The wounds are still fresh from last years 17-10 loss to Joe Pa and the Nittany Lions, and the Buckeyes get their chance at revenge today when they pay a visit to The Shoe. In his game preview, Furls answers the following questions: Is Joe Pa senile? Is this Penn State team anywhere near as good as last years? And what the hell is wrong with the turf at Ohio Stadium? Evrything you need to get ready for this afternoons game can be found inside.

All week I have heard nothing but complimentary, even self-deprecating, comments from Joe Paterno regarding the Ohio State Buckeyes. All he can do is compliment the Buckeyes and to roughly paraphrase him, pray to the patron saint of lost causes.

What does all this mean? Football coaches are supposed to be inspirational. They are supposed to instill a fire and confidence into their teams; they are supposed to find them the way to win even when it does not seem possible. Has Joe Paterno finally slipped into a Keith Jackson like senility? Is this really how he sees the world through his eight inch thick, telescope-like spectacles? This begs another question; if he were looking, could he see Uranus with those things? I digress…

The point is, what is the crazy old codger from Happy Valley doing? I am not sure he knows either.

The turf at Ohio Stadium has become something of a discussion piece. I personally have been down on the field, following last week's game, and frankly it looks like crap. There is so much sand injected into the turf in an attempt to make it airy to the roots that the players are ripping up giant divots on cuts; this problem will only be exasperated by the expected wet conditions tomorrow. I go to a driving range here in Columbus that does something similar in their grass tee area. As a result I tear divots that are about an inch deep and 5 inches long, the ground just peels away with ease.

Some in the media are billing this as a revenge game as PSU is the last team to beat the Buckeyes, 17-10 last year. Most of the Buckeyes are downplaying this aspect of the game, but the wry smile on Troy Smith's face when asked about it and T.J. Downing's comments, "I'd like to issue a personal challenge to our fans. Repay'em. Pay 'em back for what they did to us.

Their fans single-handedly took us out of the game, and maybe our fans can do the same thing. Our fans need to be loud; they need to be louder than they've ever been before."

Like Buckeyes fans needed encouragement. This is an afternoon game. That gives the fans about three and a half extra hours to get the suds flowing, and as much as the players may be taking this game personally, the Buckeyes fans may be taking it even more so.

Right now there are about ten different grass roots movements around campus to organize the fans and get them all into scarlet; the involved parties are calling it the "Red See." Hell, I personally got an Email from Coach Tressel telling me to wear red (and to conduct myself honorably). Oh yeah, this is also the first game of the year that the students will be back on campus for. The 'Shoe will be rocking.

Normally bookies say that home field in the NFL is worth about three points. Some venues in college football are worth more and the 'Shoe is one of them. Normally I would say the 'Shoe is worth about 7-10 for the Buckeyes, but I personally think that it will be worth at least two touchdowns this week.

I have watched the crowd in the 'Shoe destroy teams and change the outcome of games. The 2003 game vs. Purdue is a great example. Late in that game the crowd noise in the north end zone was loud enough to cause a couple of procedure penalties and rattle Kyle Orton so badly that he fumbled the snap in his own endzone resulting in a tie breaking score by Mike Kudla.

Maybe that is what the old man is doing, maybe he is trying to calm Columbus…

Introducing the Nittany Lions:

This is not the Penn State team from last year, you don't even have to look at the roster to see that, all you have to do is watch them play; they are not very good. Right now Penn State is holding onto a residual top twenty-five ranking (as a result of a very "generous" preseason ranking) and it is only a matter of time before they slip back into their familiar, Big Ten mediocrity.

Gone is the speed and leadership at quarterback and the dominating play of the defensive line. Also gone is the explosion of last year's Butkus Award winner, Paul Posluszny. Posluszny is coming off of a horrific knee injury last year and not surprisingly has looked rather unspectacular this year. Also gone is the intangible confidence from last year, that team of destiny feeling that the Nittany Lions team from last year seemed to exude.

The Nittany Lions no longer have that elite athlete, Robinson, at quarterback, so they will not be running the same option pass offense that they used last year. This year's version of the Penn State offense is based around a young pocket passer, and the familiar Penn State running game.

Penn State features a typical PSU running back, Tony Hunt, and given the perceived "soft underbelly" of the Buckeye's (the run defense), I would imagine that Paterno will look to Tony

Hunt to help carry this team. Make no mistakes about it, while Paterno is telling the media that his team has no shot, I am quite sure he is telling his team something else.

Tony Hunt has 44 carries on the year, for 253 yards and a couple of TDs but the numbers are a bit deceiving. He looked pretty impressive running the ball against Notre Dame, but the Lions fell behind so far so fast that he did not have many carries. Hunt also averages a couple of catches per game at about 10 yards per catch, so don't be surprised if that appears as a way to slow the Buckeyes defense down should they get too aggressive. At 6'2" 230lbs, Hunt is a load but he is also deceptively fast.

On the defensive side of the ball, PSU is no where near as good as they were last year. The strength of the team last year was its front four, but with the departure of Tamba Hali this team just does not look the same. They are vulnerable and they were abused by Notre Dame.

The Match Ups:

Ohio State Offense vs. Penn State Defense: This is no competition. This defense was gashed by the slow receivers at Notre Dame and their secondary is no match for Ohio State's outside speed and inside strength. The defense was unable to get any pressure on Brady Quinn and I doubt they will fair much better against the Buckeyes. The Ohio State offense should have their way with Joe Paterno's boys.

I expect to see Paterno show a lot of nickel and dime looks to slow the Buckeyes down the field, daring them to beat them on the ground. The Ohio State running game has been rather unremarkable this season, but I would sincerely hope that they could run the ball against five and six defensive backs. The hope in this attack is that the fewer possessions Ohio State's offense gets, the less points they will score.

Ohio State Defense vs. Penn State Offense: Look for Joe Paterno to try to attack the Buckeyes on the ground and deep down the field; steady doses of Tony Hunt followed by deep throws down into what the Nittany Lions will hope is single coverage. No one has really tried this formula against the Buckeyes, but there is a lot of talk among the uneducated and misinformed that Buckeyes secondary could be vulnerable.

I think Penn State will have a little success, but again, I do not think they will be able to run the ball with enough consistency to mount 80 yard scoring drives and I think that Malcolm Jenkins and Antonio Smith are underrated.

Don't Be Surprised If…

1 Antonio Pittman goes for 150 yards on the ground.
2 The PSU offense is held to single digits.
3 The Buckeyes have 3 or more interceptions, throwing down the field on them will be a mistake.
4 If the Ohio State offense under the back up quarterbacks outscores Penn State's starter.

5 Lee Corso gets on the Ohio State bandwagon during game day tomorrow morning.

If I were a betting man:

I would take the Buckeyes to cover the hell out of this spread. Right now I have them at –16.5. I love the Buckeyes in this one. I think Joe Pa has some cash on them too. I do not think they will be able to move the ball and score, and I think Ohio State will. I would be very reluctant to take the over/under in this game, because the field conditions are going to be bad.