



*(This OSU-Miami preview first ran on May 17, 2010.)*

The storyline for this game writes itself. It's almost too easy, and before Ohio State and the Miami Hurricanes face off in Columbus on September 11, we'll probably be sick and tired of hearing about it.

"It", of course, is the rematch angle. The last time these two schools met on the football field, it was for the 2002 BCS National Championship, the classic [double-overtime Buckeye victory](#) in the [2003 Fiesta Bowl](#)

....the zenith of the Tressel era...the shocking takedown of a Hurricane team that was unbeaten over a span of two seasons, and is rightly heralded as [one of college football's best teams](#) of all time.

There are those in Miami and elsewhere who still contend that the Hurricanes were done in by a bad pass interference call late in the first overtime. That they are [demonstrably wrong](#) has done little to alter their preferred narrative in the ensuing years.

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[Don't get me started](#)  
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Consequently, there is something of a "revenge" angle to this one as well...at least to certain elements in Coral Gables.

And why not? Look at what's happened to them since January 3, 2003. It's easy to see how

Ohio State could underestimate the revenge motive for the Miami program coming in to this game. While Ohio State has finished the decade out with five BCS bowl games, consistent Top 10 finishes, and two more title game appearances since that day in Arizona, the Hurricanes have, well...gone another direction.

Ohio State people look back on the 2003 Fiesta Bowl once in a while...to re-live some of the warm glow of that monumental victory. But clearly they've moved on to other monumental games...some good...some not so good. Tressel's Buckeyes have, for better or for worse, become fairly regular players on the sport's biggest stage.

The last memory Hurricane fans have of that stage is the image of Ken Dorsey on his knees on the Fiesta Bowl turf, with jubilant OSU Buckeyes jumping all around him. You couldn't blame the Miami coaches if they tried to get an emotional edge by implying there was something unfair about the way they lost that game...and that this rematch is a chance to set things right. I figure that edge should help them for about a minute and a half on September 11th.

### Dueling Dual-Threat QB's

The other obvious storyline to this game is the pairing of the two dynamic junior quarterbacks, Terrelle Pryor and Jacory Harris. Harris probably has an edge in the talent of his supporting cast at the skill positions, while Pryor will direct the team with the superior offensive line and the better running game. Both will struggle at times to solve the opponent's tough defense, but the exhibition of athleticism at the quarterback position could be memorable no matter what else happens.

### What Happened to Miami?

Miami under Larry Coker was an era that began with a national championship in his first year as head coach in 2001 and as we all know, he came very close to two in a row. Clearly there was no place for Coker to go but down. The Canes had a solid 11-2 season in 2003, capped with an Orange Bowl victory, but the good times wouldn't last. They were 9-3 in both 2004 and 2005, but the rigors of a conference affiliation in the ACC had proven a tough adjustment for them, and the record dipped to 7-6 in 2006. With scandals dogging the program off the field, and the appalling [brawl with FIU](#) on it, Coker had to go, and he was fired after the season.

The Hurricanes bottomed out at 5-7 in Randy Shannon's first season in 2007, and his prospects for being the long term solution at Miami have seemed iffy from day one, with the Hurricanes going 21-17 in three seasons under his leadership. Just this week though, some of the cloudiness surrounding his future was lifted by way of [a new four-year contract](#) with the university. And now, ["the clock is ticking"](#) for Shannon, who, if he completes the term of the new contract, will have coached at Miami longer than did any of his legendary predecessors (Howard Schnellenberger, Jimmy Johnson, Dennis Erickson, Butch Davis).

It is an understatement to say that 2010 is an important year for Randy Shannon.

Shannon's record on the field has been mixed to this point, but there is little argument that he has done what the school hired him to do. He has re-instilled discipline in the program, and has presided over a significant improvement in the academic performance of his players. And he has increased the team's win total...from five...to seven...to nine, in each of his three years at the helm. Another thing Miami has done well under Shannon is recruit, and the Hurricanes have three strong classes since 2008 that form part of the the basis for the new optimism in Coral Gables.

The project of returning Miami to the status of elite program in college football isn't yet complete, but there is some sense they're headed the right direction. 2009 saw an improved [9-3 regular season](#) record, driven by the emergence of quarterback Jacory Harris, and the talent on the roster, while still very young, is as good as it has been since 2004.

Re-emerging?

The Hurricanes grabbed the nation's attention last fall, racing out to a 5-1 record, chalking up wins over No. 18 Florida State and No. 14 Georgia Tech before stunning No. 8 Oklahoma 21-20 in Week 4. Only a 31-7 loss to No. 11 Virginia Tech in Blacksburg marred the Canes' fast start, and they rose as high as No. 10 in the polls after the win over the Bradford-less Sooners.

