

# 2011-12 Big Ten men's basketball previews: Wisconsin (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 [Indiana](#) and Wisconsin. The Badgers come into this season ranked 15th nationally and will play Iowa twice this season – Dec. 31 at the Kohl Center in Madison, Wis., and Feb. 23 at Carver-Hawkeye Arena.

Wisconsin is coming off a season that may have caught some by surprise, as the Badgers finished third in the Big Ten last season and managed to reach the Sweet 16 before being eliminated by Butler. This year, Wisconsin remains among the conference's elite, and is more than capable of challenging Ohio State for the Big Ten crown.

The Badgers lose a couple of key big men from last season in Jon Leuer and Keaton Nankivil. Leuer was first-team all-Big Ten after leading Wisconsin in both scoring and rebounding, and he was drafted by the Milwaukee Bucks last summer. Nankivil was the team's third-leading scorer and finished second behind Leuer in rebounding.

Make no mistake, these two pieces no longer being at head coach Bo Ryan's disposal is big. But it might not be as bad as some might suggest.

The good news for Wisconsin is that one of the players who is back from last year's squad is senior point guard Jordan

Taylor, who averaged 18.1 points and led the Badgers with 161 assists last season. In fact, Taylor's 3.83 assist-to-turnover ratio was the best of any player nationally. That right there should tell you how special he is. He also had a team-high 25 steals and his 4.1 rebounds per contest was third behind the departed Leuer and Nankivil.

Two other players who emerged last season and look to play bigger roles for Wisconsin in 2011-12 are junior Mike Bruesewitz and sophomore Josh Gasser. Both players shot over 47 percent for the Badgers last season, and both also reached triple-figures in rebounds. They're both locks to start this year and will both be counted on to aid Taylor when teams key on him when the Badgers do possess the ball. Another name to watch as someone who could have a bigger role this season is junior Ryan Evans, who didn't start last season, but appeared in all 34 of the Badgers' games.

Wisconsin's freshmen class consists of five players, all of whom averaged double figures scoring as high school seniors last year. None of the five hail from Wisconsin, but are all from other Big Ten states. The one to watch might be Jarrod Uthoff, who is originally from Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Uthoff averaged 26.2 points and 11.2 rebounds per game as a high school senior, and Ryan said at Big Ten Media Day that Uthoff had proven to be the freshman who has made the most strides since the Badgers began practicing.

The schedule is daunting in 2011-12 for a team picked to finish second in the conference at Big Ten Media Day. The non-conference slate features three in-state rivalry games against Marquette, UW-Milwaukee and UW-Green Bay, as well as an appearance in the Chicago Invitational Challenge taking place in Hoffman Estates, Ill., during Thanksgiving weekend. There's also a road game at top-ranked North Carolina as part of the Big Ten/ACC Challenge.

Big Ten play isn't any easier. The single plays feature trips

to both Michigan and Purdue. Wisconsin also has to face Ohio State, Michigan State, Illinois, and Minnesota twice each. February will be a key month as both meetings with the Buckeyes take place then, with the latter game in Columbus concluding a five-game stretch where the Badgers play four times away from the Kohl Center. Wisconsin does end the season with home games against Minnesota and Illinois.

Wisconsin should be back in the NCAA tournament, and as said before, is as legit a contender as is there in the conference this season. Whether the Badgers win the Big Ten remains to be seen, but they have to be in the discussion of teams with the best odds of knocking off Ohio State in 2011-12.