This game has evolved into something greater than just a national championship between two teams, it is becoming symbolic of a battle between conferences. The best team from the supposed best conference in college football ... facing off against the team that has been #1 from day one. In his game preview, Furls looks at the Gators, looks at the game, and makes his predictions on what's going to happen. Here's a teaser: lay the points. GO BUCKS!!!

This game has evolved into something greater than just a national championship between two teams, it is becoming symbolic of a battle between conferences. For the last fifty days we have all been subjected to enormous volumes of baseless “master-gation” by the national media. This is the term that I have coined to describe the pumping up of the very same Florida Gators that were lambasted by the same media for its inability to put teams away and generate offense. All the master-gation (coupled with the “SEC Speed”) is blinding me (I guess my parents were right about that).

In the end, all this talk of “SEC Speed” is uniting fans across the Big Ten in pulling for the Buckeyes. Hell, I bet even the fans from that state up north will take some time off from their inbreeding and the worship of their heathen gods, to pull for the Bucks. Just to give those pompous SEC fans (and the national media) a big old shitburger to eat.

Ohio State’s inability to beat the SEC in bowl games is well documented. Coming into this game, the Buckeyes are 0-7 all time against SEC teams in bowls. Hell, Jim Tressel’s only bowl loss came to an SEC team, South Carolina in the 2002 Outback Bowl. That was then and this is now.

The stakes have never been higher. If the Buckeyes win they are the champions. If the win convincingly they could become one of the all time greatest champions. How many other teams have beat three different #2 teams in a single season? NONE. This team has worn the #1 ranking (bullseye) all season long and has taken every team’s (except Michigan State and Minnesota) best punch.

Should the Buckeyes win this game, Jim Tressel will cement his place among college football’s best coaches. Many coaches have won a single championship, far fewer have won a second. Furthermore, this win would go a long way toward propelling Tressel toward the pantheon of the all time greatest coaches alongside names like Bryant, Paterno, and Hayes. This win won’t get him there, but two titles in six years would be one hell of a start.

A win for Troy Smith would end all debates regarding who the greatest quarterback in the HISTORY of Ohio State is, and could potentially fuel more debates over the greatest player in the history of Ohio State.

The stakes are high for Urban Meyer as well. If he pulls off the upset he would be immediately elevated from the second tier of NCAA coaches and vaulted into the top tier with Jim Tressel and Pete Carroll and maybe, just maybe he would stay at this job for more than two years. I swear to god this guy reminds me of my brother in law who struggles to keep steady employment also.

And finally, after 51 days of waiting here we go…. INTRODUCING THE 2006 FLORIDA GATORS!

The national media has recently gone to great lengths to compare the 2006 Florida Gators to the 2002 Ohio State Buckeyes. This is an obvious attempt on the part of the media and other concerned parties to demonstrate, by example, that teams that win close games can still win championships.

The most obvious parallel between the two teams is that both teams featured second year head coaches that led their teams to a #2 ranking and a BCS championship berth. The remarkable aspect of this similarity is that both coaches were forced to run their second seasons with someone else's recruits and both coaches did masterful jobs of fitting their system to their players, not fitting their inherited players to their preferred systems.

In spite of those similarities, there are stunning differences. First and foremost is the play of the quarterbacks. The 2002 Buckeyes featured Craig Krenzel, a slower, ball control, mistake free game manager. The 2006 Gators feature Chris Leak, an athletic, big play, risk taker. It is like comparing Wade Boggs to Mark McGwire.

Additionally, the '02 Buckeyes had a traditional running game led by freshman phenom (and current inmate #317374), Maurice Clarett. Clarett rushed for 1,237 yards in 2002; that is nearly twice as many yards as Florida's leading rusher, DeShawn Wynn (630 yards on 124 carries). This is not to say that Florida Gators do not have a running game, they amassed over 2,000 yards this season, but it is far from a traditional running game. Urban Meyer has found more creative ways to run the ball, using deception and trickery along with some misdirection. As a result freshman quarterback Tim Tebow is the Gators second leading rusher and a wide receiver, Percy Harvin, is the third leading rusher. That is a far cry from the 2002 Buckeyes and the "Tressel Ball" that characterized that team.

On the defensive side of the ball, the Gators have all of the features that we have come to expect from an SEC defense (yes, according to the media they do have the mythical SEC speed). They are quick and athletic, but I do not share the popular opinion that only defenses in the SEC can be characterized this way.

Don't Be Surprised If….

Kirk Herbstreit says “SEC Speed” so many times that it must be expressed in scientific notation.

Brent Mussburger says, “I have seen this Buckeyes team, and folks, let me tell you, they can run with anyone.”

James Laurinaitis has two sacks and Vernon Gholston has two more.

Ohio State intercepts Leak three times.

You are wondering what Florida is doing in this game by halftime. (I wonder if it will be too late to book Michigan or USC to play the second half).

Ohio State comes out gunning, using the spread and firing on all cylinders.

Troy Smith throws three first half TDs.

Justin Zwick gets play-time (and a well deserved TD in trash time).

Florida doesn't even attempt a kick if given a reasonable alternative.

If I were a betting man…

I would take the Buckeyes –7.5 Hell, I think I would take them –17.5. I have not seen an opposing team slow Ohio State's offense, nor have I ever seen Jim Tressel struggle to game plan for an opponent. There is no doubt in my mind that he has solved the "SEC Speed" enigma and the Buckeyes will be ready to hoist the trophy by halftime.

I am not a big fan of the over under in this game, but I would take the over. The Buckeyes will score their points, probably 30-40 of them and that makes the over a pretty likely bet.

My score: In the end it will be the Buckeyes that are doing the mastergating.

Ohio State 38 Florida 14.