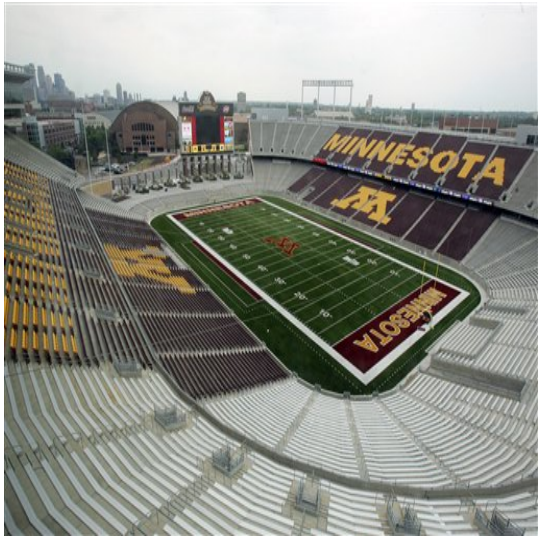

There were very few tricks in Ohio State's 52-10 Halloween Eve thrashing of Minnesota at TCF Bank Stadium. But as expected, there were plenty of treats gathered at the expense of the overmatched Gophers, who have had more head coaches (two) than wins (one) this season. Scoring touchdowns on offense, defense and special teams the Buckeyes were never seriously threatened in winning their second consecutive game by a combined score of 101-10.

Setting the Tone: It took the Buckeyes roughly five-and-a-half minutes to get going offensively. After Jordan Hall returned the opening kickoff 34 yards to the Minnesota 46, Ohio State covered the remaining ground in eleven plays, scoring the game's first touchdown on Terrelle Pryor's one-yard sneak.

Gopher Gumption: A bright spot for an otherwise dismal Minnesota team is senior quarterback Adam Weber. A four-year starter, Weber has thrown for more than 10,000 yards in his career and the 6'3" slinger from Shoreview, Minnesota used his precise right arm to level the score at 7-7 midway through the first period. Completing his first two passes for gains of 35 and 32 yards, Weber led a quick drive that culminated in DeLeon Eskridge's seven-yard touchdown burst. That would prove to be the high-water mark for the Gophers.

Rapid Response Team: Ohio State's riposte to the Minnesota score was a 13-play, 92-yard touchdown drive of its own. The main men were Pryor, who completed all five of his pass

attempts and broke off a 34-yard scramble, and Dan Herron, who carried seven times for 48 yards. Pryor finished the seven-plus-minute march with a three-yard touchdown strike to Brandon Saine, who collected his fifth scoring reception of the day. With time almost gone in the first quarter it was now 14-7, Ohio State- and the rout was on.

Special Sequence: Special teams have been a bugaboo for the Buckeyes all season long, starting in the opening-night thrashing of Marshall in which the Herd's only touchdown came off a blocked field-goal attempt. On Saturday night the specialty units were again decisive- but this time in favor of Ohio State, particularly in the second quarter when the Buckeyes blew the game wide open. The key sequence of the evening started early in the period when Minnesota kicker Eric Ellestad missed a 35-yard field goal that would have made the score 14-10. Ohio State responded with a 74-yard drive ending in Devin Barclay's 23-yard chip shot, and the Buckeyes led 17-7.

Minnesota's next possession went three-and-out, setting up the highlight play of the game. Dan Orseske's punt was fielded by Jordan Hall near the sideline at his own 28-yard line. Surrounded by three Minnesota defenders, the little sophomore somehow squirted away and picked up blockers as he went cross-field to the far sideline. Hall got all the way to the Minnesota two-yard line before being knocked out of bounds. It was the biggest play of a big night for Jordan Hall, who scored a touchdown and compiled a total of 137 yards running, receiving and returning.