The second half of the campaign was thus more of a disappointment, as Miami dropped ACC contests to Clemson (in OT) and North Carolina, finishing third in the ACC Coastal division, and then couldn't do much against Wisconsin in the [Florida Citrus Bowl](#) , finishing at 9-4.

That was a strong enough finish to secure Shannon's immediate future at Miami, though he'll be put to the test early in the 2010 season with consecutive road games at OSU, Pittsburgh and Clemson before the leaves fall. From a quick look at personnel the Hurricanes bring back for 2010, plus input from some analysts much more knowledgeable about their roster than I, a handful of assumptions can be put forward about the 2010 Hurricanes.

Green Up Front....Deep at the Skill Spots

On offense, Miami usually sinks or swims based on the performance of quarterback Jacory Harris. He can throw 4 picks, like he did in a 2009 loss to North Carolina...or he can go 20 of 25 with 3 TD's, like he did in [the upset](#) of Georgia Tech. On the season, Harris completed 59.6% of his passes for 3352 yds, with 24 TD passes and 17 interceptions. Like his OSU counterpart Pryor, Harris is entering his junior year with a good base of experience as a starter, and the expectation that his best games are in front of him.

At the other offensive skill positions of running back and wide receiver, the Hurricanes are loaded with young talent. There's more game experience at wide receiver, where Leonard Hankerson (45 rec, 801 yds, 6 TD), LaRon Byrd (33 rec, 460 yds, 1 TD) and Travis Benjamin

(29 rec, 501 yds, 4 TD) should be Harris' primary targets.

The running backs are less experienced than the receivers as a group, but in redshirt freshman Lamar Miller they believe they have a special talent. Damien Berry came on strong at the end of last season, so even with last year's leading rusher Graig Cooper (695 yds, 4 TD) recovering from a knee injury, the Canes have some depth, and the backs as a unit had a very impressive spring. At tight end, look for a breakout year by Richard Gordon, a kid with a scary size/speed combo.

The problem looming for Miami in the Ohio State game is an offensive line that took some graduation losses (three starters are gone including standouts OT Jason Fox and center A.J. Trump) and will be playing first-year starters at both offensive tackle positions against Cam Heyward, Nathan Williams and their friends. The guards are solid, but center is still a position up for grabs. Lots of questions here.

The projected starter at LT is Orlando Franklin, a two-year starter at guard who has a lot of ability, but there is sure to be a fresher face starting at RT. Even if things work out well for the O-line over the course of the season, they might not be quite ready for a date in Columbus in early September against one of the country's best defenses.

Another thing that jumps out from the 2009 Miami stats is that the team's leading rusher had just 695 yards. This is not a very good rushing team (138 ypg in 2009, and 61 yds vs Wisconsin in Citrus Bowl), and the prospects for a Miami win in Columbus won't be very good if they can't mount some semblance of a rushing attack against Ohio State.

### Defense Should Be Better

The Canes were 5th in total defense in the ACC in 2009 (3rd in rushing def, 5th in passing def.) and they return eight starters from that unit. Losing DT Joe Joseph, linebacker Darryl Sharpton and safety Randy Phillips doesn't mean the Hurricanes won't have a stronger defense overall in 2010.

The defensive line will be a strength of this team, with Allen Bailey the senior defensive end leading the way. Marcus Fortson and Josh Holmes should start at the tackles, and Adawale Ojomo is returning to the DE spot after missing last season with an injury. At linebacker, standouts Sean Spence and Colin McCarthy will be joined by a new middle backer (Kylan Robinson, Shayon Green?) and overall that unit will be fine, barring injuries.

Miami will also be very solid at cornerback, with Brandon Harris and DeMarcus Van Dyke the projected starters. At safety, final decisions are yet to be made, but Ray Ray Armstrong could be moved from corner to start there along with Jared Campbell or Vaughn Telemaque.

### A Bump in the Road Back

A year ago, Miami was thought to be at least a year away from their return to the regular ranks of the Top 10 or 20 in college football, and as 2010 gets closer, the jury is still out on the exact time and date of that arrival.

What 2009 taught us about Miami is that they have assembled a roster of athletic talent on a par with just about any team in the country, as victories over teams like Oklahoma demonstrate. The new Hurricane season promises an explosive offense with a dangerous and dynamic leader at QB, and a tough defense that could push them to the top of the ACC standings.

Miami will probably start the season with a Top 20 ranking, and if the offensive line comes around for them early enough to weather the tough road stretch in September, we might just see the Canes back in the BCS after a seven year absence. As for the date in Columbus, I suspect the difference will be the age old formula working for OSU: run the ball...stop the run, both of which the Buckeyes should be able to do better than the Hurricanes.

If the Hurricanes come in to the Horseshoe with the idea in their heads that they owe us one, I predict they'll leave with the idea that they owe us two. This one probably won't be close enough to be decided by one referee's whistle.

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Links:

[2010 Ohio State Schedule](#)

[2010 Miami Hurricanes Schedule](#)