

# 2010 Big Ten football previews: Minnesota (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

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The first team I will spend time on here in this series of Big Ten season previews is the Minnesota Golden Gophers. Iowa will play at Minnesota on Nov. 27 at TCF Bank Stadium.

Minnesota is coming off a 6-7 season that ended with a 14-13 loss to Iowa State in the 2009 Insight Bowl. In assessing their outlook for 2010, I don't see the Golden Gophers being that great a team.

What a mediocre or poor season record-wise does with regards to Tim Brewster's job security as head coach remains to be seen. But I just don't see this year's version of the Golden Gophers being any better, even though some may say this is as talented a team Brewster has had in Minnesota.

The good news for the Golden Gophers is that they have nine returning starters on the offensive side of the ball, one of which being senior quarterback Adam Weber, who has been the team's starter since his freshman campaign in 2007. However, his numbers have slowly declined with each season.

In 2009, Minnesota's all-time leader in career completions, pass attempts and passing yards completed 52 percent of his throws for 2.582 yards. His touchdown-to-interception ratio was less than stellar though, tossing 13 touchdowns to 15 picks.

The Golden Gophers also have the services of sophomore signal-caller MarQueis Gray, who rushed for 265 yards on 47 carries, while completing 6-of-15 passes for 62 yards as a true

freshman last season for Minnesota.

Another positive the Golden Gophers are going to have entering the 2010 season is that all five starters along the offensive line return in junior Chris Bunders and seniors Dominic Alford, D.J. Burris, Matt Carufel, and Jeff Wills.

Minnesota will have a few experienced playmakers returning. Junior running back Duane Bennett led the Golden Gophers in rushing last season with 376 yards on 98 carries and six touchdowns. Despite the loss of wide receiver Eric Decker, who was selected by the Denver Broncos in the 2010 NFL Draft, Minnesota has a couple of junior receivers with experience in Troy Stoudermire and Da'Jon McKnight.

I know the Golden Gophers played the second half of their season minus Decker, who got hurt in a loss to Ohio State, and even won a couple of games. But aside from a 42-point performance against Michigan State, Minnesota's offense really sputtered without his services late in the year.

To me, when it comes to the offense, this team will have to prove it can run the ball effectively, otherwise Weber is going to have to make some of these younger, inexperienced receivers into big-time playmakers.

The biggest problem this team has had to face is with the defense, as the entire front seven from last season is gone.

The leaders of this group are in the secondary with senior defensive backs Kim Royston and Kyle Theret.

Lack of starting experience here ought to be a concern, especially since Minnesota managed to hold Iowa to a mere 12 points on offense in last year's meeting at Kinnick Stadium.

As far as the schedule is concerned, Gopher fans have reason to be excited with USC, Penn State, Ohio State, and Iowa all visiting TCF Bank Stadium this fall. Normally, this is a good

thing when your team is also as good as these opponents.

Now while the Golden Gophers are still going to have the luxury of playing all these games at home, it's not unreasonable to think they could lose all four of these games.

Minnesota also plays two other non-conference games that may or may not prove challenging. Oddsmakers in Las Vegas already have it labeled a 4.5-point underdog in its season opener on Sept. 2 against defending Sun Belt Conference champion Middle Tennessee State. Also, Northern Illinois, a team that played in the International Bowl last season and is considered to be a favorite in the MAC's West division, comes to Minneapolis on Sept. 25.

In all honesty, the Golden Gophers' best chance for a home win in Big Ten play comes in their conference opener against Northwestern on Oct. 2. Minnesota also plays road games at Wisconsin, Purdue, Michigan State, and Illinois. The Golden Gophers got wins over the Boilermakers and Spartans last season, but lost to both the Badgers and Fighting Illini at TCF Bank Stadium.

If Minnesota is going to find itself playing a 13th game in late December or possibly early January, it will need major contributions from its new group of upper-classmen starting on the defensive side of the ball. A presence is needed there in order to keep pressure off of guys like Weber. The recipe to have a successful offense is there if Minnesota can run the ball well and get contributions from its returning wideouts.

The way I see it, asking for all of this might be too much. This team isn't atrocious like it was during Brewster's inaugural season back in 2007, but it will have to definitely earn its way to bowl eligibility in 2010.

[Minnesota QB Adam Weber](#)