

# 2011-12 Big Ten men's basketball previews: Nebraska (premium)

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*HawkeyeDrive.com*

The Big Ten kicks off its 2011-12 men's college basketball season next week, so this week, *HawkeyeDrive.com* will give you rundowns on all 12 conference teams. Today, we'll showcase Nebraska and [Ohio State](#). The Cornhuskers will play Iowa twice this season – Jan. 26 at Carver-Hawkeye Arena, and Feb. 29 at the Devaney Center in Lincoln, Neb.

With this being Nebraska's first season in the Big Ten, there seems to be a growing perception that the Cornhuskers are going to finish near the bottom as it goes through the rigors of its new conference. This might very well be what happens, and while I don't see Nebraska as one of the Big Ten elites entering this season, I also don't believe the Cornhuskers are as bad as some are making them out to be.

Nebraska is a team that won 19 games last season playing in the Big 12 and made an NIT appearance. To put this in perspective, Northwestern was the only Big Ten team to appear in the NIT in 2010-11. The good news for the Cornhuskers is that they have four starters returning from last year's squad. The bad news is their best player from last season, Lance Jeter, is the one who left.

Jeter was the only Cornhusker to start all 32 of Nebraska's games in 2010-11 and he led the Cornhuskers in scoring with 11.7 points per game, as well as assists (145), steals (57), and minutes per game (30.2). Nebraska's game revolved around Jeter, and this is a huge loss.

This season, it will revolve around junior center Jorge Brian Diaz, who averaged 10.5 points and 4.4 rebounds per game a year ago. Listed at 6-11, Diaz is someone opposing teams have to account for. Another name to watch in the frontcourt is sophomore forward Brandon Ubel, who started 13 games as a freshman and led Nebraska with 39 blocked shots.

Opponents will also have to account for the Cornhuskers' backcourt, which appears to be somewhat strong even without Jeter's services. Senior guard Brandon Richardson and junior guards Toney McCray and Caleb Walker all gained a wealth of experience last season and all bring something different.

Richardson was second to Jeter with 57 assists and was Nebraska's best free-throw shooter last year shooting 83.3 percent from the charity stripe. McCray shot 40.7 percent from 3-point range last season, which led the team. Walker was the Cornhuskers' leading rebounder last season, averaging 4.5 rebounds per contest.

Three newcomers to keep an eye on are senior Bo Spencer, junior Dylan Talley, and freshman David Rivers. Spencer is the likely replacement in the starting lineup for Jeter after he sat out last season following a transfer from LSU, where he averaged 14.5 points per game as a junior during the 2009-10 season.

Talley is a junior college transfer that averaged 23 points per game at Blinn College and was ranked the 11th-best junior college player according to JuCoRecruiting.com. Rivers is a 6-7 true freshman from Arkansas that averaged 19 points and seven rebounds per game as a high school senior and was first-team all-state in Arkansas on two occasions.

Nebraska has a manageable non-conference schedule. It features home games against Oregon and Wake Forest, and road games against USC and in-state rival Creighton. The Cornhuskers have a brutal Big Ten slate, however. They only draw Michigan once

and that game is in Lincoln, but the first four conference games consist of Wisconsin and Michigan State at home, followed by consecutive trips to Ohio State and Illinois. There is also a stretch late in the season where Nebraska makes consecutive trips to Purdue (who it only plays once) and Michigan State.

Overall, this is a team that will have challenges navigating through the conference, but the potential is there for head coach Doc Sadler and his team to have a better year than some might expect of the Cornhuskers this season.