

# 2010 Big Ten football previews: Wisconsin (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

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We've written about [Minnesota](#), [Illinois](#), [Indiana](#), [Michigan](#), [Purdue](#), [Northwestern](#), [Michigan State](#), and [Penn State](#). Now we set our sights on the No. 12 Wisconsin Badgers. Iowa will play Wisconsin at Kinnick Stadium on Oct. 23.

When I look at Wisconsin, I see a team that has what it takes to win a Big Ten title in 2010.

The Badgers are coming off a 10-3 season that includes a 20-14 win over Miami (Fla.) last December in the Champs Sports Bowl. They have a coach in Bret Bielema who has taken Wisconsin to bowl games every season since filling the void left by Barry Alvarez.

And the Badgers have a favorable schedule this season, which I'll examine here later.

Offensively, Wisconsin brings back plenty of talent. In fact, the only spot of concern might be tight end, where the Badgers lose Garrett Graham.

Two very important pieces to that Badger offense are back in 2010. One is junior running back John Clay, who was the 2009 Big Ten Offensive Player of the Year.

Despite only starting eight of Wisconsin's 13 games last season, Clay delivered for the Badgers, rushing for 1,517 yards and 18 touchdowns. Interestingly enough, the only two contests Clay did not record a rushing touchdown in 2009 came back-to-back weeks against Ohio State and Iowa. The 6-1, 248-pound back did end the season strong with three scores against

Hawaii in the regular season finale and two touchdowns against Miami.

That other key piece to Wisconsin's success is senior quarterback Scott Tolzien. A year ago at this time, Tolzien was in a heated battle for the starting quarterback job. Not only did Bielema name him the starter going into 2009, but Tolzien started every game and had one of the best seasons ever for a Badger quarterback.

His 211 completions is now a single-season record. His 2,705 passing yards in 2009 is second-best all-time for a single season in Wisconsin history. He threw 16 touchdown passes to 11 interceptions. Tolzien had a pair of four-touchdown games at home against Michigan State and Michigan.

The Badgers also return their leading receiver from 2009 in junior Nick Toon, who had 54 catches for 805 receiving yards. Joining him in Wisconsin's receiving corps is senior David Gilreath, who didn't have as big a role in the passing game last year as he did in 2008. However, Gilreath did start in the Champs Sports Bowl against the Hurricanes, and he will continue to have a role in the Badgers' special teams play as a return man.

There is one part of Wisconsin's offense I think is being somewhat overlooked, and that's up front. All five of the projected starters along the Badger offensive line combined for 55 starts in 2009. Not only that, but it's massive.

Junior guard Kevin Zeitler is the shortest of the five, and weighs the least of the five. Zeitler checks in at 6-4, 312 pounds.

The anchors of this offensive line are seniors Gabe Carimi, who is 6-7, 315 pounds, and John Moffitt, listed at 6-5, 323 pounds. Both were selected first-team all-Big Ten in 2009.

Defensively, the Badgers have one major loss along the D-Line

in O'Brien Schofield, who posted 62 tackles and 12 sacks as a senior before being drafted by the Arizona Cardinals in the NFL Draft. However, it does return junior J.J. Watt, who had 44 tackles, 4.5 sacks, and two fumble recoveries last year.

The linebacking corps features two seniors in Culmer St. Jean and Chris Borland. St. Jean is Wisconsin's returning leading tackler after recording 63 tackles for the Badgers. He also had an interception during the Badgers' game with Ohio State last season. Borland comes back after he had 54 tackles, five sacks, three fumble recoveries and an interception.

Wisconsin's secondary takes a blow losing Jaevary McFadden, who led the Badgers with 74 tackles in 2009. This year, senior Jay Valai will be counted on to lead the Badgers' group of defensive backs.

Now, the schedule. Just like last year, Wisconsin has two enormous games – against Ohio State on Oct. 16 at Camp Randall Stadium and at Iowa on Oct. 23 – in October that are back-to-back weeks. The Badgers also open Big Ten play with a challenge at Michigan State, who should be a better team in 2010.

The last two games of the season could also be challenges. Wisconsin travels to the Big House on Nov. 20 to play a Michigan squad that has historically played the Badgers well and could be playing for its head coach that day. The season concludes Nov. 27 with a home game against Northwestern, who beat Wisconsin in 2009.

My final take is this: The Badgers are worthy of their preseason No. 12 ranking from the AP. They, along with Iowa and Ohio State, are the cream of the crop this year in the Big Ten. The offense is loaded with the conference's best running back, a proven senior at quarterback, and a stout offensive line.

I really do think this season comes down to those two October

games for Wisconsin. I believe the Badgers win a minimum of 10 games this season. They are that good.

And if they can find a way to beat either Ohio State or Iowa (or both) this season, a Big Ten title coming back to Madison, Wis., is very realistic in 2010.

[Wisconsin QB Scott Tolzien](#)