I knew we would handle Cincinnati this week. The Bearcats that is. Mike Furlan and most of the rest of the free world knew it as well. In his weekly wrapup of the Buckeyes last game, Furls grades the team position by position. And then grades himself on what he predicted in his preview piece. Next up? That wily old coot Joe Pa.

This week's game against the Bearcats was exactly the opposite of the Northern Illinois game. Against the Huskies the Buckeyes jumped out to a big lead and then practiced their way across the finish line. This week it took the entire first half of the game against Cincinnati to shake off the Austin hangover. I knew Sixth Street was sweet, but I had no idea that it took a week to shake off the effects.

This game had all the makings of a classic letdown. Number One ranked team in the nation facing an average team from the Big Least right after a nationally televised thrashing of the Texas Longhorns and right on the eve of the kick off of the Big Ten schedule; this whole thing sounds ripe for a game that is much closer than it should be.

In some respects that is what we got this week. The Bucks allowed the Bearcats to hang around for an entire half before they woke up and treated them like the should've in the beginning of the game. This game was much closer than the 37-7 score would indicate, but it also could have been much uglier.

On the positive side, this hangover allowed the first team defense to make some serious progress. The angles looked better, the tackles were made, and the coverage was sound. It appears as though this defense is really coming together. Not that the University of Cincinnati is a real measuring stick for a defense, but the defensive explosiveness was there.

Grading the Positions:

Quarterback: B+. Troy was sharp and failed to throw an interception (again), putting his consecutive attempts without an int over 150. Jim Tressel and Buckeyes fans could not have asked for a better quarterback. He does all the right things and does not make the big mistakes. Think Craig Krenzel, with “mad skills.” Troy was not really asked to do anything this week except not to lose the game. He kept his completion percentage at 70% (21 for 30) and never threw a ball that I shook my head at.

Running Backs: B+. Yep, Pitt averaged almost ten yards per carry and went well over 100 for the day, but it was against an undersized Bearcats defense. He looked a bit indecisive in the first half, but who wouldn’t given the play of the…

Offensive Line: D. Are you kidding me, Troy Smith was pressured by Cincinnati? Their D-Line was outweighed by 50lbs across the board; they should not have gotten close enough to Troy to be able to smell his cologne. The Buckeyes were forced to use an option pitch in order to get the ball outside far enough to pick up yards at some points. Looked like the big boys did too much celebrating after the Texas game. If they perform like this against a good team our offense could be in some trouble.

Wide Receivers: A. The receivers continue to play at an exceptional level. Ginn looked too fast to be covered and Gonzo looks like he might have the best hands in the NCAA. Looks like Roy Hall may have lost his starting job to Brian Robiskie. Robiskie has been fantastic this season and it is a tough break for Hall, who only saw time during “trash time.”

Tight Ends: C. Rory Nichol looked good and it is nice to have a TE that can catch, but how the hell does a TE pick up a 15 yard personal foul on a play run to the other side of the ball?

Defensive Line. A++++. Apparently the Bucks saw the same thing in the Bearcats O-Line that I did. They were very susceptible right up the middle. I thought that this would end up in a bunch of sacks for the DE's. Typically when the defensive tackles get insane pressure up the middle the pocket breaks into a W shape instead of a U shape. This forces the quarterback outside, right into the waiting hands of an outside LB or DE, not this week. The Buckeyes tackles combined for 4 sacks (3 for Pitcock). Quinn Pitcock was an animal and was a mismatch even when double-teamed; his bull-rush was too much for their center and guard to handle. I am not nitpicking, but Pitcock could have had two more sacks. Any time you hold an opposing team to –4 yards rushing, that is a serious credit to your D-Line, because run defense starts upfront.

Linebackers. A-. It looks like the James Laurinaitis will become the new star; the guy that is going to make the big play every week. It also appears that Ross Homan is emerging over John Kerr. I am a big fan of this because, well, John Kerr is SLOW. That coupled with the fact that Homan still has four years of eligibility (Kerr is a 5th year senior) makes playing Homan a much more sound investment in the future of this group. Also emerging is Curtis Terry, but there really is not much room for him to get the snaps right now.

Secondary. B+. This secondary still needs some experience and as a result of some of the zones they are running, they are being forced to give up the shorter passes, but all in all Malcolm Jenkins is continuing to demonstrate why he will be one of the best corners ever to don the scarlet and grey. Enjoy him folks, he will be going to the NFL following the 2007 season (probably around 5-10).

Special Teams: A. Finally, the kicking game looks like it has gained some momentum and A.J. Trepasso remains solid. This week's performance was not nearly as dramatic as last weeks, but his punting did not hurt the Buckeyes at all, now the Bearcats punting, well that is something else…. As for the returns, I think we can indirectly attribute U of C's punting woes in that game to Mr. Ginn. The bottom line, the Buckeyes special teams put points on the board

and established terrific field position.

Coaching: B-. Anytime there is a letdown like this, most of the blame has to fall on the coaching staff. The only thing that keeps these guys over the C mark is the fact that they were able to turn it around at the half.

Grading the Grader:

I said, " Don't be surprised if the Bucks have 3 TDs over 50 yards." They had 0 and never really even tried to get down the field. I failed you all and myself. I apologize. F

I said, "Don't be surprised if Ted Ginn's return game comes to life." It looked like the Bearcats punter was absolutely terrified of Ginn, shanking the ball out of bounds repeatedly. While that is not directly a reflection of Ginn, I still think it counts for something. C.

I said, "Don't be surprised if UC is held under 75 rushing yards." Boy were they, the Bearcats were held to –4 yards rushing. This may not seem like a bold prediction, but given the rush defenses performance over the first two days, it was still a bit risky. A.

I said, "Don't be surprised if Pittman has 20 carries, 10 for Beanie, and 5 for Mo Wells." Well, I was in the ball park on this one. This looks like it will be about the distribution for the rest of the season. Pitt had 16 carries, Beanie 5, Mo Wells 3. B.

I said, " Don't be surprised if The linebacking corps becomes more established in the first half, featuring, Laurinaitis, Freeman, and Homan (emerging over Kerr)." I was right on the money here. The Linebackers looked very good in the first ½ and Ross Homan saw a lot of play time

in place of Kerr. A

I said, “Don’t be surprised if the Buckeyes have 6 or more sacks.” Tackles get all the press on an offensive line because when a tackle, particularly left tackle, blows his protection the result is a blind side sack and lots of fumbles, but solid pass protection starts up front and frankly, the Bearcats were weak at both guards and the center position. I knew that given the Bucks tremendous defensive tackles this would be very problematic and it was, resulting in 8 sacks. I did not foresee Pitcock getting all the sacks, I figured the UC’s quarterback would be forced outside into the waiting arms of Vernon Gholsten or Jay Richardson. A+