, here they are, the Washington Huskies! Arf. Arf.

The Buckeyes agreed to this home and home about a decade ago, and after playing the first game in 2003, they have finally come to Washington to close the books on this thing. Husky Stadium, while significantly smaller than some of the Big Ten powerhouse football cathedrals, is a very difficult place to play. While the Huskies have not been very good the last couple of years, they have given teams like USC and California some real heartburn up there. The task ahead of the Buckeyes is no small one.

Washington is a team on the rise, but the nation has not caught up yet, as a matter of fact the country seems so fixated on the widely assumed dominance of the SEC that people are over looking what may actually be the best conference in the land. Thus far the Huskies have been impressive in their first two victories of the season, beating Syracuse by 30 in a game that was not even that close and deflowering everyone's favorite Cinderella team (Boise St.) 24-10, yet they still remain unranked. This is a bone of contention for a hungry Husky team (god these puns are easy).

Right now the Huskies realize that Ohio State is the last obstacle standing between them and credibility. If they win, they will certainly vault up the polls, and this does not bode well for the Buckeyes. It is never fun to play a chippy team that feels that they are not getting the respect they deserve; particularly a well coached one (Gators anyone?).

Preview: Ohio State at Washington

Written by {ga=furls}

Friday, September 14 2007 7:00 PM -

Tyrone Willingham can flat out coach. He has coached well at Stanford, Notre Dame, and Washington, and in three years, he has taken the Huskies out of the PAC Ten's cellar making them appear bowl worthy in a loaded PAC-10 conference. He has his Huskies winning with versatility on the defensive and offensive side of the ball.

Washington's skilled front four allows them to vary their defensive sets and still achieve a reasonable pass rush or run containment, regardless of what the linebackers are doing. Fortunately for the Buckeyes, they will not be seeing a gimmick defense this week. Washington does play a standard, run of the mill 4-3.

Similarly, Jake Locker has afforded the Huskies a lot freedom in the offense, both with his speed and decision-making. Thus far Locker has appeared solid, but he, like Boeckman, has not really seen a competitive, complete defense. Yes, he did lead the Huskies to a victory over Boise State, but we really do not know much about Boise State this year.

The Match Ups:

Ohio State's Offense vs. Washington's Defense: The good news, this is not a gimmick based 3-5-3 defense or the ten men in the box defense that YSU was running. Apparently, YSU thought it would be a better idea to leave corners on an island with Brian Robiskie to defend the run. Don't expect the same from Washington, at least not from the beginning.

I expect the Huskies to cheat toward defending the run, but not right away. The

Preview: Ohio State at Washington

Written by {ga=furls}

Friday, September 14 2007 7:00 PM -

strength of the Huskies defense is the front seven; they are actually a bit thin and undersized in the secondary. Tyrone Willingham will need to see if his front seven can stop the run because he really does not want to get into a track meet with Ohio State while he has eight or nine men in the box.

Ohio State has a size advantage on the line, but it is not as pronounced as it has been in their first two games in which the Buckeyes struggled to open up running lanes. The task ahead of the Buckeye offensive line is formidable as the Huskies were able to hold the unusually impotent ground attack of Boise State to just 103 yards on 32 carries.

Frankly, if the Buckeyes think they are just going to line up and ram it down the Huskies throats from the "I" they are sadly mistaken. They are going to have to force the Huskies to respect the passing game by hitting Robiskie and Hartline down field early from running formations to keep the eighth and ninth defender out of the box.

The Huskies are vulnerable downfield and were exposed, to some extent, by Boise State's first year starter Taylor Tharp. Last week Tharp was able to amass nearly 300 yard through the air, completing nearly 2/3's of his 47 attempts, although he did throw three horrible interceptions. The Buckeyes have much better speed on the outside, so they should be able to make some things happen in the Huskies secondary.

It is hard to admit you are wrong, but I will. I, like many in Buckeye land, was pretty harsh on Todd Boeckman last week after his two interceptions. After rewatching the game, the two interceptions were not as bad as I had initially thought. The first, in which he overthrew Sanzenbacher, was an ill-advised throw, but it was complicated by the fact that Sanzenbacher fell on his ass while

Preview: Ohio State at Washington

Written by {ga=furls}

Friday, September 14 2007 7:00 PM -

running the route. The second interception, in which I questioned his decision to throw down field into double coverage, was actually a pretty good decision as it was not double coverage. It was actually man coverage with a safety overtop, the safety was slow rotating over and had Boeckman thrown a better ball it could have been six.

Overall, I think the Buckeyes have the advantage in this match up in the passing game, but in the running game, they will have trouble if they continue to telegraph running plays by using obvious formations. The Huskies are too good up front for the Buckeyes to just have their way on the ground.

Ohio State's Defense vs. Washington's Offense: Ohio State's defense is very good. We all know that. It is good up front, it is good in the secondary, there really is no obvious vulnerability, but there is a subtle one.

