2010 Big Ten football previews: Indiana (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

After examining Minnesota and Illinois, the next Big Ten team we will preview is the Indiana Hoosiers. Iowa will be making a trip to Memorial Stadium in Bloomington, Ind., on Nov. 6.

When I look at Indiana, I see a team that has potential to go to its second bowl in four years under head coach Bill Lynch. The idea of the Hoosiers playing in a bowl might seem crazy, but I think this is a team that can go 6-6 this season and maybe play in a game like the Little Caesars Bowl in Detroit.

Normally, I'd get into the schedule last and discuss the team itself first. But I'm going to take a different approach when talking about Indiana.

Towson, at Western Kentucky, Akron, and Arkansas State. Those are the four non-conference games the Hoosiers will play this season. There's no reason to think Indiana can't win all four of these contests, in all honesty. Towson is an FCS school, Western Kentucky was winless last season, Indiana beat Akron head-to-head last year, and Arkansas State won't have some of the playmakers it had on display like Alex Carrington when it visited Iowa City last October.

The Hoosiers may have only won one Big Ten game last season (against Illinois), but they were in position to win at least three others, all of which came on the road last season. Michigan was the beneficiary of some questionable calls that went against Indiana in the Hoosiers' Big Ten opener last season. Northwestern had to overcome a 28-3 deficit to beat Indiana at home. The Hoosiers also appeared poised to pull off

a monumental upset at Kinnick Stadium before Tyler Sash's pick-six gave momentum to Iowa that it would later seize in the fourth quarter of that game.

This season, the Wolverines, Wildcats, and Hawkeyes all have to make trips to Bloomington. I'm not trying to suggest Indiana gets revenge and wins all three of these games this season, but it has to think it will have a chance in each of these three games this time around.

And for my money, that Iowa-Indiana game could very well end up being the game that decides Lynch's fate as the Hoosiers' head coach. Given the Hoosiers' out-of-conference slate, the worst I see Indiana going into that Nov. 6 contest is 4-4. Consider that Indiana moved its home game against Penn State to FedEx Field in Landover, Md., and that Iowa game is now the Hoosiers' Senior Day.

It's also the start of a November that might prove daunting, with games at Wisconsin, against Penn State, and at Purdue for the Old Oaken' Bucket that follow.

Now as for the actual team, I like Ben Chappell. I like the fact Indiana has a senior quarterback who has proven he can lead a team by his performance on the field. I think the pistol offense the Hoosiers run is of benefit to a player like Chappell.

Last season, the 6-3 signal-caller threw 17 touchdowns and 15 interceptions. You know who else posted the exact same numbers? Iowa's Ricky Stanzi. The difference obviously was the teams those two had around them.

I also like a couple of the playmakers Chappell is going to have to distribute the ball to. Juniors Damarlo Belcher and Tandon Doss both had 70-plus receptions and five touchdown catches for the Hoosiers last season. As long as the offensive line gives Chappell time to throw, which again, being in a pistol offense helps this, I would expect those two wideouts

to post similar numbers again this season for Indiana.

The big voids for the Hoosiers are going to be in the trenches on both sides of the ball. The O-Line loses Rodger Saffold, who was taken by the St. Louis Rams in the second round of the NFL Draft. The D-Line loses a couple of key players from last season in Jammie Kirlew and Greg Middleton. That duo combined for 100 tackles and 9.5 sacks last season.

This season, Indiana's leader on the defensive side of the ball is senior linebacker Tyler Replogle, who had 80 tackles, two sacks, and an interception in 2009 for the Hoosiers. His younger brother, sophomore Adam Replogle, started 11 games at defensive tackle for Indiana last season, recording 32 tackles and four sacks.

It's a rather young defense Indiana returns, but if this area of the team can improve off of last season, that would go a long way in determining how far the Hoosiers go in 2010.

Again, I'm not predicting a breakout season that sees Indiana competing for a Big Ten title or anything like that. I just think the chances of it making a bowl this year look better than most will give it credit for. As long as the Hoosiers take care of business out-of-conference, asking for two Big Ten wins really isn't much.

Indiana QB Ben Chappell