Our cornocopia of Buckeyes coverage rambles on. In his latest, Furls does a complete and thorough breakdown of the numbers on the games involving the six common opponents Ohio State and Michigan faced this season. What he finds may surprise you.

Sports journalists love statistics. They will try to use numbers to compare players in various sports across eras, generations, and even sports. They will use numbers to try to compare Barry Bonds to Babe Ruth or even Michael Jordan to Tiger Woods, taking logical leaps and making questionable assumptions along the way, but they will miss the obvious and relevant numbers, such as performance against a wide array of common opponents.

It's always dangerous to compare the way that two teams fare against a common opponent. To put it in statistical terms, there is just not an adequate sample space, but as the number of games in common increases, the reliability of the numbers also increases.

This year the Buckeyes and Wolverines have six conference opponents in common and obviously, since both teams are undefeated, they were 12-0 against them. What is interesting to note is how some of the preconceived notions about the two teams seem to vanish.

Penn State

The Numbers:

Ohio State Margin: 22pts

Rushing yards allowed: 142

Passing yards allowed: 106

Rushing yards: 138

Passing yards: 115

Michigan Margin: 7pts

Rushing yards allowed: -14

Passing yards allowed: 200

Rushing yards: 116

Passing yards: 196

The story: Neither team was really able to really put away a scrappy Penn St. team. Penn State was in both games until in the fourth quarter, although they did struggle to move the ball against either team. The Nittany Lions couldn't run on Michigan or pass on Ohio State.

Iowa

The Numbers:

Ohio State Margin: 21pts

Rushing yards allowed: 87

Passing yards allowed: 249

Rushing yards: 214

Passing yards: 186

Michigan Margin: 14

Rushing yards allowed: 41

Passing yards allowed: 197

Rushing yards: 88

Passing yards: 203

The Story: The Buckeyes dominated Iowa and essentially entered trash time with a 28-10 lead following their first possession of the second half. This outcome of this game was never in doubt in spite of the night game atmosphere. Michigan, playing in the Big House, was unable to really get any breathing room against Iowa until Mike Hart punched a clinching touchdown into the endzone with 3:59 to go in the game.

Michigan State

Ohio State Margin: 31pts

Rushing yards allowed: 63

Passing yards allowed: 135

Rushing yards: 239

Passing yards: 182

Michigan Margin: 18

Rushing yards allowed: 60

Passing yards allowed: 252

Rushing yards: 211

Passing yards: 140

The Story: This game officially ended at halftime with the Buckeyes leading 24-0. After that they were forced to switch up their backfield and bring out the second team defense because of the Big Ten mercy rule. Ohio State won this one 38-7, but it could have been MUCH worse. Michigan was equally impressive in disposing of MSU, while the score may not show it, the game was never in doubt.

Indiana

Ohio State Margin: 41pts

Rushing yards allowed: 7

Passing yards allowed: 158

Rushing yards: 270

Passing yards: 270

Michigan Margin: 31pts

Rushing yards allowed: 26

Passing yards allowed: 105

Rushing yards: 208

Passing yards: 168

The Story: Both teams crushed Indiana, badly; neither game was in doubt. Indiana was unable to run or throw on either team and each team was pretty much able to assert its will on the Hoosiers, like usual.

Minnesota

Ohio State Margin: 44pts

Rushing yards allowed: 47

Passing yards allowed: 135

Rushing yards: 266

Passing yards: 218

Michigan Margin: 14pts

Rushing yards allowed: 108

Passing yards allowed: 215

Rushing yards: 234

Passing yards: 284

The Story: The Buckeyes nearly had two 100 yard rushers in the game and moved the ball at will against Minnesota. Minnesota was unable to muster 200 yards of offense against the Buckeyes and Brian Cupito only completed about 50% of his passes. Michigan struggled with the Gophers and did not really achieve a comfortable margin until they took a 28-7 lead with 5:27 remaining. Minnesota is the only team to break 100 yards rushing on the Wolverines, but the Wolverines were able to run up 500 yards of offense on the Gophers.

Northwestern

Ohio State Margin: 44pts

Rushing yards allowed: 68

Passing yards allowed: 229

Rushing yards: 231

Passing yards: 194

Michigan Margin: 14pts

Rushing yards allowed: -13

Passing yards allowed: 204

Rushing yards: 202

Passing yards: 116

The Story: Northwestern could not stop shooting itself in the foot early against the Buckeyes. The Wildcats turned the ball over three times in their first four possessions, leading to 21 quick points and a severe thrashing. It is hard to make any meaningful sense of the game after that point, Jim Tressel teams don't play the same after they get a big early lead. The Wildcats played the Wolverines very well, and were in the game until the end. They held the Wolverines to just over 300 yards of offense, at home. Chad Henne was exceptionally average.

The Conclusion

The Nittany Lions were the only team to play Ohio State tough, and of these common opponents they were the only team to slow down the Ohio State offense. Michigan found itself in some tough games with several opponents, including Penn St.

Probably the most surprising of these games was the Northwestern game, in which the Wildcats were able to essentially shutdown the Wolverines offense for substantial portions of the game. Wolverine fans will remind you that they did not have Mario Manningham during this game; I would remind Wolverines fans that the relative effect of Manningham's loss shows a shocking lack of depth and talent at the wide receiver position.

Total Rushing Yardage Allowed

Ohio State: 414 (69 y/g)

Michigan: 208 (35 y/g)

Total Passing Yardage Allowed

Ohio State: 1012 (168 y/g)

Michigan: 969 (162 y/g)

Total Rushing Yardage

Ohio State: 1358 (226 y/g)

Michigan: 1059 (177 y/g)

Total Passing Yardage:

Ohio State: 1165 (194 y/g)

Michigan: 1107 (185 y/g)

Avg. Margin of Victory:

Ohio State 34 ppg

Michigan 16 ppg

Defensive Averages:

Ohio State:

Rush Defense: 2.4 yards per attempt (414/170)

Pass Defense: 5.2 yards per attempt (1012/195)

Michigan:

Rush Defense: 1.5 yards per attempt (208/139)

Pass Defense: 4.6 yards per attempt (969/210)

Offensive Averages:

Ohio State:

Rush Offense: 5.4 yards per attempt (1358/252)

Pass Offense: 8.0 yards per attempt (1165/145)

Michigan:

Rush Offense: 4.2 yards per attempt (1059/251)

Pass Offense: 7.9 yards per attempt (1107/140)

The Big Picture:

Looking at the total numbers over the course of these six games several facts jump out. The media would have you believe that Michigan is the superior running team, but the stats do not necessarily reflect this. Over the six games Ohio State actually outgained Michigan by about 50 yards per game.

Recently Michigan's defense has been winning all the accolades and well they should, their front four has been phenomenal. Over this six game stretch, they have allowed a mere 1.5 yards per carry, that is a shockingly low number that I had to verify about ten times before I could believe it.

Almost equally as shocking is that Ohio State's much maligned run defense given up a mere 2.4 yards per carry. Granted that is not 1.5, but I will take an average of 2.4 yards per carry any day.

It is also interesting to note that Ohio State's vaunted passing game had nearly identical statistics to the Michigan passing game. Henne's completion percentage is considerably lower than Smith's which actually implies that Michigan averages more yards per completion.

Ultimately, I would be surprised if either team can run the ball on Saturday. Which should of course favor the big play passing offense.

Which is what team again?