That particular thrust ended when Pryor telegraphed a pass to Zach Boren and was picked off in the end zone. But after Minnesota was forced to punt again the Buckeyes took over at their own 38-yard line and this time found pay-dirt. Once again Boom Herron was the main of the moment, carrying five times for 61 yards and finishing the march with a ten-yard touchdown run, his twelfth of the season. It was now 24-7 with less than two minutes remaining in the half.

Ohio State got another chance to score at the end of the half, courtesy of Minnesota's punter. Orseske's horrific ten-yard shank set up the Buckeyes at the Minnesota 47-yard line with 36 seconds left. Pryor promptly hit Dane Sanzenbacher for nine yards and DeVier Posey for 38 and a touchdown, making it 31-7 at halftime.

Ohio State's first touchdown of the second half also came as a result of a play in the punting game. Thanks to a poor snap the Buckeyes were all over Orseske, with Jonathan Newsome getting the block practically off the punter's foot. Zack Domicone covered the ball in the end zone to make it 38-10 in favor of the Scarlet-and-Grey.

Pressure Bursts a Pipe: Ohio State's defensive line has been a bit of a disappointment this season in terms of getting to the quarterback. But the Buckeyes were all over Adam Weber on Saturday night, particularly in the second half. After opening the stanza with a 44-yard drive to a field goal that made it 31-10, Minnesota's next four possessions resulted in minus-eleven yards, two lost fumbles and a blocked punt. Weber was sacked three times during this sequence, losing both fumbles in the process. The second bobble early in the fourth quarter was picked up and carried thirty yards for a touchdown by John Simon to close out the scoring.

Stars abounded for Ohio State's defense on this night. After leaving the game briefly with an injury, Brian Rolle came back and accounted for two sacks, one of which forced a fumble which he recovered. Nathan Williams was his usual active self, Cam Heyward played one of his most disruptive games of the season, John Simon had the aforementioned fumble return for a touchdown and Chimdi Chekwa collected an interception, a sack and a forced fumble. Adam Weber was sacked five times on the night and pressured repeatedly, especially after intermission. The Gophers were held to 232 total yards for the game.

Offensive Showcase: The Buckeye offense was equally effective, racking up 507 total yards. Other than his goal-line interception Terrelle Pryor was sharp, completing 18-of-22 for 222 yards and two touchdowns and adding 55 yards and a touchdown on the ground. Dan Herron picked up 114 yards on 17 carries, all in the first half, and scored a touchdown. DeVier Posey had his second consecutive quality outing with six catches for 115 yards and his fifth touchdown of the season. The Buckeyes only punted once on Saturday.

Conference Round-Up: Thanks in large part to events in Iowa City, Ohio State's Big Ten title hoops got a healthy boost this weekend. Iowa's 37-6 shellacking of Michigan State threw the conference into a four-way tie for first in the loss column between the Hawkeye, Spartans, Buckeyes and Wisconsin Badgers. Michigan State owns the head-to-head over Wisconsin, which owns the head-to-head over Ohio State and Iowa, which owns the head-to-head over Michigan State; the Hawkeyes and Buckeyes will meet November 20th to complete the near-circle.

Of the four Wisconsin and Michigan State have the most favorable schedules. The Badgers (7-1, 3-1) host Indiana and Northwestern and are at Purdue and Michigan. The Spartans (8-1, 4-1) are at home to Minnesota and Purdue and finish the season with the Land Grant Trophy game at Penn State. Iowa (6-2, 3-1) and Ohio State (8-1, 4-1) have the tougher schedules by virtue of their meeting which, like last season's thriller in Columbus, could decide the Big Ten

title.

With the Big Four setting the pace, Illinois in one of its periodic feisty moods, Northwestern doing its thing and Penn State at least showing a pulse, the Big Ten is as deep with quality teams as it's been perhaps since Ohio State's National Championship season of 2002. Whoever wins this conference will have earned it.

Around the Nation

Bloody Saturday in the Midwest: The National Championship and perhaps conference hopes of Michigan State and Missouri came to an end this weekend, and in both cases it happened in quick and decisive fashion.

