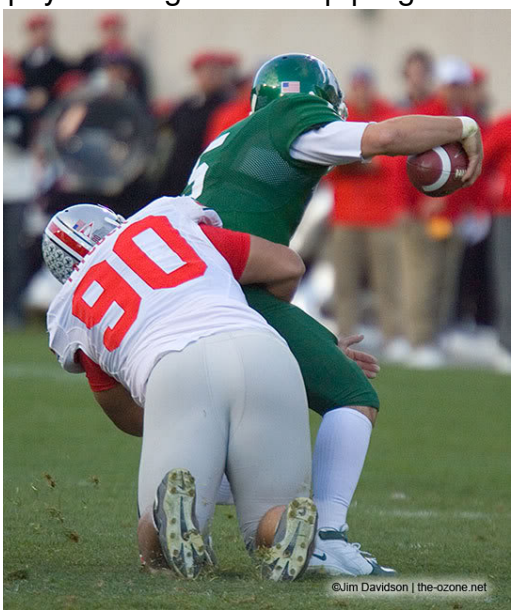
In a game that made alot of fans (myself included) nervous, the Buckeyes put those fears at ease early on against an overmatched Michigan State squad this Saturday. In his game wrap, Furls gives his thoughts on what is wrong with the Spartan program. Furls also grades all the positions for the Buckeyes, grades his predictions, and pays homage to the top prognosticator of the week from the Swerbs Blurbs message forums.



It has been a long time since I have seen a college football team look as bad as the Michigan State Spartans looked this week. This Spartans team has plenty of talent, granted a lot of their players were not recruited by Ohio State or Michigan, but they should be much better than they have played this year and this week.

One needs to look no further than quarterback Drew Stanton as the benchmark of Michigan State football during the tenure of John L. Smith. Stanton came to the Spartans as a highly recruited commodity, largely due to his potential. His “tools” that many feel will make him a highly sought after commodity in the April NFL draft have never really been honed under the tutelage of Smith’s staff. Basically, in descriptions of the fifth year senior you continually hear the words potential and tools. Well at this point that leaves three options:

1.) Stanton does not have tools.
2.) Smith’s staff lacks the ability to cultivate potential into actuality.
3.) Stanton (and every other Spartan on the team) is resistant to training and improvement.

Look at this team; the players entering this program generally leave in exactly the same condition that they enter. Is the Drew Stanton of today any better than the Drew Stanton of three years ago? Not by much. Now look at the growth of Troy Smith (and just about every

other Buckeye). They grow by leaps and bounds every season and in some cases every game. Remember Antonio Pittman, the red-shirt freshman? Remember Quinn Pitcock, the red-shirt freshman? I do, and these players did not come to Ohio State as the most widely heralded at their positions; they developed the skills while members of the Ohio State program.

This is not a referendum on John L. Smith's performance as the Spartans head coach. I have nothing against the man; as a matter of fact, I like him. As a man who struggles under the sweater vest of silence, perpetually forced to translate Tresselese, guys like John L. Smith who speak their mind are refreshing. Unfortunately, he is running one of the better programs in the Big Ten into the ground.

His team does not progress as the season continues, his recruiting is suffering, and his team is undisciplined. To make matters worse, Michigan State still owes him 4.3 million dollars if they fire him. Talk about being in a bad place, anywhere in that state up north is bad, but East Lansing is exceptionally bad this time of year (every year).

Michigan State was clearly out matched yesterday. The team made mistake after mistake and their performance during this game, and this year can be summed up by one drive. Following the Wells fumble on the Buckeyes opening possession, the Spartans offense was set up deep in Ohio State territory. A good team scores a touchdown here; a mediocre team scores a field goal; a bad team turns the ball over; and a really bad, undisciplined team takes penalties and sacks, moving backward twenty yards, and is forced to punt the ball after pushing themselves out of field goal range.

The number one team in the nation is in your stadium. That is your best shot? The key for the Spartans was to take advantage of every opportunity. They failed miserably, dropping passes, taking bad sacks, and holding calls on nearly every positive play. I wish I could say the Buckeyes dominated the game of their own accord, but that would be a real stretch. The Spartans begged to be dominated. I think they should have come out in their submissive, gimp-style (from *Pulp Fiction*), leather home uniforms, complete with ball gag.

Ted Ginn ran a punt back and that was nice to see. Ever wonder why he has so much success returning kicks against Smith's Spartans? I'll give you a hint, kick coverage is all about lane discipline. Now what word in that clause should not be mentioned in a sentence about the Spartans under Smith? Ginn looked terrific, tearing up the field (North-South), and I do not want to take anything away from him. It was still an exceptional play that only elite athletes can make.

Apparently the Spartans do not watch a lot film when game planning (or read this website). It is pretty clear that biggest vulnerability in this Buckeyes defense is run defense, but particularly against faster, smaller backs. So what did they do? They basically took a fullback and plunged him into the center of the line. Good thinking. I know Javon Ringer is out, but you mean to tell me that there is not another small fast guy on the team that can carry the ball? They would have been much better off using that beast to provide a little bit of additional pass protection.

If the tone of the article seems to focus on the negative aspects of the Spartans than the positive aspects of the Buckeyes, well I apologize, but it just so damn hard to see what the Buckeyes did right when the Spartans did so much wrong.

