A short time ago, before the 9-1 streak was broken last November, you could hear OSU fans lamenting the state of the Michigan rivalry and longing for the day when the Wolverines would return to challenge the Buckeyes like the good old days...or something. “For the Big Ten Conference to be respectable, Michigan has to be good.”, or words to that effect. Okay, I might have been one of those people.

It’s still true. You just don’t hear Buckeye fans mouthing it a lot anymore. There are a lot of indications that Brady Hoke has the Wolverine program back on its feet. An 11-win season, a top five recruiting class, and a BCS bowl win are just a few of them. It’s debatable of course, but it’s important that *they* believe it. And if their demeanor...and their swagger...and their smack talk after one consecutive victory over the Buckeyes is any indication, they
*do*
believe it.

Hoke clearly “gets” OSU-Michigan in a way Rich Rodriguez never demonstrated. From the start he has needled the program in Columbus, including his insistence on calling his rival to the south “Ohio”. The irritation of Buckeye fans at this slight is especially rich. This from the program with the iconic coach who refused to utter the “M” word at all.

That’s the kind of thing on Hoke’s part that even OSU fans have to admit is in the spirit of the rivalry. We did insist we wanted to preserve The Game, didn’t we? (Some of Hoke’s recent shots at Ohio State have been less in that spirit, and I think it’s worth drawing the distinction.)

MICHIGAN