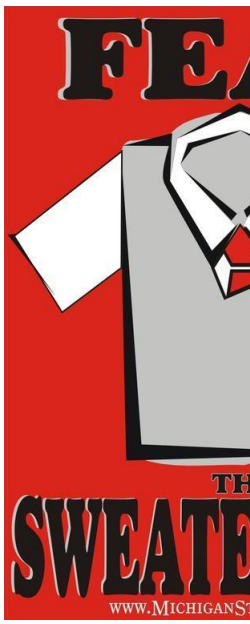
We roll along with Part IV of Furls five part technical analysis of the various matchups in Saturdays game. Today's installment takes a closer look at how the Buckeye WR's matchup with the Wolverine secondary. Has Jim Tressel been saving parts of his playbook? Can the Wolverine defensive backs deal with Troy, Gonzo, and Ginn? Furls provides the 411.



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Click Here for Part III - Ohio State Secondary vs. Michigan Wide Receivers

Ohio State Wide Receivers vs. Michigan's Secondary

The question in most minds lately is where has the Buckeyes fantastic passing game gone? The season started with big play after big play and as of late that has gone away. The Buckeyes seem to be dinking and dunking their way down the field. Optimists in Columbus are convinced that Tressel is hiding his play-book from Lloyd Carr; pessimists are convinced that we are reverting back to "Tressel Ball."

Where is the real answer? I think it is somewhere in between. Jim Tressel knows that teams like Northwestern, Illinois, Minnesota, and Indiana are only going to beat you if you give them the chance by taking needless risks and failing to execute. As a result, I think his play calling has gotten a bit hyperconservative; he does after all have the most efficient quarterback in the history of the Big Ten under center.

This conservative play call does also have the added benefit of not showing anything unique or particularly interesting or relevant to Lloyd Carr, but I don't think for one minute that Jim Tressel has a specialized play-book labeled, "Open Only Vs. Michigan." If any of the season's earlier games required a play he wanted to use against Michigan, there is no doubt in my mind that he would have used it.

Now that all that is said, how do the Buckeyes actually match up with the Michigan secondary? I would say VERY favorably. No one in the country can match up with the speed and skill of the combination of the Buckeyes receivers. Most teams in the country have one very good player in the secondary, Michigan has Leon Hall, but very few have more than that. Aside from Hall, Michigan's secondary is GARBAGE. It is by far the worst aspect of this team.

That does not bode well for a team that has three exceptional wide receivers (Gonzalez, Ginn, and Robiskie) and two developing wide receivers (Small and Hartline). Complicating matters, Ohio State is not afraid to put all five of these wide receivers on the field at the same time, and has a quarterback with the mobility to effectively run a spread offense even against a defensive front as formidable as Michigan's.

This year Tedd Ginn Jr. has really emerged as a wide receiver. In previous years he was not unlike Bullet Bob Hayes or James Jett, a track star masquerading as a football player. This year Ginn has obviously put a lot of emphasis on route running and making the difficult catch. The result is that Ginn has become a formidable force on short and intermediate routes in addition to being a deep threat. This multi dimensional aspect of his game has forced corners to play up closer to him and as a result these corners now require help over the top or they will get beat deep.

Anthony Gonzalez has become a complete wide receiver. It took most analysts half the season to come to the conclusion that I had reached before the season started, Anthony Gonzalez is the best receiver on this team. He runs terrific routes, possesses great speed, has terrific hands, and always makes the important catch. He is tough elusive and UNDERRATED. If Michigan sells out to slow Ginn, like Texas did, Gonzo will make them pay the price, like Texas did.

Brian Robiskie started this season on the two deep chart and I predicted that if Roy Hall got off to a slow start that he might lose his starting job. Well, Roy Hall was hurt early in the season forcing him to miss a few games, and he never got his starting job back. All Robiskie has done is become one of Troy Smith's preferred emergency outlets. When the play and the routes are breaking down, Smith looks to Gonzo and Robo to improvise and get open. They usually do.

Michigan has no defense for this down the field. If Smith can get the time to get the throw off, he will shred the Wolverines down the field, so for Michigan, this all comes down to stopping the Buckeye's passing game with a combination of containment and pressure from the front four. I predict they will get the pressure, but I am doubtful about the containment.

I look for the Wolverines to spend most of the game in nickel or dime. This of course will rely on the Buckeyes offensive formations, but I think coach Tressel is savvy enough to play Carr like an instrument and get Carr to put the personnel on the field that match up the best for Ohio State. The way I see it, the more DBs Tressel can force onto the field, the better off OSU will be. I expect to see, in good weather conditions, the Buckeyes using at least 3 receivers most of the day. If the Wolverines are getting good pressure up front, I expect the number of wideouts to grow.

The secondary is the Wolverines soft underbelly and this Buckeye's offense has the tools to exploit it. The Wolverines have not really faced a very good passing game, aside from Notre Dame, but they have looked vulnerable against Michigan St. and Ball State. Ohio State's offense is not even comparable to those schools, therefore, if Michigan fails to get pressure with their front four, this is going to be a LONG day in Ann Arbor.