

2010-11 Big Ten men's basketball previews: Penn State (premium)

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The Big Ten kicks off its 2010-11 men's college basketball season next week, so this week, *HawkeyeDrive.com* will give you rundowns on all 11 conference teams. Today, we'll showcase [Michigan](#) and Penn State. The Nittany Lions will only play Iowa once this season, with the meeting taking place on Jan. 26 at the Bryce Jordan Center in State College, Pa.

Penn State had a season to forget last year, going 11-20 overall, and finishing last in the conference with a 3-15 record. While this is certainly not a team expected to improve significantly this coming season, there is a little hope given what is returning.

The best news the Nittany Lions received all year was when 6-0 guard Talor Battle withdrew his name from the NBA Draft and decided to return for his senior year. This is big because Battle is undoubtedly the best player on this team, and maybe even one of the best players in the Big Ten. In fact, I'd go as far as saying if Penn State were to improve by 4-5 wins, Battle would have a legitimate chance of being the Big Ten's Player of the Year. He is that good.

As a junior last season, Battle was second in the Big Ten in scoring, averaging 18.5 points per game. Not only did he lead the Nittany Lions in scoring a year ago, but he also led the team with 165 rebounds and 129 assists. Again, this is a 6-0 point guard doing this.

To say Battle is the only reason Penn State might not finish in last place this year would be an understatement. Battle is the only reason this program might even be relevant in the Big Ten this year. If he had gone pro, this would be hands down the worst team in the Big Ten this coming season.

Now to be fair, the Nittany Lions do have three other seniors also returning this season that all started the majority of Penn State's games a year ago. Headlining this group is 6-7 forward David Jackson, who was the Nittany Lions' second-leading scorer with 9.5 points per contest. Jackson scored in double figures during 17 of Penn State's 31 games last season, including seven consecutive Big Ten games. He also was third on the team in rebounds with 140 of them.

Knowing that teams are going to be keying on Battle, Jackson, who was the only other player besides Battle to start every game last year, will need to have a productive senior campaign in order for Penn State to improve.

The other notable seniors coming back to Ed DeChellis' 2010-11 squad are senior forwards Jeff Brooks and Andrew Jones. Brooks, who is listed at 6-8, led the Nittany Lions in blocked shots last season with 14 of them. He also averaged 7.4 points per game. Meanwhile, the 6-10 Jones was second behind Battle in rebounding with 158 boards last season, and he averaged six points per contest.

Beyond those four seniors, the only other player on Penn State with any significant starting experience is sophomore Tim Frazier. The 6-1 guard started 10 games for the Nittany Lions last season, and he was second on the team behind Battle in assists with 72 of them. He also averaged five points per game during his freshman campaign.

As I said, this is a team that has hope of getting better, but in a conference as strong as the Big Ten, improvement might not be much in terms of wins and losses. If any of the other

players mentioned can help out and make it so Battle doesn't have to try and win games by himself like he often had to last year, then Penn State could be a better team, especially considering the amount of seniors DeChellis has to work with.

Otherwise, I would expect the Nittany Lions to again finish somewhere between 8th-11th place again in the conference.