

Preview: Ohio State - Michigan State

Written by {ga=furls}

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I don't know why this game makes me a little nervous, it just does. I can't stop thinking about 1998. In his game preview, Furls looks back at that contest eight years ago, and tells us if there are any parallels we should be afraid of. And as always, breaks down the matchups, makes his predictions, and tells us who is going to cover the spread.



As the final seconds slipped away, so did the Buckeyes national championship hopes. A silenced crowd and devastated players watched an undefeated season and a berth in the inaugural BCS championship game go up in smoke.

The stunned look on the faces of many Buckeyes players and the towel over Michael Wiley's head still loom fresh in my mind. So does the elation of the Michigan State players who were laying in the endzone and ripping out patches of the turf as mementos of a shocking upset. Who could blame them? They had just upset the best team in the country at home and while the Spartans left the field in triumph, Buckeyes fans were left to wonder how this had transpired.

In retrospect it is pretty obvious what had happened. The Buckeyes came into that game looking past the unranked Spartans; they were the best team in the country, and they knew it. This was a prevalent trait at Ohio State. While John Cooper did an exceptional job recruiting, he did a lousy job keeping his team focused for all eleven or twelve games in the season.

In an interview this week Michael Wiley said something that drives this point home clearly, when asked when he became worried about the looming upset (as the Buckeyes squandered a 15 point fourth quarter lead) he replied that he was never worried, even when the Spartans seized the lead. He felt confident that his offense would take the ball right down the field and score.

Flash forward eight years to today, October 14th 2006, what is the same? We have a number one Ohio State team that is the best team in the country and we have a talented, unranked Michigan State squad, these feels a bit like de ja vus, but it is not.

You have to look at what is different, because past performance is not indicative of future play. Nick Saban coached that Michigan State team; he was "pretty good." Currently John L. Smith coaches the Spartans, and during the tenure of the Smith the Spartans have been characterized by a fast start and then a horrific crash. After his recent antics, many are questioning the mental stability of Coach Smith.

Introducing the Michigan State Spartans, sponsored by Zoloft.

This team is every bit as schizophrenic as their head coach. Drew Stanton is blessed with great talent and potential, but he continues to defy the maturing and improving process, a trait not uncommon for the boys in green and white. Stanton continues to try to make "Favresque-style" mistakes with the game on the line, trying to make the impossible throw and win the football game single handedly. Apparently no one has ever told him that quarterbacks cannot win football games by themselves, Vince Young not withstanding, but they sure can lose them. He holds onto the ball too long, taking unnecessary sacks, and throws the ball into coverage. Mistakes that sophomore quarterbacks are expected to grow out of.

Standout running back, Javon Ringer, is out for the season. Stand out wide receiver, Matt Trannon, will not play this week either. That leaves the Spartans ummm, no one. Who is the second leading rusher on the team? Drew Stanton. Please tell me that John L. Smith has not put his hopes on his quarterback running the ball. Sparty still has Kerry Reed to throw the ball too, but Malcolm Jenkins will undoubtedly cover him. He should ask Limas Sweed how that worked out for him.

Defensively the Spartans are not very good either. Michigan did not put up huge numbers on them, but they did not have to. Stanton was nice enough to give them good field position. Illinois put up about 250 rushing yards on them and we all saw what Notre Dame did to Sparty in the second half.

The Match Ups:☐

Ohio State Offense vs. Michigan State Defense: This, again, is not really much of a match up. The Buckeyes should be able to pass and run on the Spartans at will. The MSU secondary is susceptible to speed and Ohio State has a lot of it.

Ohio State Defense vs. Michigan State Offense: Michigan State will be a one dimensional team in this game. The loss of Javon Ringer means that this team must rely on a big bruising 260lb running back, Jehuu Caulcrick, to carry the load. He is big, but he is slow. The backs that Ohio State has had trouble with this year are small and elusive, think Garret Wolfe. I do not anticipate that Sparty will be successful on the ground.

In the air, the Spartans really only have one home run threat available, Kerry Reed. He will draw the attention of the Buckeyes shut down corner Malcolm Jenkins. Should Stanton try to force it in there, well, he should ask Morelli how that worked out for him. Terry Love may be a better option for Sparty, but at 5-11 he is a bit undersized to match up with the big physical corners on the Buckeyes defense. I predict that this will be a long day for the Sparty offense, until the Buckeyes go into prevent (in the third quarter).

Don't Be Surprised if ...

- 1 John L. Smith actually starts slapping himself during the game.

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- 2 Sparty is held to single digits until trash time.
- 3 The Buckeyes jump out to a quick double digit lead.
- 4 The Defense forces Stanton into three turnovers. He will toss some ints, that is a given, but he holds onto the ball so long that I would not be surprised to see him fumble due to the blindside pressure of Vernon Gholston.
- 5 Chris Wells gets his first 100 yard game.

If I were a betting man....

I like the Buckeyes -14.5. Michigan State is not good and Drew Stanton makes that kind of mistakes that an opportunistic 2006 Buckeyes Defense cashes in on. I would stay away from the Over/Under. I have very little confidence in MSU moving the ball against the first team defense, but I am not sure how they will do against the second team. If I had to, I would say take the over. Ohio State 45-MSU 17.