Getting motivated to write this column isn't usually a problem. I love this gig, and talking about the Buckeyes comes easily to me. But given the events of the last couple days, I'm reminded of the Jack Nicholson character in "Terms of Endearment". When the frumpy, middle-aged Shirley MacLaine invites him into her apartment after an evening of bickering, he responds, "I'd rather stick needles in my eyes". That's about how I feel about covering OSU this weekend. You might say I'm getting a taste of what the brave souls who cover the Indians, Browns and Cavs go through on a regular basis, bless their tortured hearts.

By any reasonable standard, the 12-1 football team and the now 34-3 basketball program are winners. But both programs took hits on Friday, and Buckeye fans are understandably down at the mouth. I know this because I checked the mirror.

Kentucky ended the storybook season for Thad Matta's Buckeyes on Friday night in Newark, in what was one of the best games of the tournament so far. What can you say in the aftermath, other than that the Buckeyes didn't play their best game, and Kentucky deserves credit for a tremendous effort. You saw it. I'll just make a couple of observations.

I thought it was an incredible defensive performance by both teams. Kentucky decided not to

double Sullinger in the post except for a couple of occasions, and when Wildcat center Josh Harrelson hammered Sullinger to the floor on one of the OSU freshman's first possessions of the game and came away with a held ball call for his effort, the tone was set for the inside play.

Aaron Craft more than held his own against Jordan Knight, his freshman counterpart at the point. Craft and his mates limited Knight to a 3 of 10 shooting night and nine total points, and the Buckeyes' precocious sixth man had a hand right in Knight's face as he drained the game-winning shot with five seconds on the clock. A clutch shot. That is all.

OSU was hurt by the fact that Craft didn't dent the scoreboard from the field, missing on all five of his shots, and he had only two assists to go with his customary four steals. Of course, it's hard to rack up assists when your teammates are bending the rim on their shots.

The off night shooting the ball for the good guys was personified by William Buford, who went a woeful 2 for 16 from the floor. I'm not going to rip Buford here after the fine season he put together for OSU this year, but it's fair to say if he had shot even 35%, we'd be talking about the matchup with the Tar Heels right now instead of crying in our beer.

The lack of depth for Matta's troops has been a topic of discussion all year, but it has been framed as an issue that could hurt them if they had foul trouble, or if the top six kids became fatigued by playing so many minutes. What didn't concern anyone was the lack of "instant offense" off the bench in the event of a primary scorer having a bad night. These guys simply didn't have bad shooting nights, and if one of them did struggle, this team had four or five other options to go to.

It was pretty obvious right from the tip that Buford wasn't comfortable, and he never did find it, including on the last-second three point attempt that would have won it at the buzzer. He had a great look on that shot, and on several other attempts, although the Wildcats did force him into many contested shots on the night. The beat guys who follow such minutiae informed us after the game that Buford is statistically the team's best shooter on contested shots, and has a reputation for shooting better when he has a hand in his face. On this night, it didn't much matter what the circumstance was.

The other thing that I thought hurt OSU again Friday night was the season-long struggle to

finish in transition at the rim. It was one pass too many, or just indecision at the crucial moment on the fast break. It doesn't take more than a couple of missed opportunities on fast breaks to make a big difference, and the Buckeyes had at least that many chances go for naught in Newark.

So the dream dies in the Sweet Sixteen for Matta and his team for the second year in a row, and the stretch since Ohio State's last national championship is at 51 years and counting.

March is cruel.

The silver lining, if there is one to be seen, was the announcement after the game by Sullinger that he intends to return for his sophomore year. Buford said he has to talk with his family before making a decision final, but said he also intends to return for his one remaining year of eligibility. With a returning core of Sullinger, Craft and Buford, along with Jordan Sibert and Lenzelle Smith and another bumper crop of incoming freshmen, the Buckeyes should be back in the hunt for a conference title and another run for glory in March.

The incoming class has a lot of size, with 6-10 Amir Williams from Birmingham, Mich., 6-9 Trey McDonald from Battle Creek, Mich., and 6-8 LaQuinton Ross from Jackson, Miss. They have another new frontcourt player eligible in transfer 6' 9" Evan Ravenal, who sat out this season. The new freshman crop also includes depth at the point, with Georgia's Mr. Basketball Shann on Scott
, (son of Charlie Scott) coming to Columbus.

There will be more Sweet Sixteens in the foreseeable future. Predicting anything beyond that is...well...madness.

Tressel's Trials

It's unclear at this point how bad Friday's news will turn out to be for Jim Tressel...but it sure ain't good. The Columbus Dispatch broke the story that Tressel had forwarded emails he

received about Terrelle Pryor's NCAA violations to a Jeannette, PA businessman who has served as an advisor and mentor to Pryor during his recruitment.

This is news to the general public, but it's hard to imagine that it is news to the OSU administration or to the NCAA, which has been intimately involved in the OSU investigation of the Tressel matter since early February.

As far as I can see, the immediate significance of these latest disclosures is that they make Tressel's claims that he was "protecting the confidentiality" of either his players, or the federal investigation, seem even more ludicrous and lame than they seemed at the press conference.

It also appears that Tressel was attempting to find a remedy to the problem of Pryor's involvement in NCAA violations without ever acknowledging to his superiors that he was aware of them. Not good. The news was also damaging enough to have Athletic Director Gene Smith squashing rumors that Tressel would resign sometime this weekend. At this point, nothing would surprise me.

Mike Perry has a good piece on the front page with more details in his open letter to the coach, and I would also refer you to Ramzy, a new contributor at Eleven Warriors, who makes "The Case for Regicide", a terrific read.

And we wait.

Loose Leaves

- The Lady Buckeyes made it a clean sweep in tournament play for OSU, falling Saturday to the No. 1 seeded Tennessee Volunteers, 85-75, to finish off what has been a disappointing

campaign for Jim Foster's Bucks. Enough said on that, except to note that "disappointing" is the theme of this week's column

- The investigation into the events that led to the hospitalization of 13 Iowa football players for rhabdomyolysis contains "mostly good news" for the university and the coaches and conditioning people who put them there. It appears no drugs or performance enhancers were involved and "a strenuous squat-lifting" exercise was responsible for causing the players' symptoms. You'll recall that for a few weeks after the football season ended, Kirk Ferentz was the most embattled coach in the Big Ten.

- Until this week there had been no indication that Tressel's troubles had been having an effect on football recruiting. But a report surfaced in recent days that one of the Buckeyes prized 2012 commitments, running back Brionte Dunn from GlenOak was planning a visit to Michigan. Tressel has always been fairly understanding about his commits taking visits to other schools, but that "understanding" does not extend to visits to Michigan. Dunn may be about to have someone whisper in his ear that this is a flawed plan.