Grading the Positions:

Quarterback: A. Troy was his exceptionally efficient, mistake free self. He promoted his own Heisman Campaign by providing another astonishing highlight for the pundits to drool over until next week. That is what it will take for him to win. He needs to make exceptional plays in wins every week, because the strength of this team (and the huge early leads) are killing his "stats." I am not sure if he will break 300 yards in any game this year, except maybe the scUM game.

Running Back: C-. Pitt got hurt and Beanie gave the Spartans a gift that should have rallied them and got the crowd into the game. A mistake like that against a decent team could have cost the Buckeyes the game on the road. That is the kind of play that keeps the crowd in the game and lets the opposition build some confidence. Luckily there was no opposition or crowd to speak of this week. The numbers were not great and I don't think that the team would have

been able to control the clock if they needed to on the ground.

Wide Receivers: A-. These guys demonstrate every week why they are the best, hands down, in the country. Exceptional catches everywhere, but there were a couple of drops. Luckily, those don't matter in a game that is this one-sided. Gonzo had two phenomenal catches, the kind that may really start to turn the heads of the NFL scouts and Brian Robiskie caught a ball in the endzone that most players would have dropped. Any guess how fast that ball was going?

Offensive Line: B. Troy Smith had time, but the O-Line failed to take over the game and the struggle in the trenches like they need to. I hope their play gets better before Nov. 18th, that scUM front four is no joke and if they play like they did today, well lets just say Troy Smith will have to make a few more of those incredible, highlight style throws.

Defensive Line: A+. Domination. Pitcock is a manchild and it is time for people to start seriously discussing him for the Lombardi Award and Outland Trophy. This guy can just take over a game from the defensive tackle position. That is something that you just don't see every day.

Linebackers: B+. I was glad to see Marcus Freeman continue to step up and let's get serious, there are not many linebackers out there in Laurinaitis' league. He will be another one of the great ones. Will be is a bit of a misstatement. He is one of the great ones. Now if we could just get one more outside backer to step up….

Secondary: A. Rock solid. No complaints. Must be easy to cover opposing receivers when their quarterback has two seconds to make a decision and throw the ball (without blitzing a DB!).

Special Teams: A. Now if we could just convince Ginn to take every return right up the gut! Solid coverage, return for a TD, good kicking game, what more could you ask for? Well we did have a couple of kick offs fall short of a touchback, against the wind. Let's pick it up boys!

Coaching: A. The difference between Ohio State and most of the rest of the programs in the nation is never more apparent than when the Buckeyes play one of the most poorly coached teams in the country. Playing MSU really makes you appreciate the coaching staff you have.

Grading the Grader:

I said:

1. "Don't be surprised if… John L. Smith actually starts slapping himself during the game." He didn't but I know he felt like it, and maybe he should have. A.

2. "Don't be surprised if…. Sparty is held to single digits until trash time." Ummm, has trash time started yet? Final score 38-7 and the second team defense nearly closed the shutout. A.

3. "Don't be surprised if…. The Buckeyes jump out to a quick double digit lead." In spite of turning the ball over on their opening possession deep in their own territory, the Buckeyes achieved a 10-0 lead less than three minutes into the second quarter and they went into the half up 24-0. I think that qualifies as a quick double digit lead. A.

4. "Don't be surprised if…. The Defense forces Stanton into three turnovers. He will toss some ints, that is a given, but he holds onto the ball so long that I would not be surprised to see him fumble due to the blindside pressure of Vernon Gholston." Well he didn't get a whole lot of blindside pressure, that would imply that there was in fact a "pocket." There wasn't. Quinn Pitcock ate him up bad. He did throw one bad int on screen pass, intercepted by Marcus Freeman, but by in large his decision making was not too bad, aside from holding onto the ball to pick up one extra yard on the side line! C-.

5. “Don’t be surprised if…. Chris Wells gets his first 100 yard game.” Not even close, 54 yards. Furthermore, his huge fumble in the beginning of the game could have been the spark that the Spartans needed to get started. F.

Well, I said to take Ohio State to cover the 14.5 point spread easily and they did. I was more reluctant to play the over and actually, if you read the message boards, I recommended actually a reversal on the over/under based on wind conditions at game time. That is why it is important to read the boards! A.

PROPS TO THE PROGNOSTICATOR OF THE WEEK:

Every week I will recognize the prognosticator who goes on the record with the most insightful prediction of the score and or key match ups of the game. This week’s score winner was a push between yours truly with an official prediction of 31-10 (10 point differential) and Pup, Cris Sykes, with a predition of 45-10 (for a 10 point differential).

It was also a push on the key points/game summary. I said, “The Bucks defense will be dominating, lots LOTS LOTS of sacks, pressure, and a few turnovers. I am not wishing ill on Drew Stanton, but I would not be surprised if he were knocked out of the game; he is already pretty badly banged up and MSU is using its 5th offensive line of the season against a very dangerous front 4.”

And Cris said, *“…Ginn scores on a punt return. Smith throws for 2, runs for 1.”*

Nice Job Cris.

Everyone else, **make sure to get your pick in for next week’s game here** . You could find yourself getting some props as our Prognosticator of the Week.