

Preview: Ohio State - Iowa

Written by {ga=furls}

Friday, September 29 2006 7:00 PM -

I can't wait for this one tonight. 8 PM, national television. Buckeyes - Hawkeyes live from Kinnick Stadium. Per usual, Furls is here to chime in with his game recap, breaking down the game in a variety of different ways. In it, Furls wonders aloud who Iowa QB Drew Tate is going to throw to, and who on the Hawkeye defense is going to cover Ginn, Gonzo, and Robiskie. GO BUCKS tonight!



Two years ago, the Ohio State Buckeyes walked into Iowa City and got their teeth kicked in. The final score was 33-7, but I am not really sure if it was actually even that close. Last year, the Hawkeyes got their chance to come to Columbus and receive a very similar pummeling. What does that all have to do with this years game? Not much.

I'm sure that Troy Smith and some of the veteran Buckeyes are using that whooping as a source of motivation, and I am sure that Iowa and Drew Tate feel the same about last years loss, but these teams in no way resemble either of those two teams. Bear with me for a second while I expound upon that.

Two years ago the Bucks were crushed by a stiffling run defense and indecision in the passing game. Think back to that Buckeyes team; Justin Zwick was the QB, Lydell Ross and Maurice Hall were platooning at RB, the offensive line was offensive, and the defense was porous. Drew Tate was dominant and he had receivers to throw to. The Buckeyes turned it around 2004 following this game, but the Iowa game two years ago was the low point of the Tressel Era.

Last year the Hawkeyes were dominated by a stiffling defense that strangled and abused Drew Tate in a raucous Ohio Stadium. As you can see, things are very different now, but the talking heads at ESPN would like you to believe that this game somehow resembles either of these.

Iowa has played exceptionally at home, where they have won 25 of 26 games and there is a definite advantage for them in Kinnick Stadium. But it is not enough of an advantage to overcome the overwhelming talent disparity between these two teams. Now, if the Buckeyes were young, inexperienced, and didn't have the best big game coach in college football....

Don't fall into the trap. Don't try to pigeon-hole this year's game into one of the recent games. The teams are different, and just like the mutual fund disclaimers: Past performance is not an

indication of future gains.

Introducing the 2006 Iowa Hawkeyes:

Drew Tate is a good quarterback, one of the best in a suddenly quarterback deep conference. He makes good decisions, has a good arm, and is rather mobile. In spite of all this, he was abused in Ohio Stadium last year, but so was just about every quarterback that came to visit beautiful Columbus, Ohio. His numbers this year are very comparable to Troy Smith's, but frankly he has not faced any real competition (Montana, Iowa St., and Illinois).

Albert Young was a 1300 yard back last year for the Hawkeyes, averaging 5.4 yards per carry. This year his numbers are down against inferior competition, avering only 4.1 yards per carry against the likes of Montana, Iowa St., Syracuse, and Illinois. This is a direct statement about the offensive line. The Hawkeyes offensive line is paper thin and vulnerable.

Iowa's leading receivers are the running back, Albert Young, and the tight end, Scott Chandler. Iowa's wide receivers are horrible and it's rather peculiar that a team that has this much hype built around its quarterback has surrounded him with so little talent. Dominique Douglas, a freshman WR, leads the Hawkeyes with 14 receptions. None of the Hawkeye's other receivers are in double digits.

On the defensive side of the ball, the Hawkeyes appear vulnerable to the run. They gave up 120 yards to a putrid Illinois team and 170 to a very weak Iowa State team. They have done a decent job of defending the pass, but it is hard to gauge how zealously teams are throwing the ball when they are having success on the ground. This defense relies heavily on its front four to make plays and may be susceptible downfield if the front four is unable to achieve any pass rush.

The Match Ups:

Ohio State Offense vs. Iowa Defense: I look for the Hawkeyes to try to stop the Ohio State running game with seven in the box while playing a lot of "Nickel." The extra DB will be used to solidify the secondary in attempt to slow down Ted Ginn and Gonzo. Look for intermittent blitzes if Iowa is struggling and Ohio State is throwing short routes. Teams are looking at the Penn State game as the road map to slow Troy Smith. Hell, Penn State has been the only team to accomplish this feat, so it may not be a bad idea. The dilemma is that if the blitz is picked up, it will hurt Iowa very badly, but if they give Smith a lot of time, he will tear them apart.

Well ... that is Iowa's gameplan, at least my guess at it. Here is why it will fail. There is no way they will be able to consistently stop Antonio Pittman with seven. That just will not happen. Iowa's defensive line is the best part of their team, but it's not that good. The Iowa rush defense is a bit porous and would probably have difficulty stopping the run with eight in the box. I have a feeling we may get to test that theory in the third and fourth quarters.

Also, Brian Robiskie has emerged as a serious threat and it will not be possible to play

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meaningful defense on all three receivers and get any real pass rush. Smith is good enough and composed enough to find the open receiver and accurate enough to hit them. I really do not see this as much of a match up.

Ohio State Defense vs. Iowa Offense: Drew Tate is a good quarterback. In 2004 he shredded the Buckeyes secondary for 331 yards, but remember what I said, that was a different Iowa offense and a different Ohio State defense. Tate actually had receivers on that team that could catch the ball and everything! Now he finds himself on an island, forced to play the "dink and dunk" game with his running back and tight end.

The Iowa offensive line is vulnerable up the middle, just like the Cincinnati line that Quinn Pitcock absolutely ruined en route to a three sack game (with two others that were missed). Tate is fast enough to escape and run around, but not if the ends are providing any type of containment.

The Ohio State run defense looked very good against Penn State through three quarters last week, allowing just 65 yards in the first 45 minutes to a good back. The run defense is improving every week and maybe this will be the week that they finally break through and get some national respect. If the front seven can stop the run, this game will not even be close.

Don't be surprised if....

- 1.) Iowa is held to single digits (pre trash time).
- 2.) The Ohio State rush defense becomes the talk of the College Gameday wrap show.
- 3.) The Buckeyes have a double digit lead in the first quarter.
- 4.) The defensive line (Pitcock and Patterson specifically) has a monster game. (it is important to note that if defensive tackles are making any tackles, that is a monster game).
- 5.) Drew Tate is statistically unimpressive, he has NO ONE to throw to.

If I were a betting man ...

I was bailed out last week by a couple of late interceptions, but you know what, it is better to be on this side of the cover. I absolutely love the Buckeyes -6.5 in this one. I may have even taken them at -16.5. This game will be nowhere near as close as the pundits would have you believe. I am seriously starting to believe that there is a conspiracy in the media to try to make these games seem closer than they really are to improve ratings.

If you are hell bent on taking Iowa, I will give you one last piece of advice, look at how bad Iowa's schedule has been to this point. None of those teams has come close to preparing them for a good team and frankly, Iowa has not looked good in dispensing of their poor competition. The best team they have played to date is Iowa State, a team that they trailed 14-3 just before the half. That same Iowa State team was pounded one week later by the Texas team that Ohio

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State decisively beat in Austin. I hate to try to extrapolate too much from one game, but it is pretty clear that Iowa is struggling with mediocre teams at home and on the road.