WOW ... what a weekend of college football. Texas, Auburn, and Cal all fall ... narrowing the field of potential title game teams by three. Furls is here to make sense of the chaos, and gives his complete and thorough breakdown of who is still alive, what they need to happen, and what will most likely happen. And Michigan still sucks.

Clearly the BCS system is not perfect. Hell, the BCS system still has some serious flaws, but like it or not, it is the system that we're stuck with.

It's obviously better than the old system, which did not guarantee that the two highest ranked teams in the country would face off. Anyone remember watching the New Year's Day bowls hoping that two teams would tie in the Toilet Bowl, so that your team could jump them both? I do and that sucked even worse then the ceaseless BCS bickering we now find ourselves immersed in.

The obvious solution is a playoff, but this would not end all of the problems; there would still be bickering, complaining, and conjecture. How many teams should play in the playoffs? Who should get automatic bids? When and where should the games be played? And so on. Well, I can tell you right now, we are a long way from getting any real playoff. The bowl committee fat cats are some of the most powerful people in the sport, and frankly, things are nice and "cushy" for them right now. It would take a string of "Auburnesque" snubbings to cause significant alteration to the BCS and the bowl system.

This year we, as college football fans, are stuck again with the typical debates, arguments, and discussions that we have every year. Who will get snubbed if we have three unbeatens? Which one loss team is the best? I thought it appropriate, against the backdrop of the biggest

game of the season, to try to make sense of where we stand right now. As we know, somehow, the college football season tends to sort itself out in a way that seems to justify the BCS (a little). So let's start sorting this thing out.

THE TEAMS

#1 Ohio State

Buckeyes win and they are in. If they lose a close one and get some help, they could still be in. They would probably fall behind a one loss SEC champ or a one loss USC team. If they are beaten decisively, they could fall behind a one loss Notre Dame team.

#2 Michigan

Wolverines win and they are in. If they drop a close one and get some help they could still be in. Michigan would probably fall behind a one loss SEC champ, a one loss USC team, but should not fall behind a one loss Notre Dame team. I expect that if they were skull stomped, this would also open the door for the rest of the rabble.

#3 Florida

We can only presume that Florida will move up to #3 following Louisville's loss. In order to make it to the national title game, they must win out, which includes winning the SEC championship game against a strong team from Arkansas. I like Arkansas to ruin the Gators chances.

#4 USC

USC is still alive thanks to a stumble from Texas, but USC must win out also and they still have a couple of tough games left to play. I think the chances of USC winning out are not very good; they do not match up well with California and I expect them to fall out of contention also.

#5 Notre Dame

They have no one left to play aside from USC. I don't think that Notre Dame will be able to beat USC because they do not match up well with them at all this year, but *should* they beat USC - what are their chances of playing the Big Ten winner in the national title game? Not very good, but they are better if Michigan wins big over Ohio State. Should Michigan lose the game, I cannot see any rational voter ranking Michigan ahead of Notre Dame. All Michigan did was nearly put half a hundred up on Notre Dame in a game that was not nearly as close the 47-21 score would lead you to believe. Notre Dame needs to win out, have Arkansas lose to LSU, and then defeat Florida.

#6 Arkansas

The Hogs still have a lot of work to do. They must beat a much improved LSU team and then win the SEC title game. The ‘Hogs need help too, they need all the teams ahead of them to drop another game. I actually think that this is not all that unlikely, but it would be kind of strange to see a team that started their season losing by 36 points at home to be playing for a national title. With that memory still lingering, I am not certain if Arkansas could jump a one loss Big Ten team.

#7 Rutgers

Well, they are going to be moving up the poll. The Big East has been exposed for what it is, but don't let that fool you into thinking that sportswriters will not reverse themselves again and say it is strong. Ultimately though, I don't think Rutgers has a Wolverines chance in Columbus of jumping a one loss Big Ten team.

