The last time Ohio State played in Evanston, they were stunned in a nationally televised Saturday night game on ESPN. Are there any paralells between these two games? Do the Buckeyes have anything to worry about playing a Wildcat teams that is playing their best ball of the year? And how will the team approach the final tuneup to the epic showdown next Saturday? Furls is here with the best damn Buckeye preview in the land.

Bob Barker says….

To prevent Wildcat's have your pets spayed or neutered. Unfortunately, the last time the Buckeyes played in Evanston - they were the ones that were sterilized.

In 2004, the Buckeyes came out on the short end of the stick for the first time since 1971, the year before Archie Griffin set foot on Ohio State's campus. That game was a stunning defeat that encapsulated the sluggish start for a disappointing Buckeye's team. Remarkably, even Mike Nugent was off, he missed a field goal in overtime, which in college football is basically the kiss of death. That was a different time and that was a different team.

The 2004 Buckeyes went on to an 8-4 record and destroyed a favored Oklahoma St. team in the Alamo Bowl. There are no real parallels between that game and this year's game.

Last week the Buckeyes played in their first close game of the season. Those in the national media are calling that game a scare, but I disagree. I do not deny that Ohio State did not play its best game of the year, but the game was not really in question.

Much of the blame for the close score falls squarely on the shoulders of the coaching staff. It is pretty damn arrogant for a coaching staff to think that the only need to play one half of a game in another team's stadium. It felt as if the coaching staff thought that they did not have to do anything else in the game offensively, and they were content to just basically take a knee and run out the clock. I would hope that they learned their lesson, and I think we will see much more aggressive play calling in this game. This does not bode well for the Wildcats.

Introducing the 2006 Northwestern Wildcats ...

Let us make no bones about it, this Northwestern team is NOT good. They lost their coach to a heart attack before the season, but this team was not going to be good no matter who was coaching it. They lack talent and depth.

Lately the Wildcats have been playing better but that's because they have once again started giving the ball to running back Tyrell Sutton. For some unknown reason, Northwestern head coach Pat Fitzgerald was not getting him the ball. All Sutton did last year was run for almost 1500 yards on 250 carries, scoring 16 TDs in the process.

This is not the crazy Northwestern offense that we have grown accustomed to seeing. In the past, Northwestern was known for a quirky, kind of awkward version of the spread. As strange

as that offense was, it was pretty effective. Last year, quarterback Brett Basanez passed for 3600 yards and 21 TDs, and this year Northwestern's passing stats project to about ½ of that total. Losing Basanez obviously hurt, but I am not sure anyone thought that it would devastate this team as badly as it has. The Wildcats have been unable to find any offense, anywhere.

The Wildcats are just about as bad defensively. They are undersized and slow. They are equally horrific against the run and the pass, which means that they should receive a balanced pasting from Ohio State.

Northwestern has not played any significant offensive powerhouses this season and has still managed to give up nearly 400 yards of offense per game, (145 on the ground, 220 in the air). Hell, this team lost to a division IAA team and struggled mightily with Eastern Michigan. I don't care what Jim Tressel says, this team stinks.

The Match Ups ...

Ohio State Offense vs. Northwestern Defense

Well we learned last week that Ohio State's offense can only be stopped by an aggressive defense (and exceptionally predictable playcalling). Let's not give Illinois more credit than they deserve. The offense really deserves a lot less blame for that game than the coaching staff.

Here in Columbus the coaching staff has taken a lot of grief from the local media and the fans. I have a feeling that the Illinois game is the last game that we will see the "governor" on the offense. Pray for the Wildcats.

Ohio State Defense vs. Northwestern Offense

If there is one really nice thing about playing Northwestern this week, it is that they are a very good tune up for Michigan. Tyrell Sutton is a short, stocky, quick back, very much like Mike Hart and Northwestern does use quite a bit of zone blocking like Michigan. So this game should be a lot like playing the scout team (except less talented).

I think this game will be a terrific warm up for the Buckeyes as they prepare to play their scout team this week. Everyone knows that you cannot go into practice unprepared.

In all seriousness, we should be able to see a lot about Ohio State's ability to stop the run this week, but don't think for one minute that Northwestern's offensive line will be any kind of substitute for the Jake Long and company, although I do think that Sutton is a better back than Hart.

Don't be surprised if…

I fall asleep before halftime.

I spend more time scouting Michigan in their game vs. Indiana than I do watching this game.

Troy Smith puts up his biggest numbers of the season.

Chris Wells gets his first 100 yard game. I think the coaching staff knows that he needs the confidence right now and Ohio State will need him in short yardage next week.

If I were a betting man ...

Take the Buckeyes –22. Hell, take them –40. I have been saying to take them most of the year and I have been right. This team is not going to play like it has something to prove, they are going to play like a team on a mission. Stay away from the over/under, but if you must play it, then I say take the over because 42 points just doesn't seem to go as far as it used to.

My score prediction ...

OSU 45 Northwestern 7. Buckeyes 2nd string offense scores 2TDs in the 2nd half.

Hurry and post **your** prediction here.