

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

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HawkeyeDrive.com

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 [Minnesota](#) and Ohio State. The Buckeyes come into this season ranked fourth nationally and will play Iowa twice this season – Jan. 4 at Carver-Hawkeye Arena and Jan. 19 at Value City Arena in Columbus, Ohio.

Ohio State comes into this season as the defending Big Ten champion in both the regular season and conference tournament. A major part of that success had to do with Evan Turner, who was the Naismith Player of the Year last year.

Turner is now a member of the Philadelphia 76ers after being selected by them with the second overall pick in the NBA Draft last summer.

While some look at the Buckeyes as a highly-touted team that is more than capable of winning the Big Ten again this year, I'm going to be honest, I really don't see a repeat. I'm also somewhat skeptical of Ohio State's No. 4 national ranking by the AP.

Yes, the Buckeyes were tabbed to finish second in the Big Ten this year behind Michigan State. But even though Ohio State is definitely one of the five best teams in the conference this year, I just feel as though Turner's loss is bigger than some make it out to be.

To be fair, every other starter from last year's team is back again this year, and the void left by Turner in the starting lineup is likely to be replaced by freshman Jared Sullinger. The 6-9 forward is a Columbus product who many regarded as the top high school player in the country along with Harrison Barnes, who is now a freshman at North Carolina. As a senior in high school, Sullinger averaged 24.5 points and 11.7 rebounds per game, and he was also a McDonald's All-American.

As far as the rest of the team is concerned, Ohio State's core consists of those four returning starters, three of whom are seniors. The most veteran player from this group is 6-5 guard David Lighty, who is the lone member remaining from the Buckeyes' 2006-07 squad that lost the national championship game to Florida. Lighty received a medical redshirt after missing the bulk of Ohio State's 2008-09 campaign.

Last year as a redshirt junior, Lighty started all of the Buckeyes' 37 games, and shot 49.2 percent from the field, which was second only to Turner's 51.3 percent. Lighty averaged 12.6 points per game, was third on the team with 110 assists, and led in steals with 58 takeaways.

The other two seniors coming back along with Lighty are 6-6 guard Jon Diebler and 6-8 forward Dallas Lauderdale. Diebler also started every game for Ohio State last season and played the most minutes, averaging 37.2 minutes per game. He averaged 13 points a contest and was the Buckeyes' leading 3-point shooter and free-throw shooter, knocking down 42 percent of his 3-pointers and 87 percent of his free throws.

Meanwhile, Lauderdale led Ohio State in field goal percentage last season, shooting 77.3 percent while starting 34 of 36 games. He also was the Buckeyes' leading shot blocker in 2009-10 with 77 rejections.

But perhaps the biggest piece to the puzzle for Ohio State this year is junior William Buford, who was second behind

Turner in points, rebounds, and assists. As a sophomore, Buford started all 37 games like Lighty and Diebler, and finished with averages of 14.4 points, 5.6 rebounds, and 3.1 assists per contest. Buford will be expected to take on a role much like the one Turner had a year ago.

Ohio State does have some solid freshmen in addition to Sullinger, most notably forward Deshaun Thomas, an Indiana native who averaged 31 points per game as a senior in high school and was regarded as one of the top small forwards in the country.

But the question marks with this team have to do with depth. Unless most of these freshmen are ready to step in immediately, I could easily see Ohio State as a team that could fade down the stretch due to some of those older guys being a little fatigued.

Again, the Buckeyes are going to be a good team. They're definitely one of the five best teams in the Big Ten, they have experience returning, and making a return trip to the Sweet 16 shouldn't be a problem. I just don't have Ohio State on the same pedestal that others seem to have it on.