#8 West Virginia

If there is one thing that sportswriters and members of the media like, it is to be right about a preseason prediction and the Mountaineers were a pretty "sexy" preseason national championship game pick. I picked them, but not because they are good. I picked them because the rest of the Big Least is so bad. Now, all that having been said, should West Virginia POUND Rutgers then I think you may actually hear some pretty loud rumbling from the Mountaineer bandwagon. West Virginia would need a decisive win over Rutgers (and the rest of their easy schedule), the Big Ten winner to be decisive, Arkansas to win the SEC championship after losing to LSU, USC to lose to Cal, and Notre Dame to lose to USC. It is a lot of crap, but it is possible.

#9 Wisconsin

Is it possible that the winner of the OSU vs. Michigan plays another Big Ten team for the Championship? Nope. Not really. Here is the list of help they would need: a decisive Michigan win, Florida to lose the SEC championship game, Cal to beat USC, USC to beat Notre Dame, LSU to beat Arkansas, and Rutgers to lose to West Virginia in a close game.

THE ANALYSIS

I don't think anyone outside of this nine really has a chance. So here is the part where the math geek in me takes over. I am going to make some predictions and try to come up with "percent chances" for each team. I will provide a way for you to do the same, so that way if you do not agree with my assumptions, you can change them, recalculate and come to your own conclusions.

Here are the remaining games and the chances I think for the outcomes shown as %'s:

1. **Ohio State vs. Michigan**
1. Ohio State wins decisively (14 points or more) 25%
2. Ohio State wins 50%
3. Michigan wins 20%
4. Michigan decisively 5%

1. **LSU vs. Arkansas**
1. Arkansas wins 65%
2. LSU wins 35%

1. **SEC championship game:**
1. Arkansas wins 70%
2. Florida wins 30%

1. **USC vs. Cal**
1. USC wins 50%
2. Cal wins 50%

1. **USC vs. Notre Dame**
1. USC wins 70%
2. Notre Dame wins 30%

1. **Rutgers vs. West Virginia**
1. Rutgers wins decisively 10%
2. Rutgers wins 40%
3. West Virginia wins 30%
4. West Virginia wins decisively 20%

Now with these assumptions, I can calculate the chance that each team moves on. Assuming that there are no major injuries or stumbles along the way, the way you calculate these probabilities is using a “Markov Chain,” assuming independence between all events, you multiply the chances of each required event together to achieve the probability that all the events will occur. An example would be, the chance of tossing 2 coins and getting heads 2X is the product of the two individual probabilities, in this case: .5 *. 5 = .25 or a 25% chance.

I will spare you the calculations and list the teams with my calculated probabilities:

1. Ohio State: 82.15% (75% they win, about 7% if they lose)
2. Michigan: 32.96% (25% they win, about 8% if they lose)
3. Florida: 30% (win SEC title and they are in)
4. USC: 24.5% (win out + SEC split)
5. Arkansas: 20% (needs to win out + USC loss along the way)
6. Notre Dame: 7.35% (needs to win out + SEC split)

The remaining 3.04% is split between the West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Rutgers, but their chances are statistically insignificant.

An interesting consequence of this is that under my assumptions (think of them what you will) I predict an Ohio State vs. Michigan rematch with about a 15% likelihood. Now, what this does not account for is the voter factor. Should the Ohio State vs. Michigan game be an instant classic there is a much higher probability of this rematch occurring due to voter bias.

Some may wonder why Michigan has a better chance to make it to the national championship game after a loss than the higher ranked Buckeyes. The answer is not what you think. In my rough model it has nothing to do with home field advantage, that is to subjective to quantify, it is because there is still the possibility given a slew of events that Notre Dame and Michigan could play in a rematch. In my model, Ohio State needs a Notre Dame loss to hurdle them.

Another interesting consequence is that it predicts the winner of the OSU vs. Michigan game to play the SEC champion with about 50% likelihood and gives USC about a 25% chance. Those are exactly the same numbers I would have forecasted at the water cooler.

I am not pretending that this analysis is the most in depth, or the most accurate. There are problems in assuming what a majority of people will believe or vote. I used the standard assumption that when a team, particularly in the case of Ohio State vs. Michigan, loses it will generally fall about 4-5 poll slots unless there is a good reason for them not to (e.g. it would be hard for Michigan to fall below Notre Dame).

Have fun and post your gripes with my system, assumptions, or forecasts here.