You asked for him, and you got him. Furls is back on the Buckeye beat for us, covering the team through what will hopefully be a magical title run. In his latest effort, he breaks down the Bucks big win over Purdue yesterday, led by a HERCULEAN effort from the big man, Greg Oden. Furls also looks ahead to the rubber match with Wisconsin today, set to tip off at 3:30 PM. Should be a great game ... and it's followed immediately by The Selection Show. God how I love March Madness ...

This just in, Greg Oden has a horrible metaphoric lower back strain. No, not really, but the way he is carrying this team it would not surprise me if he developed one.

The Buckeyes' miserable shooting continued through the semifinals of the Big Ten Conference Tournament, but if you just perused the box score, you might have missed that in large part due to the large man in the middle.

How impressive was Oden's performance yesterday? Well, his 19 rebounds set a conference tournament record and that was probably the second most impressive aspect of his game yesterday. Oden "only" carded four blocks, but now he is not only altering shots; he is altering the way entire teams are playing the Buckeyes. He is dominating defensively like only the best centers in basketball can, a la Russell or O'Neal.

I am aware that I recently asked where Ron Lewis has gone, apparently he decided to show me he was still alive and well by assailing the backboard and rim with sixteen shots (ten or so may have caused irreparable damage to the rim). While Lewis did contribute 13 points in a low scoring game, it took him 16 shots to do so. You don't have to be a statistician to see that this is not a great return, but the poor shooting was not limited to Ron Lewis.

As a whole, the Buckeyes shot a miserable 35.9% from the floor, and a Cavalieresque 62% from the line. If you remove Oden's 8-13 performance, the Buckeyes' FG% drops to a paltry 29%. The only way to win a game with shooting like that is with good defense and rebounding. If your opposition shoots better and out-rebounds you, they win. It is basic statistics. As hard as it is to believe, Purdue (36.4%) shot almost as poorly as Ohio State but still could have won that game with if the Boilermakers were not out rebounded decisively, 43-25. Hell, with his 19 rebounds, Greg Oden nearly out rebounded the Boilermakers.

The Boilermakers, as predicted, came out swinging and played hard. This should have surprised absolutely no one. If you look up bubble team in the dictionary, there is a picture of the Purdue Boilermakers, and a win in this game would have gone a long way toward propelling them into the tournament.

Purdue remained in this game much later than the Buckeye faithful would have liked, and it was not until Ron Lewis made a layup with 10:59 remaining, that the Buckeyes would take the lead for good. While the Lewis score was nice, it was hardly the turning point of the game. What actually turned a close game between two teams struggling to shoot into a comfortable win was the defense that followed. Over the next 8:30, the Buckeyes would hold Purdue to four points, ending the game and potentially ending the NCAA hopes for a Boilermakers team on the edge.

All this sets the table for the Buckeyes vs. Badgers, Part Trois. A total of four points decided the two games split by the teams in the regular season. Ohio State won the last meeting in a defensive struggle/brick fest 49-48, while Wisconsin won the previous meeting (handing Ohio State it last loss 16 games ago) 72-69.

It was during the 49-48 slugfest that Wisconsin big man Brian Butch dislocated and fractured his elbow likely ending his season and it is that injury above all things that probably gives Ohio State the edge in this contest. Butch is a tall rangy player that gives the Badgers another big man down low and would have created bigger problems for the Buckeyes than even

Alondo Tucker.

Don't get me wrong, I am not implying that Butch is better than Tucker, but generally, a guy like Tucker is going to get his points and winning or losing the game is decided by the role players. Aside from Oden, Ohio State's big men have struggled and have been rather ordinary and inconsistent. Butch forces Oden and other big men out to the perimeter because you have to respect his outside game.

Ultimately, Oden will be too much for the Butch-less Badgers and the Buckeyes will lock up their first #1 seed in the tournament in recent memory. Hopefully, the Buckeyes will shoot better from the outside, but I doubt it. This team, for all its hype, just does not shoot well from the perimeter and each game is further proof that this is not a slump; it is who they are.

Final Score: Ohio State 64 – Wisconsin 56.