And then there were two. Ohio State - Florida for the national championship. Sound familiar? In this superb wrapup of yesterday's exhilirating 67-60 win over Georgetown in the national semifinals ... Furls eats a little crow, recaps the game, and heaps praise on Buckeye point guard Mike Conley Jr. Furls also talks about where the Hoyas went wrong in this one, and how Thad exposed 'em with a brilliant gameplan. Furls preview of the title game posts tomorrow. GO BUCKS!

As far as I am concerned, Archie can take my alumni card, set it ablaze, and shove it, still smoldering, squarely betwixt my buttocks, delivering it to the land where the sun seldom shines. I deserve nothing less than that. I underestimated my team and they over-delivered. I neglected one of the cardinal rules of the NCAA tournament, guard play dominates all, and it was Mike Conley that took over this game. Georgetown had no answer for him, but we will get to that soon enough. I have never been so delighted to eat crow! It is actually quite tasty with some fava beans.

First of all, I think someone forgot to tell Jeff Green that there was a basketball game occurring tonight, either that or he was not interested in participating. In any case, David Lighty and Othello Hunter were huge on the defensive side. All night long the CBS broadcasters were puzzled by Green's non-relevance, but if you watched the game closely you would have seen that Hunter and Lighty defended him exceptionally well. My apologies to both Mr. Hunter and Mr. Lighty, for in my preview I did not think the Buckeyes hand anyone that could slow Green, let alone render him to a non-factor, yet both of these young men did exactly that.

Now, we all heard the hype about the mythical match up between Oden and Hibbert, and

man, was I looking forward to it, but the officials destroyed any hope of intrigue with their quick draw whistles. Although Hibbert did outscore Oden, the match up was basically a stalemate. When Oden was in the game with Hibbert, Oden was clearly the better player, but Oden did not dominate as clearly as Hibbert did when his counterpart was out of the game. To make a long sentence short, Oden outplayed Hibbert when both were on the floor, but Hibbert did a better job of taking advantage of mismatches when Oden was off the floor.

Anyone who was wondering if Mike Conley could play in the NBA, or was "ready," should have had their questions answered yesterday. Conley is not only ready, he is **the best player on Ohio State's roster**
. His control of the game and basketball IQ remind me of, get ready for this, Steve Nash. Yep, I just compared Mike Conley to a two time NBA MVP. Conley, like Nash, owns the dribble. The ball responds to his every whim, like he has it on a string. He creates scoring opportunities, not only for himself, off the dribble like Nash, and can score with either hand like Nash. The 3-pointer is not necessarily part of Nash's game, nor Conley's, but both will use it if you leave them alone and disrespect their shot. Furthermore, the two of them have insanely quick hands to match their first steps. If their mark gets sloppy, or tosses the lazy pass, Conley and Nash make them pay, every time! Conley is more ready for the NBA than most think. Hell, he is more ready for the NBA than Oden.

Now that I am done editorializing, one page later, let's get to the game…

Ohio State stole a page right out of Old Furl's play-book by taking it right at Hibbert. I counted no less than five or six drives that were designed to take the ball directly into Roy Hibbert's chest; veteran's Ron Lewis and Ivan Harris were particularly active in this effort. Finally, at the 6:48 mark, Ron Lewis was able to put Hibbert on the bench for the remainder of the first half by attacking him with an extra dribble in a clear effort to draw the contact. In retrospect, I wonder if the officials enjoyed the fact that they were in fact the most important people on the floor, that both teams were actively game-planning for them. I cannot believe that the NCAA really wants to nullify its marquis matches with its officials, but big men have been unfairly officiated in the NCAA for as long as I can remember and it is not bound to stop any time soon. Have you ever wondered why guards dominate tournament play? Well, the fact that even the best big men spend most of the time on the bench in foul trouble has got to be a huge part of the reason.

The Buckeyes were able to plant Hibbert on the bench in foul trouble again early in the second half. Following an Oden miss underneath, Oden maintained inside position on Hibbert, forcing him out. This allowed Harris to collect the rebound and take the shot. Through the duration of this exchange, Oden continued to keep a body on Hibbert, forcing Hibbert out of the play. If Oden does not keep Hibbert out, he easily stuffs Harris like a Thanksgiving turkey, but since Hibbert was so far outside of the play he was only able to slap Harris in the face, drawing his third foul. Hibbert was forced to the bench with 15:56 left in the game and with Hibbert out, Ohio State would go on to rip off a 9-2 run, forcing John Thompson to get Hibbert back on to the floor just four minutes later at the 12:10 mark with the Buckeyes now leading 42-36.

Oden drew his third foul just twenty seconds later, clearly fouling Hibbert on an easy lay up. These are the fouls that Oden has to learn how to avoid. While you can appreciate his defensive vigor, contesting every shot in the paint, this situation was completely hopeless; Hibbert had him so low on the block that there was nothing he could do about it, and he should have just watched the ball go in. Oden would be forced to sit, but it would only be a brief respite, for he would return two minutes later with the game tied at 44.

Hibbert would draw his fourth foul in short order once Oden returned, and Oden drew his fourth with 2:39 remaining in the game. Surprisingly, neither player fouled out, but that obviously does not diminish the effect that officials had on the game. Drawing fouls on the oppositions big man was not just a strategy to win the game, it was the strategy. The real difference in the game was not what Ohio State was able to do with Oden on the court, it was what Ohio State was able to do with Oden off the court.

The Buckeyes were able to capitalize quickly and efficiently off of Georgetown's turnovers and the Buckeye's guard's ability to get to the rim was not matched by Georgetown. So when the big men were off the court, the Buckeyes were able to adapt, the Hoyas were not.

For the better part of a week, I, like you, have been subjected the national media's rave

reviews of Georgetown's defense. Many called the Hoya defense, "Underrated," but what about the Buckeyes? They gave up a mere 62.6 ppg during the regular season, and they have only allowed 69 ppg during the tournament. 69 ppg is not particular impressive under normal circumstances, but many announcers, Jim Nantz included, wondered aloud if the Buckeyes would be able to keep pace with the high powered offenses in the South Region. It is pretty clear, that Ohio State can defend just about anyone.

In my preview, I stated that Georgetown runs a version of the Princeton offense. While this is true, I said that they ran it well. I guess that part of my preview was not accurate. The one thing that you cannot afford to do in that offense is hold the ball and throw lazy passes; the Hoyas did both. At no point did we see any of the crisp high post passing that was going to paralyze the Buckeye's 2-3 zone and open up backdoor layups. As a matter of fact, the Hoyas' passes and sets looked like something out of Mike Brown's playbook, and the Hoya's motion offense appeared as stationary as Amon Jones (he plays no D so he will not get one in his name here).

The Buckeyes did a good job attacking the Hoyas inside. Ohio State only attempted 14 threes for the game, making four, choosing instead to take the ball inside for higher percentage shots. As a result the Buckeyes shot, 44% for the game against a team that held all of their opponents in the tournament below 40%, and Ohio State was able to get to the line more than twice as often as Georgetown, but surprisingly they still only had 19 attempts, six of which came with less than 30 seconds in the game.

That just shows one of the problems with college basketballs biggest stages, officials blow the whistle differently against the big men. I saw several plays that were nothing short of battery (on both sides), the felonious assault committed on Ivan Harris in the key with 7:18 remaining in the first half immediately comes to mind, yet these fouls remained uncalled. If it had been Oden or Hibbert they may have been awarded three personal fouls in a similar exchange. I guess that is just the way things are in the NCAA tournament; it was this way for Shaq, it is this way for Hibbert and Oden, and it will be this way for next years versions of the same. What a shame.