... is a dead gopher. Anytime I can interject a Caddyshack reference is OK with me, and its certainly appropo with the Gophers in Columbus for today's tilt with THE Ohio State University at 3:30 PM EST this afternoon at The Horseshoe. As he is each Saturday morning, Furls is here with The Best Damn Buckeye Football Preview in the land.

... is a dead gopher," quoth the master thespian Bill Murray in his master work, Caddyshack.

That statement is as true today as it was in the early 80s, for you just cannot trust a gopher, not even a Golden Gopher. A significant number of this year's Golden Gophers are Ohioans, seventeen to be exact. Even their coach, Glenn Mason, is an Ohioan. As you can see, gophers are every bit as treacherous as Bill Murray believed.

Treacherous enough to make a run at the #1 Ohio State Buckeyes in the 'Shoe today? Not even close. The only real question remaining about the outcome of this game is; do Gophers make a crunching sound or a squishing sound when you stomp them with a size fifteen jackboot? If you have any experience in this matter, please email me personally at furls@peta.com.

While I do think that this Gopher team has a wolverine's shot in Columbus in this game, there are some interesting facts about this game that are at least worth mentioning. Seven years ago Glenn Mason was a leading candidate to replace John Cooper. He lost the job to Jim Tressel by the thinnest of margins. The man can coach. Unfortunately little kids in southern Canada (that is how I prefer to think about Minnesota) don't dream about playing football for the Golden Gophers; they dream about skating the Icecapades (or hockey, whatever you like to call that game). Football talent is a bit thin up there, but the Gophers cheerleaders are not. They have that "extra layer" to protect them against the cold Minnesota winter, or so I have heard, but I did not see that episode of Wild Discovery personally so it is only speculation.

Now if you have a hard time believing that little boys in Minnesota would rather grow up playing hockey than playing football, I submit the following evidence: seventeen Ohio kids, including quarterback Brian Cupito, had to be exported from Ohio to play football up there. Think of it like a football missionary program, they are spreading the word of Woody to the backwards peoples of the North.

In all seriousness, Glenn Mason is a very good coach. He has nearly restored that Golden

Gopher's team to respectability. Ironically, the fans have turned on him this year. This guy has pulled Minnesota football from a level of futility matched only by the Indians in the early 80s to bowl games. One poor season and they are already calling for his job.

Introducing the Minnesota Golden Gophers, I knew we should've used those illegal lawn traps.

This is NOT last year's Golden Gophers team. That team was among the leaders in rushing yards. This team averages a respectable 160 rushing yards per game, but were held to just 99 yards on the ground against that national power, Division I AA North Dakota State. How far have the Gophers fallen? Last year they ran the ball for nearly 300 yards per game (273 to be exact).

They still feature the same quarterback, Brian Cupito, who rang up 390 yards through the air against Ohio State last year, but that was against a different defensive strategy. Last year's game plan? Stop the run. This year's game plan, well they can't run the ball, so get out your size fifteen jackboots and….

Brian Cupito has had some success throwing the ball this year, but still completes less than 60% of his passes. His wide receivers are decent, but once you get past Logan Payne they are very ordinary. Teams that feature one good WR have had problems throwing the ball all year, largely because the Buckeyes lockdown corner, Malcolm Jenkins, has done a terrific job shutting them down.

On the defensive side of the ball, the Gophers have been equally soft against the run and the pass. The are giving up slightly less than 200 yards per game through the air and slightly more than 160 yards per game on the ground. Those numbers are not horrific, but they are not good either. Against the Wolverines, the only competition they have faced with talent similar to Ohio State, they gave up 284 through the air and 234 on the ground.

The Matchups ...

Ohio State Offense vs. Minnesota Defense. Ohio State has embarrassed much better defenses this year. That is not to say that the Gophers don't play decent defense, they do, but they do not rank anywhere near the Longhorns or the Hawkeyes. The only way that the Buckeyes will not dominate this matchup is if they come out cold, looking past Minnesota to Michigan.

Minnesota Offense vs. Ohio State Defense. This is not last year's Gophers. This team struggles to run the ball and that is bad news for QB Brian Cupito. The Buckeyes should be able to just sell out to some extent and apply additional pressure to the Minnesota QB. Complicating matters is the fact that the Minnesota WRs do not match up favorably with the Buckeye's secondary.

Don't Be Surprised If…

~If the Buckeyes do not even allow a moral victory this week. Don't be surprised if the Buckeyes shut them out.

~The Buckeyes put 500 yards of offense.

~The Buckeyes put up 250 yards on the ground.

~The Buckeyes record 7 sacks or more.

If I were a betting man ...

I would take the Buckeyes –28. This year they have been covering the big spreads, actually just about every spread, and today will be no exception. Giving up thirty with Jim Tressel used to scare me, but the Buckeyes defense puts so much pride in not giving up points even the reserves are doing a good job keeping the score down. That said, the Buckeyes should have no trouble putting up 40, but will induce a Jim Tressel induced offensive slow down right after. He just doesn't hang 50 on anyone.

I would stay away from the over under altogether.