In his preview, Furls asked if there was any fight left in the Illini. In his recap, he asks why the Buckeyes stopped fighting in the second half. After getting out to an easy 17-0 lead in the first half, the Fighting Illini defense shut down the Ohio State offense. What in the hell happened?

Hyperconservative play calling probably cost the Buckeyes an easy win. After getting out to an easy 17-0 lead in the first half, the Fighting Illini defense shut down the Ohio State offense. What in the hell happened?

Well, much of the blame can be placed on an offensive line that looked ordinary. As a matter of fact - they looked bad. They were beat off the ball consistently in the second half and driven back. The Illinois defense had a couple of players three yards deep on every running play; it was like they knew what was coming, but how would they know that?

It could be that the Ohio State Buckeyes borrowed Maurice Carthon's playbook, which bears a striking resemblance to the Jim Tressel 2002 playbook. After mixing things up and running right down the field in the first half the Buckeyes became shockingly predictable. How predictable? Well let's take a look at some numbers:

The Buckeyes ran a mere thirty plays from scrimmage in the second half. Of those thirty

plays, twenty were runs. If you are moving the ball like the 1980s Nebraska Cornhuskers, a 2:1 run to pass ratio is fine, but when your running back is averaging slightly less than 2 yards per carry ...

Yet it was not just that the Buckeyes ran so much that made them predictable, it was when they ran. The Buckeyes had the ball on first down eleven times in the second half. Any guesses at how many times they threw the ball? One, and it was a screen pass that lost three yards.

If you can handle subtraction you can see that the Buckeyes threw the ball ten times in the second half, any guess what the average down and distance was? Well of their ten passes in the second half, seven were called on third and long. As a result of this predictable play calling the Buckeyes average third down in the second half was 3rd and ten.

I don't care who you are and what you are ranked, when you are this predictable it sure makes the opposition's defense appear that much better. Apparently the Ohio State offensive staff thought that a seventeen-point lead was enough, but they were nearly proven wrong by an Illinois team that hung around for far too long.

Illinois' effort will be given praise and hyperbole, words like "valiant, gritty, and shocking" will be used, but they had some serious help from the ineptitude of the Buckeyes play calling. Ron Zook is already guilty of the same thing. He said in his post game press conference that he thought his team did a great job of settling down in the second half. I would argue that it is easy to be calm when you know what is coming.

Grading the Positions:

Quarterback: B. One interception and a performance that appeared rather ordinary, but Troy

cannot be held solely accountable for his struggles. He really could not do much facing 3rd down and seven or more for the entire second half.

Running Back: D. Chris Wells does not need to see the field for the duration of the season. His fumbling is excessive and frankly the only thing more shocking than his fumble:carry ratio is the way that he is fumbling; he is not even being hit. He is just dropping the ball. Pittman needs to do a better job of blocking, but he does not carry all the blame for his 1.8 yard per carry average.

Wide Receivers: I. Couple of drops, but apparently the coaching staff forgot that we had wide receivers (and that they could run down the field). They get no grade because they were not really part of the “game plan” today.

Offensive Line: F. They made Illinois look like Worldbeaters today. I actually had to double check to make sure that Simeon Rice was not back on the field. The Illini knew what was coming and that made the O-lines job harder, but let’s face it, this is Illinois and they should’ve been up to the task regardless.

Defensive Line: A. The D-line turned in another terrific performance upfront. If they could’ve caught Williams it would’ve been ugly, but they did get pressure and held Illinois to under 100 yards on the ground.

Linebackers: A. Solid play all around. Curtis Terry is emerging as the third linebacker is proving to be a solid asset when the Buckeyes go into nickel. Laurinaitis made the play of the game, and may have essentially kept the game out of overtime with his fifth interception.

Secondary: A. Illinois quarterbacks, not known for their efficiency, completed 40% (14-35) of their passes and the physical play by the secondary was evident through the entire game.

Coaching: F. The only thing that stands in the way between Ohio State and another national title is play calling like yesterday's. Yesterday they allowed a team to stay in the game through the fourth quarter. A good team might have beaten them. If the Buckeyes were content to just run the clock out in the second half, they should've just taken a knee on each play. It would have probably been more effective (no incompletions stopping the clock on 3rd down) and would not have risked the health of the players.

Hopefully everyone, coaching staff included learned a lesson from that one. The one thing the staff accomplished today, was they artificially created a four quarter game and have now breathed new hope into Northwestern and Michigan that this Buckeyes team is beatable.

Grading the Grader:

I fail all predictions. I thought we were past this hyperconservative coaching style that makes mountains out of molehills. At least this week, I was wrong.

Props to the Prognosticator of the Week: Swerb

I am not even going to bother with point differentials because no one was close. I am giving it to Rich based on the following comments:

"Looking at these two teams, it seems like theres no way Illinois should or could be able to give any resistance at all to the Buckeyes.

However, Illinois is playing better, and is at home. Game should be cold and very windy. Illini has a QB that can make things happen, and the Bucks have a couple guys that they will rest (errr ... they're hurt, yeah, thats it) on defense.

At no point will the outcome be in question. However, the Bucks have to have a letdown game at some point this season. Even in '02, they had a couple games where they were sloppy, underachieved, and got spooked.

Tressel will try and strike quick with his aerial weapons early, and pound the ball late in a windy environment. Juice Williams makes one big play with his feet and one with his arm.

The Buckeye offense has one of its least prolific days of the year. Troy throws a pick and the Bucks lose a couple fumbles. A late Illinois TD makes the final score ...

Ohio State 34 Illinois 17."

Nice Job Rich!