The preseason USA Today Coaches Poll was released this weekend, and THE Ohio State Buckeyes came out on top. And that, says Mike Furlan, is exactly where they should be. Furls argues that the Buckeyes have the best offense in the nation, and a defense that will be better than most are expecting. In Part I of this three part series, Furls breaks down the Buckeye offense before turning his attention to the defense and the Buckeyes national championship aspirations in parts II and III.

The USA Today Coaches Poll has fired its first shot of the season and has scored a bullseye, tagging the Ohio State University Buckeyes as its preseason number one. The Buckeyes return what is probably the most dynamic offense in college football going into the 2006 season, yet they return only two starters from one of the nation's best defenses last season. I know. I know, you have heard all of this before, why bother writing another article about it? I'll tell you why, because Ohio State is the best team in the nation going into next season.

The offense is strong, there is no question about that. What most people outside of Columbus don't realize is how strong it is going to be. Everyone has heard the hype surrounding Smith and Ginn's Heisman campaigns, and most should know about Antonio Pittman. What is surprising is the rest of the offense that no one is talking about.

The Buckeye's return a veteran offensive line. Sure the loss of Mangold and Simms hurts, but it is not like they are being replaced with total scrubs. Word on the street is that former guard, Doug Datish will be moving to center, making room for T.J. Downing and Tim Schafer at the guard slots. Sophomore phenom, Alex Boone, should be a huge asset (6-7 325) for the

team on Smith's blindside at left tackle. Smith should have plenty of time to find his targets down field, not that he really needs it with his legs.

There is a lot of talk about Ohio State's Junior flanker, possibly the fastest player in the NCAA this year, Tedd Ginn, but lost in the shuffle is Junior wide receiver Anthony Gonzalez. Gonzalez does what Ginn does not, Gonzalez is not afraid to catch the ball over the middle on those dangerous slant and crossing routes, yet he is still a big threat on the outside. There are only a handful of Buckeyes with anywhere near the speed that Gonzalez possesses. I suspect that by the end of the season he will be widely recognized as Ohio State's real threat at wide receiver and I also think that this will be the year that Roy Hall, at a David Boston-like 6-3 240, is able to finally put it together as the teams "Z" receiver, a big body on the outside. Should he falter

What can you say about Ted Ginn Jr. that has not already been said? He is the homerun threat for the Buckeyes, every time he touches the ball there is a very real shot that it is going to go for 60 yards and a touchdown, unfortunately there is also a very real shot that he will drop the pass. Ginn's work should primarily be done on the outside on hitch routes, alternating on a short isolated hitch route, leaving him a corner to beat with a move and a safety to beat for the touchdown, and a "hitch and go" burning the cornerback deep or capitalizing on blown help from the safety who should have deep help. I sincerely hope that the Buckeyes stay away from the gimmick plays that became all to predictable last year in an attempt to get Ginn touches.

Now if those three on the outside don't present enough trouble, just picture it for a second. Troy Smith drops back, looks down the field, sees Ginn in over under coverage on the left, Gonzalez well covered on the right, Hall covered on the out, and a dump to Pittman is not a possibility because the strong side linebacker is cheating up on him, who does that leave? Marcel Frost. For the first time since Ricky Dudley, the Buckeyes have a viable threat at tight end. His development at the end of last season was phenomenal and his contribution to Smith's development cannot be overstated. A solid tight end is like a big old fluffy security blanket to a quarterback, especially on a team with wide receivers like Ohio State's. You know that no matter what, no team in the country is going to be able to give safety help to that linebacker stuck with the task of covering Frost. That means lots of big gains down the middle of the field, right in the seam of the Cover 2 defenses that most teams are going to be forced to play.

This offense has the capability to put up huge numbers against everyone one. What makes this offense better than USC's from last year? The fact that is exceptionally talented across the board and features a quarterback with exceptional arm-strength and an incredible set of wheels. The Buckeyes do not have a Reggie Bush, but their talent runs much deeper creating a bigger threat.

To Be Continued…. Next time the hard part, the Defense