Typically, when the Buckeyes are on the road they have a tendency to play a very conservative, soft zone underneath, particularly against spread offenses. Coincidentally, the Huskies have the capability to run a spread and if Tyrone Willingham has ever watched film on the Buckeyes he knows that he can expect and exploit this zone by using short to intermediate routes as long as his young quarterback can remain patient.

These 5-7 yard routes are just long enough to move the chains while still short enough to get the ball in front of Ohio State's secondary. Additionally, these routes get the ball out of Locker's hand before the Buckeyes can get to him with a four-man rush, and spreading the field opens running lanes for a mobile quarterback. What is Locker's 40 time again? (4.5 in case you were wondering).

Preview: Ohio State at Washington

Written by {ga=furls}

Friday, September 14 2007 7:00 PM -

The national media is all over Jake Locker and for good reason. The red-shirt freshman has played very well up to this point in the season, but I am not quite ready to give him the Davey O'Brien Award yet. While he is obviously talented and tough, Locker has yet to really take a game over from the pocket and Ohio State's defense is athletic enough to take away a lot of the runs that he broke against Syracuse and Boise State. Like all young quarterbacks, Locker is susceptible to mental lapses and although he has only thrown one interception to date; he could very easily have had a couple of more if the Boise State defenders had better hands. Fortunately for Locker, Ohio State's defense seems to drop a lot of interceptions too.

Look for Washington to use the spread and give Locker two options per play. If neither is available he will tuck and run. If the Buckeyes get too conservative and drop all three linebackers into coverage Locker will tuck the ball immediately and run. Jim Heacock is going to have to bite the bullet and make the young quarterback beat him with his arm downfield by blitzing. Sending a corner from the blind side or blitzing linebackers right into his Locker's face may be just what the doctor ordered. This will leave the Buckeyes more vulnerable downfield, but will also force Locker into mistakes.

What to watch for:

Watch for the Buckeyes to come out slinging, throwing the ball downfield in an attempt to quiet the raucous, caffeinated Husky faithful.

Watch for the Huskies to spread the field, but with very few actual options on the field. The Huskies have some physically imposing receivers, but they do not have a lot of talent on the outside. The only real viable option they have on the outside is 6'3" 240 lb receiver Marcel Reese. I am not completely sold on Reese

Preview: Ohio State at Washington

Written by {ga=furls}

Friday, September 14 2007 7:00 PM -

either, this is the senior's first year of real playtime and in two games he has already equaled his previous career total for receptions (9).

Watch for the Buckeyes to turn the dogs loose on the Huskies (no, this is not a Michael Vick sponsored event). Look for the Buckeyes to bring the pressure early and often. Right now Locker is the only playmaker on the team and if the Buckeyes are not actively attacking him, well, then they have bigger problems than what they are doing on the field. I am expecting to see a blitz package similar to what they gave Colt McCoy last year, sending corners and linebackers from the weak side.

Watch for the Buckeyes to run more play action and misdirection. Thus far, everyone is jumping on first motion of the running back, and Beanie Wells numbers reflect it. The only way the Buckeyes are going to get those defenders out of the box is to make defenders stay home. Watch for a reverse involving Brandon Saine, particularly a couple of plays after lining him up wide and using him on a bubble screen.

Don't Be Surprised if:

The Buckeyes make this a lot easier than people are expecting. Washington is a tough place to play, but the Buckeyes played a lot of tough games last year. Washington is a good team, and they will be much better next year, but I think we have only seen the tip of the iceberg on the offensive side of the ball.

Beanie gets it together this week. We saw flashes of the explosive Beanie last week, and I think is going to be just the beginning. Remember, Wells missed a

Preview: Ohio State at Washington

Written by {ga=furls}

Friday, September 14 2007 7:00 PM -

lot of camp and most of spring practice with minor injuries. He is rusty, but now has two games and three weeks of practice under his belt. Have you ever seen anything better than a Chris Wells stiff arm? How many more weeks is the offensive line going to allow itself to be the “disappointment?” I am calling for 150 out of Beanie.

The defensive line dominates. The Buckeyes have a huge advantage upfront and will all season long against every team they play. The Buckeyes have eight very good defensive linemen that all see substantial playing time. This gives the team a huge advantage in the second half when offensive lines tend to start pushing defensive lines around. I am calling for six Ohio State sacks and a couple of pressure induced turnovers.

Look for two picks. I have seen some of Locker’s throws, and lets just say that if he had tried them into a good secondary it would have been ugly. Look for him to underestimate Jenkins and company and for them to make him pay.

If I were a betting man:

I can definitely see scenarios unfolding in which the Buckeyes lose. If they come out conservative on defense they are in trouble. If they come out predictable on offense, they are in trouble. In the end, I think the first two games were nothing more than glorified practices. I expect the Buckeyes to come out and attack and to do a better job masking their plays than they have (they could hardly do worse). All in all, I think the game will be easier than everyone else thinks.

Buckeyes win a game that never really feels close: 24-7. Take Ohio State and the under.