

# 2010 Big Ten football previews: Penn State (premium)

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Thus far in our Big Ten season preview series, we have discussed [Minnesota](#), [Illinois](#), [Indiana](#), [Michigan](#), [Purdue](#), [Northwestern](#), and [Michigan State](#). We now turn our attention to the No. 19 Penn State Nittany Lions. Iowa will play its Homecoming game against Penn State on Oct. 2 at Kinnick Stadium.

Despite all the questions surrounding Penn State heading into the 2010 season, I keep finding myself thinking the Nittany Lions are a 9-3 caliber team.

Penn State has won 22 of 26 games over the past two seasons and has appeared in the Rose & Capital One Bowls, with the latter being a 19-17 victory over LSU. Maybe Penn State doesn't take quite the dive this season as some are expecting, but I don't see how this year's team is anywhere close to the 2008 or 2009 squads.

I'll get this out of the way about Joe Paterno. As much as it gets speculated whether he'll retire at season's end or not, I don't see JoePa leaving after this season. At least that's what my gut feeling is. I say that because I think Paterno wants to be around for next season when the Big Ten officially expands with the addition of Nebraska.

Now, looking at the Nittany Lions, their biggest issue right now is at quarterback.

Yes, Daryll Clark struggled in games against Iowa the past

couple of years, but his 22-4 record as a starter, as well as a conference championship to his name, should make him the best quarterback Penn State had since Kerry Collins led the Nittany Lions to an unbeaten campaign in 1994.

Not only has Clark moved on, but now you have four guys still competing right now to fill that void. After spring practices, it looked like sophomore Kevin Newsome was the front-runner to replace Clark. He had 66 yards passing and 95 yards rushing last season for the Nittany Lions.

But it appears right now he hasn't separated himself from the likes of sophomore Matt McGloin and freshmen Robert Bolden and Paul Jones. Given how we're a week away from the 2010 season starting, this is alarming to me.

Whoever is fortunate enough to win the job as Penn State's signal-caller will have the luxury of a loaded backfield, led by senior running back Evan Royster. Although he took a dive statistically in 2009 rushing for 1,169 yards and six touchdowns, Royster only needs 481 yards on the ground to surpass Curt Warner as Penn State's all-time leading rusher.

Behind Royster is junior Stephfon Green, who had 319 yards rushing and three touchdowns last season for the Nittany Lions.

The offensive line features one of the conference's premiere linemen in senior Stefen Wisniewski. After starting at guard during Penn State's Rose Bowl season of 2008, Wisniewski moved over to center last year and was named first-team all-Big Ten. Now going into the 2010 campaign, Wisniewski moves back over to guard to make room for senior center Doug Klopacz.

As for the receiving corps, it returns senior Graham Zug and junior Derek Moyer. However, junior Chaz Powell, who caught a 79-yard touchdown pass on the first play of Penn State's game against Iowa last season, is making the switch over to cornerback while still handling kickoff return duties for the

Nittany Lions.

Powell will be a part of an experienced Penn State secondary, which is clearly the strength of this year's defense. Returning are three starters from last year in junior cornerback D'Anton Lynn and junior safeties Drew Astorino and Nick Sukay. Last season, the two safeties combined for three interceptions, while Lynn had 35 tackles (26 solo) and five pass break-ups.

It's the front seven that might be a major concern for Penn State in 2010. While it returns senior defensive tackle Ollie Ogbu, who recorded 30 tackles and two sacks in 2009, it loses a major piece up front from last season in Jared Odrick, who was taken in the first round of the NFL Draft by the Miami Dolphins.

In addition, Penn State's linebacking corps takes a major hit after both Sean Lee and Navorro Bowman, who chose to forego his senior year, went off to the NFL.

Part of me is very skeptical about the Nittany Lions. I wonder how big a distraction Paterno's coaching status becomes. I wonder about the quarterback play Penn State will have when defenses load up the box with eight or nine players to stop Royster. I wonder how effective that front seven will be.

Yet even with all these question marks, I look at their schedule, and I only see three for-sure losses for the Nittany Lions. In fact, all three of those games – at Alabama, at Iowa, at Ohio State – are all away from State College, Pa.

Penn State avoids Wisconsin this season, and gets the luxury of playing teams such as Michigan, Northwestern, and Michigan State at Beaver Stadium this season.

Part of me feels like the Nittany Lions may slip up in a game or two at home, but right now, I just don't see where it would be. And I got to say, if Penn State overcomes all these areas

of uncertainty and finishes 9-3 or better this season, then hats off to Joe Paterno and his coaching staff.

I'm not sure the No. 19 ranking given by the AP is justified right now, but given the schedule, this might be about where Penn State finishes, if not higher.

[Penn State RB Evan Royster](#)