Mizzou's demise came in a blistering first period, when Nebraska took it to the visiting Tigers with 24 points and a whopping 258 yards of offense. Roy Helu Jr. was the main devastator, breaking off touchdown runs of 66 and 73 yards. Helu would add a 53-yard scoring burst in the third period on the way to 307 on the ground. The final score of 31-17 did no justice to Cornhusker dominance. Now Nebraska holds the whip hand in the Big 12 North and need only to win out to have one last crack at the conference title before decamping to the Big Ten.

Michigan State's fall was even more complete, as a game billed as a white-knuckler turned into a laugher before halftime. Iowa jumped on the Spartans for 17 first-quarter points, with the Tyler Sash-to-Micah Hyde 66-yard interception return breaking it open, and poured it on in the second to take a 30-0 halftime lead. The usually stalwart Michigan State offense finished with 258 total yards and three turnovers in the 37-6 rout.

And Then There Were Two: While the Tigers of Columbia and the Spartans crumbled on the road, the Tigers of Auburn and the Ducks prospered in half-a-hundred fashion in unfriendly locales. Cam Newton threw for 209 yards and two touchdowns and caught a touchdown pass himself in Auburn's 51-31 victory at Ole Miss, while Oregon blew away USC with 24 unanswered points and won going away, 53-32. It's very simple now: if Auburn and Oregon win out- and in Auburn's case that means beating Alabama in Tuscaloosa and winning the SEC Championship Game- the Tigers and Ducks will meet in Glendale for the BCS Championship.

Mountainous Showdown: Three non-BCS teams remain unbeaten, and two of them will meet in Salt Lake City next Saturday at 3:30 in one of the most important games of the entire college football season. TCU is 9-0 and riding a defense that has given up a total of 16 points in the last five games. The power gear for 8-0 Utah is an offense that has topped fifty points three times and sixty points once. Both teams still have legitimate BCS-title aspirations: an Oregon loss at some point could open up a slot for a non-BCS team. What remains to be seen is what bump, if any, this game will give in terms of passing Boise State in the non-BCS pecking order.

Bear Market: Once upon a time Baylor was a respectable, if not overly prestigious, college football program. Under the stewardship of head coach Grant Teaff the Bears won Southwest Conference titles in 1974 and '80, the latter with stars like Mike Singletary, Vann McElroy, Walter Abercrombie and Dennis Gentry. From 1979 through 1994 Baylor played in eight bowl games, a solid accomplishment for a modest Baptist school in a league awash with big-money programs. But with Teaff's retirement and the transition from the SWC to the Big 12, the Bears went into hibernation. Going into 2010 Baylor had posted fourteen consecutive losing seasons.

That streak is now over. Following a 30-22 win at Texas - the first win in Austin since 1997- the Bears are now 7-2 and have clinched a winning record. They're also 4-1 and, improbably, tied

for first place in the Big 12 South. Led by the sensational Robert Griffin (2,592 yards, twenty touchdown passes and seven rushing touchdowns) and tailback Jay Finley (813 yards) the Bears have rampaged to thirty or more points in six consecutive games.

With games left at Oklahoma State and against Oklahoma, the road remaining looks rough. But whatever happens from here on out, this is the best season of Baylor football since back in the halcyon days of Grant Teaff. And with the wiles of Art Briles, the wheels of Finley and the wing of Griffin, this team is dangerous against almost any opponent. You never know- the November 20th meeting on the Brazos between the Bears and Oklahoma could be for the Big 12 South Championship. In a season like this you can't count out any eventuality.

Preseason Predictions Revisited

We're at the two-thirds mark of the season, two months in. So it's as good a time as any to look back at the conference-championship predictions Yours Truly made way back in the tender days of August , and see how I'm faring- along with the teams I did and didn't tout.

Listed are my preseason picks, their present-day conference record and location in the conference standings, a brief analysis of their season to date, and a another prediction for the

rest of the way, which may or not be revised.

