Ohio State and Texas started playing football in the 19th Century, but they would not meet on the field until the 21st Century. It took 112 years to schedule the incredible home and home sequence that saw Vince Young lead the Longhorns to a road victory in Columbus on his way to a national title and Troy Smith lead his Buckeyes to a victory in Austin on his way to a Heisman Trophy; fortunately we only had to wait two years for the rubber match. Furls gives us his thoughts on tonight's epic showdown in Glendale, AZ.

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Much has changed in those two years. In 2006 Jim Tressel sat in the seat of honor among major college football programs. Tressel was widely revered as an exceptional big game coach, a terrific game manager, and a serious contender to relieve the floundering Romeo Crennel of his duties in Cleveland.

Two national title defeats later, Jim Tressel and his underachieving Buckeyes are the butt of jokes throughout the national media.

Oh how the times and perceptions have a changed, although Tressel has not.

When last we saw young Colt McCoy he was the likeable "aw shucks" kid that was

getting pasted by the Buckeyes linebackers and ends. He seemed a bit overwhelmed and he probably was, but based on McCoy's performance this year; it is pretty clear that the young man has settled in just fine.

McCoy, this year's Heisman runner up, has better numbers than Smith put up in that 2006 Heisman winning campaign. He has been historically good this year and stands on the threshold of breaking the all time record for completion percentage, currently held by Daunte Culpepper from his days at UCF (74%), with a jaw dropping 78% completion percentage resulting in 3,450 yards and 32 TD passes.

For Ohio State this game is about redemption and for its seniors, this game is about their legacy at Ohio State. During the tenure of James Laurinaitis, Malcolm Jenkins, and Alex Boone the Buckeyes have won at least a share of the Big Ten Title and competed in a BCS Bowl every year. Additionally, they are also 4-0 against Michigan, but all the talk is about their inability to win the big games, particularly at the end of the season.
Think about that for a second, these seniors have beat Michigan all four times they have played them, they have won at least a share of the Big Ten Title every year, and they have made it to two National Championship Games, and they could be remembered as failures?

Each of the aforementioned seniors will have pivotal battles that will shape the outcome of this game, in a sense, they will literally control their own legacies. Boone will match up against the best pass rushing DE in the nation, Jenkins will have to come up huge in the secondary, and Laurinaitis will have to anchor the defense if the Buckeyes are going to have a chance.

Boone's four years at Ohio State have been characterized by high expectations and erratic play.

Boone was a "can't miss" tackle prospect and saw significant play time as a freshman.

He looked so good early on that he was drawing early comparisons to Orlando Pace, but he never quite made it there.

He has struggled with speed rushers and at times it has appeared that he has not been fully engaged in games.

Boone has drawn a tough assignment in Texas defensive end Brian Orakpo.

If the Buckeyes are going to have a chance in this game, they are going to have to use a balanced offensive attack. Ohio State is not going to be able to ram the ball down Texas' throat from the Power I. They are going to have to vary their playcalling and get Terrelle Pryor the time to get the ball downfield and underneath.

Boone's match up with Orakpo is going to be pivotal in establishing any kind of passing game.

Orakpo is everything that the pundits have said that Boone cannot block, he is exceptionally quick and is relentless. The single most impressive part of Orakpo's game is not his exceptional speed or his underrated power, it is his motor; the guy just does not quit.

I saw numerous clips of the Orakpo getting stood up on an outside rush, only to turn it in.

Sometimes he would make the play, sometimes he never had a chance at the play but he always trying to get involved.

Malcolm Jenkins' impact is going to be very simiar to Alex Boone's in that as long as both players are getting the job done no one will notice; we will only be able to tell when they fail. Je nkins' true value in this game is that he is a force mulitiplier if the defensive coordinators choose to take advantage of it.

Jenkins, this year's Thorpe Award recipient (given to the best defensive back in the country), offers the Buckeye coaching staff the option of leaving him alone on an island to attack with pressure or supplement coverage. Against a highly effective and accurate passer like McCoy putting a guy like Jenkins on the field is essentially like having an extra half a player on the field since he frees the safety of some of his coverage responsibility.

