

2010 Big Ten football previews: Michigan (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

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So far, we have previewed [Minnesota](#), [Illinois](#), and [Indiana](#). The next Big Ten team we will examine is the Michigan Wolverines. Iowa pays a visit to the Big House on Oct. 16.

I get that there are people out there who think Michigan will bounce back in 2010. I understand there are those who can't fathom the thought of Michigan being mediocre at best for a third consecutive year. The mystiques of the Maize and Blue, the winged helmet, The Big House, "The Game" against Ohio State, are all engrained in the fiber of the typical college football fan.

All of those things are great. But they don't have anything to do with the current situation in Ann Arbor.

Is the Big Ten better when the Wolverines are hunting for a Big Ten title? Probably. But if that's how an outsider is going to judge the conference this year, well, it won't be giving the Big Ten a rave review.

To me, Michigan is at best a 6-6 team, one that could play in a bowl such as the Texas Bowl or Dallas Football Classic. It's not as though the Wolverines don't have enough talent on their roster to go .500 this season. However, I just don't see how Michigan can be seen as back in the Big Ten's upper echelon.

I believe it starts with the head coach, first and foremost. I have always thought highly of Rich Rodriguez as a good football coach. He was quite successful at West Virginia. I just don't think he was ever the right fit at Michigan,

although he could prove a lot of doubters wrong with a successful season this fall.

As far as the quarterback battle is concerned, I feel as though the consensus is that the Wolverines are going to end up starting sophomore Denard Robinson over sophomore Tate Forcier when they open their season on Sept. 4 against Connecticut. Robinson showed a knack for running with the football as a true freshman, picking up 351 yards rushing on 69 carries. One of his five rushing touchdowns came in a 30-28 loss to Iowa.

Robinson only completed 14-of-31 passes with two touchdowns, both of which came in a win over Delaware State.

Meanwhile, Forcier threw 13 touchdown passes last season for the Wolverines, but only four of those tosses came during the second half of Michigan's season when it began to free fall. The San Diego native put up 2,050 yards through the air, and also had 240 yards on the ground with three rushing touchdowns, including one in the final seconds to beat Notre Dame.

When the Wolverines do elect to go through the air, there are four receivers they will heavily depend on. The best of the bunch might be the youngest, sophomore Roy Roundtree. Last season, Roundtree had 32 receptions for 434 yards and three touchdowns. Michigan also has juniors Darryl Stonum, Martavious Odoms, and Junior Hemingway. Of the three, only Hemingway had multiple touchdowns (2), but both came in the opener against Western Michigan.

The offensive line features the lone senior on Michigan's first-string offense in left guard Stephen Schilling, who was recently voted one of the team's captains for the 2010 season. Schilling made the switch to left guard from right tackle last season and started all 12 games in 2009. In fact, the only start Schilling has missed came against Ohio State in 2008 due

to an injury in practice that week.

Offensively, Michigan will be OK. Defense is where the problems existed last season and will likely continue to exist in 2010.

The Wolverines lose two of their only bright spots defensively from 2009 in defensive end Brandon Graham and cornerback Donovan Warren. Graham was selected in the first round of the NFL Draft by the Philadelphia Eagles, while Warren didn't get picked despite foregoing his senior season.

Making matters worse for Michigan is the recent injury of senior Troy Woolfolk. The 6-0 defensive back suffered a dislocated ankle during the Wolverines' fall camp, and is likely out for the entire 2010 season. His absence, combined with Warren's decision to leave early, has Michigan very thin with depth in the secondary.

Looking at the Wolverines' 2010 schedule, it features a couple of difficult non-conference games out of the gate with Connecticut coming to The Big House, and at Notre Dame. The Huskies are considered one of the favorites to win the Big East, while the Fighting Irish will break in a new regime with Brian Kelly at the helm.

Simply put, Michigan is going to have to win at least one of those games (if not both) to potentially be bowl-eligible this year. In Big Ten play, the Wolverines do get to welcome Michigan State, Iowa, Illinois and Wisconsin to Ann Arbor, all of whom they lost to in 2009. Michigan also has to travel to Indiana, Penn State, Purdue, and Ohio State this season, with Indiana being the only team Michigan doesn't have a losing streak against.

Again, some are going to think the Wolverines finally rebound and that this is the year Rodriguez restores Michigan back to glory. I'm just not seeing it. But as I said, if Michigan can beat either Connecticut or Notre Dame (or both), a shot at

being bowl eligible isn't entirely out of the question.

[Michigan OL Stephen Schilling](#)