Enjoy:

Big East: *Pittsburgh*

Present: 3-0, First Place

Analysis: After a rough start the Panthers have found their way and at 3-0 have the only undefeated conference record in the Big East. Three of the final four games are on the road, but Pitt has West Virginia at home, should be favored in all four games and can absorb a loss while still winning the conference title.

Revised Prediction: Like the Chinese sticking with the chopsticks , I'm sticking with the Panthers.

ACC Atlantic: *Florida State*

Present: 4-1, Tied for First Place

Analysis: The Seminoles would be in the driver's seat if not for their loss Thursday night to N.C. State . Now they're tied with the 'Pack and trail them in the head-to-head. Two of the last three games are at home, although the one road game is at Maryland, the third leg of the three-way first-place tie in the Atlantic.

Revised Prediction: N.C. State still has three tough ACC road games left and I don't quite believe in Maryland. The Seminoles were the pick in August and they're still the pick here in

November.

ACC Coastal: *North Carolina*

Present: 2-2, Fourth Place

Analysis: The Tarheels were decimated early by the scandal that rocked their program . They lost their first two games and although they've played their way into bowl contention, any chances of winning the Coastal are down the tubes. Carolina is two full games behind Virginia Tech and has three ranked opponents left on the schedule.

Revised Prediction: Virginia Tech is at least two games up in the loss column on everyone else. The Hokies are going to take this thing going away.

SEC East: *Georgia*

Present: 3-4, Third Place

Analysis: The Bulldogs got off to their worst start in nearly two decades and were effectively out of the SEC East race by the end of September.

Revised Prediction: I'm going with South Carolina, even though the Cocks have to go to Gainesville on November 13th to take on second-place Florida. It just seems like their year, although we *are* talking about South Carolina.

SEC West: *Alabama*

Present: 4-1, Tied for Second Place

Analysis: The Tide had its 29-game regular-season winning streak snapped at South Carolina but are still alive and well in the West Division race as well as the BCS title race. Alabama visits LSU next week and will host first-place Auburn on November 26th in the game that will likely decide the West title.

Revised Prediction: I still like Alabama. In fact, I like the Tide to win out, including the SEC Championship Game, and play for the BCS title. I know Cam Newton is a force of nature, but Auburn's defense is not, and I'm skeptical of that defense's ability to go into Tuscaloosa and neutralize all of those Crimson weapons.

Big Ten: *Ohio State*

Present: 4-1, Tied for First Place

Analysis: Most people knew Wisconsin would be one of the toughest games on the schedule, so it's not a surprise, really, that the Buckeyes lost (losing in such abject fashion *was* a bit of surprise.) The Big Ten is still wide-open and Ohio State will have every opportunity to win it.

Revised Prediction: Wisconsin leads all Big Ten teams in the BCS rankings. If Ohio State beats Iowa (which I think will happen) and there is a three-way tie for the title between the Buckeyes, Badgers and Spartans, Wisconsin will get the nod based on those BCS rankings. With a friendly schedule the rest of the way I think that will happen.

Big 12 North: *Nebraska*

Present: 3-1, Tied for First Place

Analysis: Though tied with Missouri at 3-1, the Cornhuskers own the head-to-head over the Tigers and only have to win out to clinch the division. They'll have to do it amid the uncertain status of Taylor Martinez, who is getting increasingly banged up , but Nebraska has a senior backup in Zac Lee and should be okay against a so-so last month of opponents.

Revised Prediction: No revisions here; Nebraska is in the catbird seat of the Big 12 North and should stay there.

Big 12 South: *Oklahoma*

Present: 3-1, Tied for First

Analysis: Other than the loss at Missouri the ride has been as smooth as expected for the Sooners. They should cruise through the next two weeks at Texas A&M and at home against Texas Tech before the critical juncture: season-ending road tilts at Oklahoma State and at Baylor.

Revised Prediction: Oklahoma is the safe choice and hasn't done anything to render the preseason pick null and void. The Sooners will win the South and meet Nebraska in a Big Red title game.

