In what has already been a very successful year for the Big Ten Conference, this year's tournament will be rivaled only by the tournaments for the ACC and the Big East crowns. This year's tournament features three ranked teams (Ohio State #7, Illinois #9, and Iowa #20), and although these teams have to be considered favorites, this year's tournament is could very easily fall into the hands of Michigan State or Wisconsin. It has been a long time since the Big Ten, rated #1 conference by the RPI, has been this deep. This depth promises to yield some very captivating games.

First Round:

Northwestern vs. Penn State: Look for Northwestern to attempt to grind the shot clock down to its very last millisecond on every possession in an attempt to beat the very same Penn State that handed them two losses during the regular season. In the end, Vedran Vukusic will be too much for Geary Claxton and the Nittany Lions to handle and Northwestern will advance to play Ohio State for the third time in a month. Look for a final score in the ball park of 65-60.

Michigan vs. Minnesota: My total disdain for both of these teams really prevents me from selecting a winner, so we will select the least terrible of two losers. This game forces me to select between the team that I hate most in the world and the basketball scheme that I hate most in the world. My disdain for the University of Michigan is nearly equaled by my hatred of the "lawyer ball" stylings of the Golden

Gophers. The Minnesota strategy? The longer we hold the ball and do nothing with it the fewer points our opponents can score. Well thankfully, I have a bathtub that needs recaulked and a winter's worth of dog crap to scoop up in the back yard during this one. Hell, maybe I can get my wife to take me with her to go pick out curtains or shoes. While I am hopefully otherwise engaged, I predict that Michigan will survive to be pounded another day 72-59.

Michigan State vs. Purdue: If I had told you at the beginning of the season that Spartie would not have a first round bye in the Big Ten Tournament and that the Buckeyes would be the #1 seed ... you would have laughed me off of this web page. Hell, I would have done the same. This Michigan State team, one year removed from a final four, is by far the most disappointing team in the Big Ten this year. That being said, they are still very dangerous in a single elimination format. Oh yeah, and Purdue sucks. Spartans by 437 points.

Second Round:

Ohio State vs. Northwestern: After playing down to the Wildcats twice this year and winning ugly, I expect to see the Buckeyes win convincingly in this one. Look for a well-rested Buckeyes team to take it to the Wildcats early and never look back. They should lead by double digits through most of the game and build some confidence going into the semifinals. Look for Dials to have a big day and continued strong play from Ron Lewis off the bench.

Wisconsin vs. Indiana: Ummm, if I am not mistaken someone forgot to tell the Hoosiers that they still have games left to play this year. Granted they have won their last four games, but they did not really beat anyone of significance prior to their little "hot streak" they looked absolutely miserable losing to Wisconsin on February 8th. During that stretch they lost seven of eight games and I look for Wisconsin to help them return to their old form.

Iowa vs. Michigan: These two teams met earlier this year and Iowa absolutely pounded Michigan on the Hawkeyes home court by nearly 30 points. As much as I would like to see that trend continue I am afraid it will not. Look for the Hawkeyes to beat the Wolverines by a mere 10-12 points. The combination of Brunner and Haluska is just to much for the Michigan, final score: 83-71.

Illinois vs. Michigan State: The Battle of the Underachievers. Both of these teams were final four teams from last year and only one of them will become a final four team in this years Big Ten Tournament. In the end, I suspect that the Spartans will ultimately fall to the Illini for the third time this season. Look for Illinois to step up their game and return to form, just in time for the big dance this year. This will be the coming out party for the real Illini. Illinois by 20ish, 80ish to 60ish.

Semi Finals:

Ohio State vs. Wisconsin: I despise the Badgers, but I have to give them credit they play good ball sometimes and I think that this will be one of those days. Look for the Badgers to take the Buckeyes deep into the game, but I expect that ultimately the Buckeyes will pull it out in a game that will be much closer than the final score (bolstered by free throws) will indicate. Final Score: 72-65. Look for a big game out of Alondo Tucker and Brian Butch, but ultimately the Bucks will have to many scorers.

Illinois vs. Iowa: Illinois is back and look for them to look big. They are just too athletic for Iowa and will win this one looking back.

Augustine and Brown will continue their improved tournament play and will use the Hawkeyes as a warm up for the Big Dance.

Finals:

Ohio State vs. Illinois: In a rematch of the decisive Buckeyes win in February look for the Illini to exact their revenge. Although I am an enormous Buckeyes homer, I expect to see the Illini win this game in a nail biter. In order to win this one, the Buckeyes must shoot the ball well from outside. The Buckeyes match up very well with Illini as OSU is one of the few teams in the country that can match their guard play, but unfortunately I just have one of those feelings about this one. Now go out there Bucks, get angry, and prove me wrong. Final score 71-67.

If I'm right, and the Buckeyes drop this game, it could essentially close the books on their hopes for a number one seed in the tournament. I personally hope they end up with a number two seed. I think it would be beneficial to them to be able to play without the huge bullseye that being a number one would paint on them.