

2011-12 Big Ten men's basketball previews: Purdue (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 [Minnesota](#) and Purdue. The Boilermakers will play Iowa twice this season – Dec. 28 at Carver-Hawkeye Arena, and Jan. 17 at Mackey Arena in West Lafayette, Ind.

Despite losing Robbie Hummel to a second ACL tear at the start of last season, Purdue found a way to exceed the expectations of some and finished second in the Big Ten last year. Before being knocked out of the third round by Final Four-bound VCU, the story of the Boilermakers' season was forward JaJuan Johnson putting the team on his back and becoming the Big Ten's Player of the Year in 2010-11.

Johnson and guard E'Twaun Moore, who was Purdue's second leading scorer and led the team in steals, are no longer there (coincidentally, they were both drafted by the Boston Celtics last summer), and those are two enormous losses. Again, Purdue was a team that with this duo and a healthy Hummel arguably would've won the Big Ten and at the very least made a trip to the Final Four.

Hummel returns as a fifth-year senior this year and is undoubtedly the leader of this year's squad. The fact that he was voted preseason all-Big Ten without having played in a game since Feb. 2010 ought to speak volumes of what he means to head coach Matt Painter and his program.

But there's more to this year's squad than Hummel. I see four others that could elevate into key figures for the Boilermakers. Senior guards Lewis Jackson and Ryne Smith can both expect to see their roles increase. Jackson started all 34 of Purdue's games last season and led the Boilermakers in both assists (135) and with a 50 percent field-goal percentage. Smith was Purdue's top 3-point shooter making 44 percent of his shots from beyond the arc, and his 88.5 shooting percentage from the free-throw line was also a team-high.

Junior guard D.J. Byrd started 22 games and while he shot 36 percent from the floor, his knack was defense. Byrd had 102 rebounds and 21 steals during his sophomore campaign. Then there's junior forward Kelsey Barlow, who shot 47 percent from the floor last season. I would expect both Byrd and Barlow to become bigger contributors given their past performance, and should Purdue get decent numbers from both, it will remain a contender in the conference.

Looking at the schedule, the Boilermakers play in the Puerto Rico Tip-Off and should be the likely favorite to win that early-season tournament. The two other non-conference games played outside Mackey Arena are both intriguing, as Purdue visits Xavier on Dec. 3 and plays two-time defending national runner-up Butler at the Crossroads Classic in Indianapolis on Dec. 17.

As far as single plays are concerned in Big Ten play, they're balanced out. Purdue gets Northwestern and Wisconsin at home, but has to travel to both Minnesota and Ohio State.

Again, there's no reason to think the Boilermakers can't compete for a Big Ten title (not necessarily win the league, but compete) and a sixth consecutive trip to the NCAA tournament is likely this season. What will distinguish Purdue from the others hinges on how effective Hummel is returning from two ACL tears and how some of the other upperclassmen

perform playing elevated roles.