Furls is back with his recap of yesterdays Buckeyes opener versus Northern Illinois, and delivers position by position grades in addition to his overall analysis of yesterdays game. It was a tale of two games says Furls, a first quarter that was more impressive than possibly imaginable. And then the pedestrian final three quarters in which the Bucks essentially played to a tie with the Huskies.

So I went to a football game yesterday and a scrimmage broke out. Within in 15:05 the Buckeyes had neatly and impressively disposed of the preseason MAC favorite Northern Illinois Huskies. What happened for the nest 44:55? Well, it appeared as though Coach Jim Tressel held open try outs for starting positions.

I would not recommend walking away from the Northern Illinois game and trying to extrapolate any greater truth about the Buckeyes play as a whole. There are just too many wildcards. Is Garret Wolfe as good as he looked? Did the defense really play that badly? Can anyone stop Ted Ginn and Troy Smith? These are questions that we really cannot answer because they are kind of like layered questions with the answer to each resting in another question.

Clearly, the Buckeyes offense looked very good, but as I said in my preview, this really isn't a match up. The defense appeared disappointing, or did it? I really did not think that it looked that bad. There are a lot of folks who will jump up and down and point to Garret Wolfe's 285 yards and say that the defense looked atrocious. My own observations (from the seventh row) are not really the same. Bear with me, hopefully, it will make sense as we break down each position.

Quarterback: Troy Smith gets an A. I would give him an A plus, but his deep passes were a bit behind Ginn. Otherwise, he was impressive. His decision making was sound and surprisingly, he only ran the ball one time. I don't think that Texas should count on that. I have a feeling that the play-book was limited by Northern Illinois' to stay in the game.

Running Backs: Antonio Pittman gets a B+. His play was solid, but he really did not shine as much as I expected against a weak Huskies' defense. Chris Wells gets a B, he would've had an A, but a fumble in the red zone costs a full letter grade. Is this guy for real? Even Maurice Wells looked very good, catching the ball out of the backfield, but I will have to give him an I for lack of touches, his carries were primarily limited to trash time with ten men in the box.

Wide Receivers: They all get an A. Ginn looked sharp, fast, and when did he develop hands? Gonzalez gave you exactly what we expected and Hartline and Robiskie looked very good, providing much depth as Z receivers.

Tight End: Rory Nichol gets a C+. His early drop looked like shades of Ryan Hamby, but he did recover with a couple of nice catches.

Offensive Line: A-. No one ever came close to Troy Smith. I think at one point I saw Smith reading the paper in the backfield. Unfortunately, the line did not blow open the holes that I thought they would for the running game. I am sure that is probably a by-product of the 14 men that the Huskies were putting in the box once it became apparent that the Buckeyes were not really interested in scoring anymore.

Coaching: A+. Coach Tressel did everything right trying to get folks into various sets to see what would work and what still needed work. One dig, I really thought that Pittman, Smith, and Ginn should not have played after the 2nd quarter.

Defensive Line: A+. Quinn Pitcock looked like a beast against a very young interior line. Routinely double teamed Pitcock not only kept the linebackers free to make the plays, but he also managed to drive both players that were on him a couple of yards deep. That is playing with great leverage. At defensive end things get a bit harder to interperet. I am not sure if it was just dumb luck or observational failure on my part, but Lawrence Wilson and Alex Barrow appeared to be much better against the run and Vermon Gholsten appeared devastating in nine-technique pass rush. For some reason I don't remember Gholsten crushing the run like those two. It may have just been a failure on my part to observe it, or it may have just been that they happened to pass when he was out there. In any case Gholsten looked like the best pass rushing end that Ohio State has had since Will Smith. Don't think for a moment that it was a by product of playing Northern Illinois. The Huskies feature two very good, veteran tackes. Jay Richardson was very sound all around. Could he finally be living up to his potential?

Linebackers: C-. The whole crew of them were just very ordinary. Nearly every play that Garret Wolfe broke was due at least in small part to a linebacker taking a horrible pursuit angle. Now this could be explained by the fact that Garret Wolfe is very fast and accelerates faster than most people think, but I still would have expected some improvement there. Again though, it is very hard to get a feel for what the real ability of this unit is. Coach Tressel ran all six leading prospects through the motions and they seemed to spend a lot of time in zones. This is one area where I get the feeling that Coach Tressel was trying very hard not tip his hand much. Think about it, how much game film does Mack Brown have on these guys? How much would you like him to see?

Secondary: B+. They all looked rock solid in picking up the slack caused by the mediocre linebacker play, Brandon Mitchell in particular. Malcolm Jenkins looked solid, Antonio Smith looked very good, and Nick Patterson did well stepping up to slow the run. This unit looks very good and coupled with a strong defensive line, I think that we will see some good things out of this defense this year.

Special Teams: C-. Here in Columbus we don't like to miss field goals inside the fifty. The only that helps the kickers get a passing score is that I graded on a curve based on turf conditions (Pettrey's touchbacks helped too). Coverage looked good, and so did Ginn's returns.

Overall Grade: A-. Not bad for first game of the year (at least for the part that was not a scrimmage).

Grading the Grader: I said: "Don't be surprised if Garret Wolfe goes for less than 50 or more than 150." The mistake that I made here was thinking that Northern Illinois had something else to do with the ball besides giving it to him. I give myself a C on that one.

I said, "Don't be surprised if Ginn has 4 catches for 3 touchdowns." He had four catches for 2. I give myself an A+ on that one.

I said, "Don't be surprised if Beanie Wells has 15 carries." I think he would have gotten those five carries if he hadn't fumbled. Coach Tressel is notorious for penalizing young backs severely for fumbles. Anyone remember how many carries Maurice Wells had in the Fiesta Bowl after his fumble in Michigan? I'll give you a hint, the answer is not an integer. I give myself a B+ on that one.

I said, "Don't be surprised if the offense looks very conservative." For the most part it did. The Buckeyes jumped on them early, than after that it was pretty conservative game calling, just as I had figured. It was kind of a stupid prediction though, seriously, Coach Tressel conservative, I really went out on a limb there. I get a D- for stating the obvious.

I said, "Don't be surprised if Northern Illinois hangs on longer than expected." I expected it to be a "reasonable" game until the 3rd quarter, but the game ended at 15:05 and the Bucks were lethal early, C- on that one.

Overall: B+. I said 37-20 (two trash-time scores). Apparently, I overestimated exactly how trashy our trash time would be. Coach Tressel was still working a lot of starters through late in the fourth on defense, this probably more than anything else ruined my cover on the over, although, Justin Zwick and Chris Wells fumbling inside the five hurts too (so do two missed field goals when I only needed 3 points to cover). Regardless, my optimism remains unchanged, there is a lot of talent on that defense. They just need one of the best coaches in the country to put the right packages together. Will they get it done in time for Texas? I think so.