

2010 Big Ten football previews: Purdue (premium)

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After discussing [Minnesota](#), [Illinois](#), [Indiana](#), and [Michigan](#), the next Big Ten team I will spend time focusing on is the Purdue Boilermakers. Iowa does not play Purdue this season.

A year ago at this time, I saw Purdue as a conference cellar-dweller, a team that was going to be in rebuilding mode for awhile under Danny Hope, who had to fill the void left by Joe Tiller.

Although the Boilermakers didn't make a bowl game last season, they fared better than I could have imagined. Purdue took Oregon to the brink inside Autzen Stadium, and shocked both Ohio State and Michigan. The Boilermakers weren't bowl eligible, but they went 4-4 in Big Ten play.

This season, I think Purdue takes that next step and can finish anywhere between 7-5 and 9-3.

The story on the offensive side of the ball is at quarterback, where Miami (Fla.) transfer Robert Marve steps in to replace Joey Elliott. Marve started 11 games at quarterback for the Hurricanes as a freshman in 2008, where he threw for 1,293 yards as a redshirt freshman. However, he only threw nine touchdowns to 13 interceptions.

To me, how Purdue fares offensively depends on how Marve performs. If he stays consistent, the Boilermakers' offense is legit. If he struggles, then Purdue might not meet the seven-win plateau I think it will reach.

At running back, junior Ralph Bolden was listed as the starter

before suffering a knee injury during the spring. With his status uncertain, the Boilermakers are looking at sophomore Al-Terek McBurse to carry the ground game. McBurse only saw action at running back in two games for Purdue, while Bolden had 935 rushing yards and nine touchdowns on the ground for the Boilermakers last season.

Purdue's receiving corps is led by senior Keith Smith, who led the Boilermakers in 2009 with 91 catches for 1,100 receiving yards and six touchdowns. But perhaps the most intriguing storyline here is with junior Justin Siller.

Siller, who played both quarterback and running back for Purdue as a freshman in 2008, was dismissed from Purdue in 2009 for an academic violation. He was reinstated last spring and has converted to wideout.

Defensively, Purdue has one of the best defensive ends in the entire conference with senior Ryan Kerrigan. Last year, Kerrigan started all 12 games for the Boilermakers, recording 66 tackles (18.5 for a loss of yards) and leading the Big Ten with 13 sacks.

In fact, it was during Purdue's defining moment in 2009 when the 6-4 defensive end truly delivered. In the 26-18 victory over Ohio State, Kerrigan had a season-high of nine tackles, four of which came for a loss of yards. The Muncie, Ind., native also recorded three sacks and forced two fumbles against the Buckeyes.

Kerrigan is undoubtedly the most important player defensively for the Boilermakers, as he is one of two seniors projected to start on that side of the ball. That other senior is linebacker Jason Werner, who bounced back from a back injury in 2008 to record 77 tackles for Purdue last season, 61 of which were unassisted.

The question mark defensively is in the secondary, as the Boilermakers lost all four of their starters from 2009. If

Purdue's front seven is able to get pressure on opposing quarterbacks, I wouldn't worry much about these guys being beat frequently through the air.

Purdue also returns one of the Big Ten's top kickers in junior Carson Wiggs. Although he only connected on 14-of-21 field goal attempts last season, six of the seven misses came from 40-plus yards out. Wiggs did make a 59-yard try in the Boilermakers' season opener at Toledo.

Now, the schedule. I think this year's slate of games sets up nicely for Purdue. The Boilermakers dodge both Iowa and Penn State for the second consecutive year. They should also be favored in six of their seven home games in 2010 (the exception being their Nov. 6 contest against Wisconsin, who beat Purdue 37-0 last season).

As for the road games, there are two I don't see the Boilermakers winning, two I think are toss-ups, and one I think they do win for certain. The game I think Purdue wins is at Illinois, while the two losses are to Ohio State (who will be seeking payback) and Michigan State.

The season-opener at Notre Dame, and the Oct. 9 primetime contest at Northwestern are the two games I can see going either way. And who knows? If Purdue is able to win both these contests, it could be looking at a 6-0 record when it visits the Horseshoe on Oct. 23 to face the Buckeyes.

As I said before, I believe Purdue is further along under Hope than I envisioned it being at this juncture when he first took over. If Marve can live up to expectations at quarterback, and the front seven can keep an inexperienced secondary from being completely exposed, I fully expect the Boilermakers to be bowling again this winter for the first time since 2007.

[Purdue DE Ryan Kerrigan](#)