



The Big Ten men's basketball tournament tipped off yesterday in Indianapolis with Iowa facing off against Michigan. The two teams were fighting for a second round birth to challenge our beloved and top seeded Buckeyes. With the way the game started, it looked like Michigan was going to blow the Hawkeyes out. Iowa was able to get things close in the second half, but in the end, Manny Harris and the Wolverines pulled away for a 59-52 victory. With that, we're going to jump right into the Conference Tournament preview.

First opponent -- Quarterfinals

Michigan Wolverines -- The 8 seeded Wolverines will take the court against Ohio State at noon today. Ohio State and Michigan split the series during the regular season, with each winning on their home floor. Michigan's win should have an asterisk next to it though, as their victory against the Buckeyes came when Evan Turner was recovering from that silly broken back of his.

Harris & Sims, Attorney's at law, lead a talented group of Michigan players that haven't been able to live up to the preseason hype they created. When I previewed the Ohio State - Michigan regular season game two weeks ago, I said that limiting Harris and Sims was crucial to beating the Wolverines. If I needed proof that Head Coach Thad Matta reads all of my articles, he gave it to me by creating a game plan to shut those two down in Ohio State's 66-55 victory.

Prediction -- Warning -- I'm allowed to predict the ending of this game because I know who Ohio State's opponent is. For the Semifinals and Conference Championship preview, I'll only be evaluating the Buckeyes possible opponents in the event that Ohio State advances. Now that I've said that, I think Michigan keeps things interesting early, but the Buckeyes will use their overall talent advantage to pull away in the second half for a 74-60 win.

Possible opponents -- Semifinals

In the (likely) event that Ohio State beats Michigan in the Quarterfinals, they will move on to the next round and play the winner of the 4-5 game, Wisconsin -- Illinois.

Wisconsin Badgers -- The Badgers, like Michigan, were able to split the regular season series with Ohio State. Also, like Michigan, the Badgers victory over Ohio State came while Evan Turner was recovering from the broken back. That's not to say that if the Buckeyes face

Wisconsin in the semi's, it will be an automatic win.

The Badgers have the kind of team that gives Ohio State fits; athletic, big, and defensively sound. Led by Trevon Hughes, Wisconsin uses balanced scoring from the other starting four to slowly, slowly, bleed victories away from their opponents. When I think of a game with Wisconsin, I think of a game with a final score in the 50's.

Illinois Fighting Illini -- Illinois, as a team, does not match up well against Ohio State. The Buckeyes have won both games against Illinois this year, and neither game has been very close. Ohio State blew the doors off of Assembly Hall in their first meeting with a 19 point win, and were able to run away with the second game in Columbus (winning by 16) to clinch a share of the regular season conference title.

Demitri McCamey leads the Fighting Illini and is extremely effective scoring and passing the ball. If Illinois advances, expect David Lighty (Ohio State's best defender) to draw McCamey as his defensive assignment. Limiting his play-making ability would pay huge dividends if the two teams were to match up.

As Buckeye fans, we should be cheering for Illinois in this game. As previously stated, Wisconsin is a tougher match up, and they're the hotter team as well. Wisconsin has won six of their last eight games, while the Fighting Illini have lost five of their last six. My advice -- cheer for Illinois, but expect Wisconsin to win it.

Possible opponents -- Conference Championship

Let me first say that yes, anything can happen during a basketball game, it's why they play the games and yada, yada, yada. But does anyone really expect Minnesota or Northwestern to advance past Purdue and Michigan State? If you do think this is possible, please raise your hand and keep it raised until I find you... so I can smack you. Unless, of course, you're a woman, then I won't hit you because I don't hit women. I was never able to get into *The Ben Roethlisberger Center for Kids Who Want to Abuse Women Good and Who Wanna Learn to Do Other Things Good as Well*

. Regardless, I'm just going to assume that the favorites (Michigan State and Purdue) will advance to the other Semifinals match up, and in the event that the Buckeyes (hopefully) make it the Conference Championship game, they'll be seeing one of these two teams.

Purdue Boilermakers -- The Boilermakers, ranked fifth in the country by the coaches, are one of the best squads in the NCAA. The season series between Purdue and Ohio State produced two of the best games the conference saw all year. The first game was an epic battle between Robbie Hummel, who exploded for 29 points in the first half, and Evan Turner, who closed the game out in the second half with 23 points for an Ohio State victory. The second game took place in Columbus and saw Ohio State rally late in a game when they were down *big*, but fell just short in the end with a 60-57 defeat.

Unfortunately for the Boilermakers, one of the most important members of their team, Robbie

Hummel, was lost for the season due to an ACL tear. Purdue has played three games without Hummel -- falling to Michigan State in an ugly loss where they only scored 44 points (a season low) in the first game, then winning two easy ones against the Big Ten's worst teams (Indiana and Penn State) to close out the season. We'll all have to wait and see if the Boilermakers have learned to play without one of their team leaders.

Michigan State Spartans -- The Spartans and the Buckeyes only played once during the regular season because of the strange rotation the league is forced to abide by (ah, the beauty of having eleven conference members). The game was played in East Lansing with Evan Turner suffering flu and cold-like symptoms. Fortunately, his Buckeye teammates (namely William Buford) were plenty hot and raced out to a big halftime lead (39-26). The Spartans were able to put together a run in the second half, but by then, Evan Turner had found his groove and sealed the victory for Ohio State.

Michigan State has a very talented starting five and a few bench players who can come into the game without the normal drop off in athleticism you see with most other teams. Kalin Lucas is the battery that makes alarm clock buzz (I'm tired of the "engine that makes the car go" analogy), and when the Spartans are playing efficient basketball, they are scary good.

With Purdue playing sans one of their best players, I expect Michigan State to emerge from the other side of the bracket and advance to the conference championship. If everything goes well on our side, Ohio State will be waiting for them.

Come back on Monday and check out my review of the Conference Tournament. If you don't, you run the risk of me finding you... and smacking you. Unless, of course, you're a woman, because I don't hit women. But then, if you are a woman, you'll have to worry about Big Ben finding you and smacking you, because if there's one thing Ben doesn't like (outside of not treating women right), it's unfinished business.

You've just read the longest section title *ever*. Congratulations, you just experienced *history*. Anyway, all the information you need about this section was in the title. Come back on Monday for my Conference Tournament review... or else.