Texas does not have the singular super elite receiver that demands double coverage, so the Buckeyes coaching staff should be able to use Jenkins to vary the coverage and present some different looks for the Horns.

Laurinaitis' swan song is probably going to be the most visible of the three. With Texas' dink and dunk spread system, Laurinaitis and his zone coverage skills are going to be exceptionally important. Addition ally, McCoy is the Horns' leading rusher so Laurinaitis will need to keep his head on a swivel to prevent McCoy from extending drives with his legs.

My Biggest Fears:

Predictability: I was able to successfully predict about half of Ohio State's offensive plays this year based on formation, down, and distance. This year, like last year, the Buckeyes fell into a predictable rut of offensive play calling.

If the Buckeyes are going to win this game, they are going to have to run from passing formations and pass from running formations.

I am not asking for sets with trick plays and two quarterbacks on the field at the same time, I am calling for playaction passes on third and short.

I am calling for a commitment to a passing game on first down.

The Buckeyes don't need to run a bunch of reverses to be successful, just keep the Texas defense honest.

Rust: I will not try to make excuses for the Buckeyes last two bowl melt downs, but I will say that the team looked a bit out of sorts in both games and you can't help but think that a month and a half off might have something to do with it. This year rumors abound that the Buckeyes are playing a lot more 1's vs. 1's than usual along with a lot more hitting.

These rumors are substantiated by the noticeable welts and bruises on the players' foreheads from their helmets.

The Buckeyes cannot afford to come out rusty and fall behind because they do not play the type of offensive that is conducive to coming back from a double digit deficit.

Inability to adapt: In both the 2006 and 2007 National Championship games, it was pretty apparent early that the Buckeyes were not prepared for the game that Florida and LSU were taking to them, yet the Buckeyes were unable to make a significant adjustment in either game.

It never really felt like there was a Plan B; it seemed as if the Buckeyes coaches were confident that their teams could dictate the play of both games.

The Buckeyes are going to have to continuously adjust and vary their coverage if they are going to keep this game within reach; the Buckeyes have the athletes to play, the question is will they have the scheme to succeed.

How it Plays Out: Bucks on Offense

The Longhorns are going to stack the box and stop the run. End of story. The Buckeyes do not have the offensive line to beat 8 or 9 in the box to allow Beanie to take it up the gut.

I am not sold on Texas defense, but at the same time, they are good enough to beat a one dimensional Ohio State team; that is why the Buckeyes cannot afford to be one dimensional.

The only way the Buckeyes move the ball is if they are committed to running a varied offense, if Pryor only throws 14 times then I don't like our chances, but it isn't just about throwing the ball more, it is about when the Buckeyes throw it.

Running the ball on 1st and 2nd down and then throwing on 3rd and long will result in another ugly bowl loss.

I have very little confidence in the staff making meaningful changes to the identity of this team. The definition of idiocy is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results, and I refuse to succumb to the idiocy of thinking that we will see significant differences in play calling.

How it Plays Out: Bucks on Defense

The Buckeyes have got to get off the field on third down. Colt McCoy and Texas play a ball control passing attack similar to that employed by the Philadelphia Eagles.

The Horns will be glad to take the 5-7 yard underneath stuff that Ohio State is going to be giving up.

The Buckeyes are going to have the Colts in 3rd and three all day long, how they handle it will shape this game.

If the Buckeyes allow McCoy to scramble and pick those up, like he has all year, well it is going

to feel an awful lot like the 2006 National Championship game.

The Buckeyes are going to have to press up on the receivers and take away the inside routes on third down. The tackles cannot allow themselves to run up the field and open up those middle running lanes and the ends have got to keep McCoy inside the tackles.
Texas has not played an defense as good as Ohio State's yet.

Marcus Freeman and Jermale Hines have the speed to keep those receivers in front of them, and I think the Silver Bullets should be able to do enough to give the Buckeyes a shot.

Common sense tells me that I have to take the Horn's experienced quarterback and varied offensive attack over the Buckeyes predictable offense. The Big XII defenses have proven to be a bit suspect during the bowl season, but even the most suspect defense looks better when they know what is coming.

In the end, I think the Buckeyes defense does enough to keep them in the game, but there just is not enough offense to get it done. Horns win 23-17. Go Bucks, prove me wrong!