It's payback time. Number one versus number two, and a rematch of last years thrilling contest that ended up essentially deciding the national championship. And the first regular season meeting between the two top ranked teams in the country in ten years. Furls chimes in this morning with an excellent preview of one of the most hyped college football games in many moons. GO BUCKS.

Well it's finally upon us.

The day that has been circled on our calendars since a disappointing defeat last year in Ohio Stadium. Our chance at redemption, the rematch in Austin. As if the hype for this game could get any greater, Texas moved up in the polls to number two, making this the first time that the number one and number two team in the country have met in the regular season since Florida State and Florida did so in 1996.

It is against this backdrop that we see our veteran offense and young defense move into the hostility of Darrell K. Royal Stadium, in Austin, Texas. They say that in the NFL home field advantage is worth three points. I say that in college football, the great venues like Royal Stadium or the Horseshoe can be worth ten. I was raised a Browns fan and I used to think that nothing could be louder than the old Dawg Pound during a game against the Steelers; I was mistaken. After last year's OSU vs. Texas game, I know different. Expecting anything less in Austin would be a mistake.

Introducing the Longhorns:

Unless you have been living in a cave, or perhaps Ann Arbor (where they still don't have internet or cable), you should know that the University of Texas will be featuring first year quarterback, Colt McCoy, and that they are returning a lot of starters from last year's national

championship team. Texas will probably be playing more of its option pass attack that we saw last year, but frankly, McCoy is not Vince Young and I do not expect the run option to be as pervasive as it was last year.

On the defensive side of the ball, the Longhorns were hurt badly by the NFL draft also. They lost Rodrique Wright, Michael Huff, and Cedric Griffin to Sunday football. While these losses will hurt the 'Horns, let's not kid ourselves, this is the University of Texas; they reload just like the Buckeyes. Expecting these slots to be filled with mediocre or "untalented" players would be foolish.

Toting the ball for the 'Horns will be Selvin Young and Jamaal Charles. Charles is a smaller, shifty back similar to Antonio Pittman, but is not quite as strong. Offering a change of pace will be Selvin Young who is a little bigger, 6'0" 210lbs, and has very good hands out of the backfield. Of course, the 'Horns will also be returning one of last year's heroes in the Horseshoe, WR Limas Sweed. Sweed, at 6'5" 220, is a huge target on the outside and has very good hands to compliment great leaping ability. He is very much like Michael Jenkins used to be for us on the outside.

The Buckeyes will be facing a veteran defense in Texas ... and while they are fast, I am not sure if they are going to be fast enough. Upfront, Texas features a smaller and faster front seven than we are used to seeing in the Big Ten. Their DE's weigh in at only about 260 pounds each, and their linebackers average about 220 pounds. This front seven is built around speed and their quickness should present some challenges to the Buckeyes veteran offensive line.

The Match Ups:

Ohio State Offense vs. Texas Defense: Clearly, the Buckeyes offense will be tested more this week than they were last week, but I'm not sure that the Longhorns will be able to keep up with Ginn on the outside or Gonzalez underneath. Additionally, I expect that the Texas defense will have to deal with another set of problems, if their front seven can get pressure on Smith, then they will be forced to deal with him as a running option. It will be very difficult to stop a running

quarterback with seven upfront, but bringing up the eighth will make them very susceptible to the deep ball.

The Ohio State offensive line is one of the best that they have put on the field since the 1996 team, but last week they did not do a great job of blowing open holes for the running game. However, they were facing eight and nine man fronts. I do not think that Texas will be able to put that many men up front, so I think the Buckeye's advantage on the line will be decisive and will allow Ohio State to do more on the offensive side of the ball than Mack Brown will like. This balance will allow the Buckeyes to run or throw.

Ohio State Defense vs. Texas Offense: The much maligned Buckeye's defense is better than their statistics from the Northern Illinois game would indicate. Most of the NIU yardage came off of big plays on the outside courtesy of an exceptional running back. These plays were generally run outside the tackles and the big gains were the direct result of the Buckeyes failing to get off of blocks and bad pursuit angles by the outside backers. All in all, if the Buckeyes new linebackers do not play better this weekend than this game will be a shootout.

The Buckeyes will need their front seven to play stout run defense and put the pressure on Colt McCoy to win the game. After seeing some of the Northern Texas game, I was impressed with McCoy, but I did think that he made a lot of foolish mistakes throwing into coverage. These are the types mistakes can be made against North Texas, but mistakes that will cost the 'Horns dearly against the Buckeyes. North Texas does not have anywhere near the speed that Ohio State does in the secondary and several of those throws would have been sure interceptions. In that regard, I think Texas selected a poor opening opponent for a young QB because he did not have to pay for any questionable throws, so he really did not get any "negative reinforcement." A coach telling you, while looking at film, that a throw was stupid is one thing; an interception returned for a touchdown is something very different.

Ultimately, this match up will be decided by the linebackers who will not only have to slow the Texas running game, but will also be asked to do many other things that we did not see against NIU. In that game the Buckeyes did very little blitzing, I would expect that the young Texas quarterback will not be as fortunate. Additionally, I think that Vernon Gholsten will provide some serious headaches for the 'Horns as a nine technique pass rusher on McCoy's blind side. That will be a key match up in this game.

Don't be surprised if…

1. Colt McCoy is baited into at least two interceptions by a very good Ohio State secondary.

2. Anthony Gonzalez has a bigger game than Ginn. Ginn will spend most of the game with "over under coverage" and that will make Gonzalez underneath across the middle a very attractive option.
3. The Buckeyes make a field goal. They are due.
4. Troy Smith has close to 100 yards rushing and 300 yards passing.
5. Troy Smith leaves this game as the hands-down Heisman Favorite.
6. The linebacker play is much better than last week. These Texas backs are good, but they do not have the deceptive quickness and speed that Garret Wolfe does.
7. The offense scores more touchdowns than A.J. Trapasso punts.

If I were a betting man:

Take the Buckeyes and the points. I think the linebacker play will be good enough this week to force the very poised, but still inexperienced, Texas quarterback to throw into a very dangerous secondary. I think that Malcolm Jenkins, with some help, will be enough to slow down Sweed, freeing Brandon Mitchell to support the run. McCoy is going to see a TON of pressure and will probably be forced/baited into a couple of mistakes.

I do not see how any team in the NCAA is going to be able to slow down this offense this year. Most teams will not be able to take away Ginn and Gonzalez at the same time, and if they try, then they will have to watch Smith run the ball down field for ten yards. I think this game will be surprisingly easy (not easy, just easier than most think). I like the Buckeyes by two TD's on the road, in spite of the fact that they have not been a great road team in the last couple of years. In the end, I do not think Austin at night will be any scarier than Ann Arbor by day.

Frankly, I do not have the adoration for Mack Brown that most in the national media do. Prior to Vince Young's stunning performances last season, he had a tough time winning big games. Now that Vince Young is no longer around to carry this team in crunch time, why

should we expect something different?