

# 2011-12 Big Ten men's basketball previews: Penn State (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 [Michigan State](#), [Northwestern](#) and Penn State. The Nittany Lions will play Iowa twice this season – Feb. 4 at Carver-Hawkeye Arena, and Feb. 16 at the Bryce Jordan Center in State College, Pa.

Penn State had one of those seasons last year that just seemed too good to be true. Picked by many (including myself) to finish last in the Big Ten one year ago, the Nittany Lions ended up finishing sixth in the Big Ten. Not only that, but Penn State played its way into the championship game of the 2011 Big Ten Tournament where it lost to top-seeded Ohio State after winning three games in three days. As a result, the Nittany Lions locked up just their second NCAA tournament berth this century and went to overtime against Temple before falling to the Owls in a second-round game.

Two months after that NCAA tournament appearance, however, Ed DeChellis left Penn State to become the head coach at Navy. In to replace DeChellis this year is Patrick Chambers, a Philadelphia native who takes over Penn State after leading Boston University to an NCAA tournament trip last March.

Chambers doesn't inherit much, though. The Nittany Lions lost four starters off last year's squad, including perhaps the most valuable player in the entire Big Ten last season in

guard Talor Battle. One of the biggest reasons why Penn State caught everyone by surprise in 2010-11 was Battle averaging 20.2 points per game and becoming the Nittany Lions' all-time leading scorer.

The lone returning starter is junior guard Tim Frazier, who averaged 10 points, 5.9 assists and 4.6 rebounds per game as a sophomore. Frazier has established himself as the focal point of this year's team. Other veteran players being asked to contribute heavily include senior guard Cammeron Woodyard, junior forward Billy Oliver and sophomore guard Jermaine Marshall. None of these three players have had significant playing experience for Penn State during their careers, so suddenly being elevated into key roles under a new coaching regime looks to be challenging.

What will make this season all the more grueling is that Penn State's roster consists of 11 underclassmen – six freshmen and five sophomores. The most notable of the freshmen is 6-1 guard Trey Lewis, an Ohio product that averaged 23 points per game as a high school senior last year. The Nittany Lions also have a junior college transfer in Matt Glover on this year's roster.

The non-conference portion of Penn State's schedule isn't extremely daunting outside of a contest against No. 2 Kentucky at the Hall of Fame Tip-Off Tournament being played in Uncasville, Conn. How the Nittany Lions perform in November and December could prove very telling when Big Ten play does begin.

No favors were done with the conference schedule. It starts with two straight road games against Michigan and Northwestern. The lone meetings with both Ohio State and Michigan State are away from the Bryce Jordan Center, but the Nittany Lions draw both Minnesota and Illinois at home as part of the single-plays. The final week of the season features a trip to Purdue, and the home finale against Michigan.

In conclusion, Penn State is probably the worst team in the Big Ten. I know I said this last year and was proven wrong. I'm saying it again this year because the Nittany Lions are a young team with a new coaching regime and a challenging schedule, and they lost arguably the best player they've ever had in Battle. I like Chambers and think he'll get Penn State going again much like Fran McCaffery has at Iowa, but it's going to take time in State College. The question will be how patient Nittany Lion fans are Chambers and what he seeks to accomplish.