Pac-10: *Oregon State*

Present: 3-1, Tied for Second Place

Analysis: Despite a rough ride through a demanding non-conference schedule and the loss of

James Rodgers
, the Beavers are still within striking distance in the Pac-10 race and with the next three at UCLA and at home against USC and Washington, have a good chance of staying within striking distance going into the final two weeks.

Revised Prediction: Unfortunately, those final two weeks are at Stanford and at home against Oregon. Without James Rodgers the Beavers won't be capable of doing what they have to do, which is win both games. They probably won't win either. Oregon has dominated the Pac-10 all season and should go right on dominating down the stretch.

Mountain West: *Utah*

Present: 5-0, Tied for First

Analysis: It all boils down to next Saturday's showdown with TCU, the *de facto* Mountain West Championship Game. If the Utes take that one, they can absorb a loss at San Diego State and still win the league title, although it'll obviously play havoc with their BCS chances.

Revised Prediction: Utah has taken me this far. It'll take me the rest of the way.

Western Athletic: *Boise State*

Present: 3-0, Tied for First Place

Analysis: No surprises here- the Broncos have a 19-game conference winning streak after dispatching their first three WAC opponents by a combined score of 156-20. Hawaii (5-0) leads Boise by two games in the win column but the Rainbows have to play on the Blue Turf next Saturday.

Revised Prediction: I just might have to stay with Boise on this one.

Conference-USA East: *Southern Mississippi*

Present: 2-2, Tied for Third

Analysis: The Eagles trail Central Florida (4-0) and East Carolina (4-1), have already lost to the Pirates and travel to Orlando on November 13th to take on the Knights. It's a long shot. Both of Southern Miss's two C-USA losses are by one point, but close doesn't count in this game.

Revised Prediction: Central Florida has already beaten East Carolina and has lousy Tulane and Memphis teams left on the schedule. The Knights should close this out.

Conference-USA West: *Houston*

Present: 4-1, Tied for First

Analysis: Despite losing his top two quarterbacks, including preseason Heisman candidate Case Keenum, Cougar coach Kevin Sumlin still has his team in the thick of the West race. Houston is tied for first with SMU but has already defeated the Mustangs to cop the head-to-head tiebreaker.

Revised Prediction: Tulsa (2-2) has three of its last four at home, while Houston has three of its last four on the road, all against good teams. I like the Hurricane to knock off the Cougars in Houston and take the West.

Sun Belt: *Middle Tennessee State*

Present: 2-1, Tied for Second

Analysis: Losing Dwight Dasher for the first four games didn't hurt the Blue Raiders *too* badly, although the dual-threat quarterback was rusty as hell for his team's home loss to Troy in October. MTSU has to win Tuesday night at Arkansas State to stay alive in this race.

Revised Prediction: Troy (3-1) has the head-to-head secured over Middle Tennessee and its remaining conference schedule consists of North Texas, Florida International, Western Kentucky and Florida Atlantic (combined record: 7-23.) The Trojans should make it three straight outright championships in the Sun Belt.

MAC East: *Temple*

Present: 4-1, Tied for First

Analysis: The Owls have looked impressive so far, but they've got a lot of work left. In the last two weeks of the regular season they host Ohio and are at the O.G. Miami- the other two thirds of the three-way tie for first in the East.

Revised Prediction: The key game is the November 16th meeting with Ohio and I like Temple at home over the Bobcats. I'll stay with the Owls.

MAC West: *Northern Illinois*

Present: 5-0, Tied for First

Analysis: The Huskies have rolled through the MAC schedule thus far, including a decisive win over Temple
in early October. They host fellow frontrunner Toledo next Tuesday. The last two games on the schedule are at weak sisters Ball State and Eastern Michigan, so if they beat the Rockets they should be home free.

Revised Prediction: There's no reason to alter this one.

Next Week: The Buckeyes host Penn State Saturday at 3:30. At 5-3 overall the Lions are struggling. They did beat Michigan last week, but that isn't saying a whole lot, frankly.