- Saturday, October 29, 2011

- Ohio Stadium, Columbus, OH

- 8:00 p.m. (ET)

- TV: ESPN -

The Buckeyes host the Wisconsin Badgers on Homecoming weekend in Columbus with a chance to climb back into the Leaders Division race in the Big Ten with a victory. Any hope of that happening seemed remote a few short weeks ago, but the Badgers (6-1, 2-1) got knocked from the ranks of the unbeaten last week, and Ohio State (4-3, 1-2) could draw even with the preseason favorites if they can pull off the upset Saturday night.

This Badgers vs. Buckeyes matchup has taken on the air of a budding rivalry now that Bret Bielema has helped return the Wisconsin program to national prominence, and the two schools find themselves in the same division of the new-look Big Ten. Three of the last four meetings

have been nationally-televised night games, which automatically adds some excitement to the event. Wisconsin comes into town ranked 15th in the BCS standings, 12th in the AP poll and 11th in the USA Today poll.

Last year the Badgers ambushed the No.1-ranked Buckeyes in Madison, but Ohio State had won the three previous meetings between Bielema and Jim Tressel. In fact, OSU's Athletics Communications department is able to claim that, "the Buckeyes have won the last three meetings between the squads", since last year's loss has been "vacated" by Ohio State along with all 12 of their wins. Something tells me Bret Bielema hasn't vacated that "1" in his 1-3 record against Ohio State.

The last time they played in Columbus, a 31-13 OSU win in 2009, the Badgers dominated the statistics, but lost big as OSU scored on a kickoff return TD and got two more TD's on interception returns. The all-time series has been lopsided in the Buckeyes' favor, as is the case with most of their conference foes. OSU leads 53-17-5, with a 29-7-3 mark in Columbus. Since 1980, the Buckeyes are 8-5-1 in the series. The two schools did not meet in either 2005 or 2006.

Ohio State will honor Eddie George at halftime to celebrate his induction into the College Football Hall of Fame. The Buckeyes will be wearing "throwback" uniforms , and have asked fans to dress in scarlet for the game.

State of the Bucks

Ohio State is coming off an open week, so they've had plenty of time to work on executing the forward pass since their one-completion performance in Champaign two weeks ago. Reports from practice about the way that freshman QB Braxton Miller is progressing in the passing offense have been encouraging, but he'll have to "do it in front of 105,000 people", as the former coach always described the challenge facing young OSU players. Ohio State is currently ranked 115th out of 120 FBS schools in passing offense at 127.86 yards per game. Yikes.

Several Buckeye players were clearly energized by the last-second Wisconsin loss to Michigan State on Saturday night, as it appeared to put the Bucks back "in control of their own destiny", as they say. It doesn't
really

do that, since Penn State currently leads the Leaders Division with a 4-0 conference mark. On the other hand, no one really believes that the Nittany Lions will come through their season-ending stretch of Illinois, Nebraska, at OSU, and at Wisconsin, with less than two losses.

In general, the Buckeyes are in good health, with no real surprises on the depth chart, viewable here
, courtesy of Bucknuts.com.

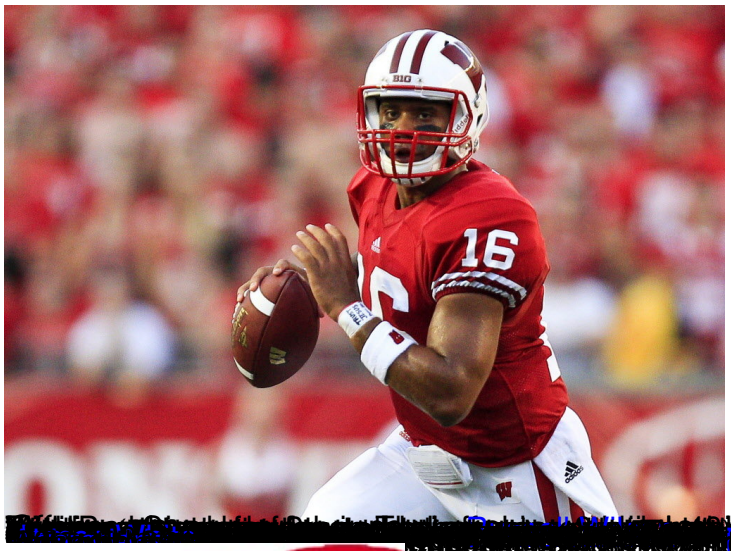
This being a game preview, the off-the-field stuff is usually held to a minimum, but this season has been defined by those issues, and they certainly contribute to the "state of the Bucks". No major college football coach goes through a season without facing distractions from getting his team ready to play football, but consider what first-year OSU coach Luke Fickell has had to deal with this week.

Jaamal Berry, his 4th-string running back, was involved in his second "altercation" in as many weeks, and is now being sued as a result of one of them. Berry has been a non-factor on the field this year, but Fickell has to deal with the issue nonetheless. Ed Rife, the tattoo parlor operator at the heart of the recent OSU player violations, was in the news as well, being sentenced
to a 3-year prison term as a result of a
Pryor
prior plea bargain. This doesn't affect Fickell or the team directly, but it does drag the scandal through the public eye one more time.

Speaking of which...ESPN breathlessly promoted an "Outside the Lines" segment this week, featuring audio of Jim Tressel's testimony before NCAA investigators, the complete transcript of which has been available on the Internet for months. *Yawn*. And on top of it all, Fickell has to prepare for Wisconsin amid rampant rumors that Urban Meyer to OSU is all but a "done deal", with speculation centering only on the date and manner of Meyer's announcement as the Buckeyes new head coach. *(Smart money is on halftime of the OSU-Duke basketball game on Nov. 29)*
.

To his great credit, Fickell continues to graciously play the lousy hand he has been dealt.

Key Personnel - Wisconsin



© Jim Davidson | the-Ozone.net