Final Four bay-bee!!! Often in doubt, up at the nine count on two different occassions, the Buckeyes emerged from the South Regional yesterday with a gritty 92-76 win over Memphis in a game that saw the Buckeyes make 18 straight free throws down the stretch. Furls wraps the game, talks about the resurgence of Buckeye basketball, and looks ahead to the Final Four next week in his latest effort.

It is now official, Ohio State is unofficially in its first Final Four since 1999 and first official Final Four since 1968. Sound confusing? Well it sort of is. We all remember the Buckeyes last memorable run to the Final Four on the guard play of Scoonie Penn and Michael Redd, but as far as the NCAA is concerned that run never happened. Much like Michigan's memorable run in 1992, and UMass in 1996, those games have been stricken from the record.

The resurgence in the Buckeye basketball program is pretty shocking given the series of improbable events that were required to get here since the Jim O'Brien- Aleksandar Radojevic pay off scandal broke. Although he had not had particularly great seasons immediately prior to the story breaking, O'Brien was one of the most successful basketball coaches in Ohio State history. His loss sent shockwaves through Columbus, and the Ohio State program faced uncertain sanctions from the NCAA.

Andy Geiger acted quickly, too quickly according to one Columbus Superior Court Judge , and fired his good friend, O'Brien. Amazingly, Geiger was able to lure Matta from Xavier in spite of the undetermined sanctions that were sure to follow. Somehow Geiger, to his credit,

was able to sell Matta on the future of Ohio State hoops.

In addition to firing O'Brien, Ohio State enacted its own disciplinary actions on the program, penalizing players that were not even there during the payoff, in effort to preempt the actions that were sure to come from the NCAA. In spite of these proactive measures and the complete forthrightness of the Ohio State Athletic Department, the NCAA still took nearly a year and a half to ultimately determine that Ohio State's self-imposed sanctions were severe enough.

I know this was an interesting walk down a dark alley near memory lane, but what does it really have to do with this Final Four berth? Well, somehow, in spite of the uncertainty caused by the unresolved NCAA issues, Matta was able to hold on to his prized 2006 recruiting class, the "Thad Five." Remember, it is not like these guys did not have other offers; Duke, UNC, Wake Forest, and Indiana are some of the schools that were offering to the guys at the same time. It is shocking to me, more shocking than the rally against Tennessee Thursday night, that not one of these recruits wavered.

In light of these facts and the ending of their most recent games, the Ohio State victory over Memphis was a bit of an anticlimax. Memphis was clearly outmatched at nearly every position on the floor for the entire game. As a matter of fact, in my preview I said that Memphis was playing to validate its entire season, with that game yesterday, they proved what most were thinking; their 25 game win streak was more the result of a cupcake schedule than superior play. In short, if Jeremy Hunt was not burying 27' jumpers this game would have been over shortly after the opening tip.

Chris Douglas-Roberts, Memphis' leading scorer, was largely ineffective anywhere, and the only guy on their team that I thought would get significant minutes in a scarlet and grey uniform was sophomore forward Robert Dozier. Dozier played very well in a losing effort; scoring nine points, coming down with eleven rebounds, and playing some pretty disruptive defense.

Big-man Joey “Goliath” Dorsey learned a valuable life lesson, keep your mouth shut. Dorsey provided the Buckeyes all the locker room inspiration they needed. When asked how Dorsey’s comments, calling out Oden, affected Oden, Ohio State freshman point guard Mike Conley replied that they did not affect Oden, they affected the whole team. In short, the entire team took it personally and it was evident by the way they attacked Dorsey, getting him in foul trouble early and keeping him there all day.

Dorsey was completely and totally outplayed by Oden. He actually scored 0 (yes, ZERO) points and collected more fouls than rebounds. His three rebounds were far short of his own prediction of 20 and he was posterized by Oden on several occasions and seemed to be unable to affect his shots in anyway when they were matched up one on one. Based on his pre-game comments and predictions, I think Mr. Dorsey might be a prime candidate for urinalysis; I have no idea what he has been smoking, but it must be pretty good (and illegal).

Ron Lewis continued his impressive run through the NCAA tournament/audition for the NBA draft, logging another 20+ point game (scoring 22). Lewis showed range, basketball smarts, and his ability to get to the rim. He has shown that he is not afraid to take the big shot and that he has an affinity for making it. This is the senior leadership that the Buckeyes needed, while guys like Dick Vitale wondered aloud if they had it.

Mike Conley has been absolutely devastating and undefendable. It is like he has had a moment of self-actualization, where he realized that no one can defend his first step. He has taken everyone he has faced during this tournament to the hoop at will. His tournament performance has been so impressive that he may have actually played himself into the first round of the NBA draft this year if he decided to pursue a pro career this year. He does not have great range, but he has all the intangibles and skills that teams are looking for in pass first point guards. I cannot help but wonder what he would look like in a Cav’s uniform; he is already the best point guard in Ohio at any level.

How about the sudden emergence of St. Joe’s phenom, David Lighty? All of a sudden he is “Johnny on the Spot,” grabbing every important loose ball and coincidentally being at the right place at the right time. His numbers do not do his performance justice, but in the last two games, at times when his team needed him most, Lighty has been there to make the play. I am certain, that at least Lighty and Cook will be back in Columbus next year and that is a

pretty good foundation to build a team around.

…and finally, how about those free throws down the stretch. I know that it has been pointed out ad nauseum by ESPN that Ohio State made 18 of 18 free throws down the stretch, but how about the fact that during that stretch, Ohio State's freshmen were 10-10 from the line. Talk about having ice water in their veins. These are the kinds of immeasurables that speak volumes about the composure of these young men. You get the feeling that they have been here before, although they never have.

So now, it is time to look ahead. Ohio State's opponent in the National Semifinal will be decided today. Frankly, I think they match up better with Georgetown's slower pace of play, but I would prefer to see the team get another shot at UNC, this time with a big man to put on Tyler Hansbrough. UNC's run and gun offense and up and down the floor play will put obvious pressure on Greg Oden and Ohio State's bench, but the game that these two teams played in November is among the finest I have ever seen. I am looking forward to seeing it again.