2012 Big Ten football previews: Indiana (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

After examining Penn State and Ohio State, the next Big Ten team we will preview is the Indiana Hoosiers. Iowa will visit Memorial Stadium in Bloomington, Ind., on Nov. 3.

The good news for Indiana is it's one of only four teams that can represent the Leaders Division in the 2012 Big Ten Championship Game. The bad news, however, is the Hoosiers' odds of playing up the road at Indianapolis' Lucas Oil Stadium on Dec. 1 are slim to none.

Coming off an abysmal 2011 where Indiana went 1-11, the Hoosiers might be better this fall in what will be head coach Kevin Wilson's second year at the helm, but it's hard to envision them not finishing with the conference's worst record once again.

Indiana does return a combined 15 starters from last year on both sides of the ball. One player returning who is returning is sophomore quarterback Tré Roberson, which should be encouraging for the Hoosier faithful. Roberson emerged as the team's starter midway through last season and appeared in nine games.

Through the air, he completed 57 percent of his passes for 937 yards, but only had three touchdowns to six interceptions. As a team, Indiana only had 10 passing touchdowns all season. On the ground, Roberson rushed for 426 yards on 109 carries and had two touchdowns. Being the full-time starter, Roberson's numbers should improve in 2012 and his mobility is going to be needed if the Hoosiers are going to even have a chance at

fielding a good football team.

Junior running back Stephen Houston was Indiana's leading rusher last season, compiling 802 yards and scoring eight touchdowns. Having him back should help take some of the pressure of Roberson. The Hoosiers also return sophomore D'Angelo Roberts, who rushed for 263 yards and two scores in 2011.

The receiving corps is led by junior Kofi Hughes, who will miss Indiana's opener against Indiana State due to a violation of team rules. Last season, Hughes hauled in 35 catches for 536 receiving yards – more than double the next closest to him in that category – and tied for a team-high three touchdowns. When Hughes returns, he'll need to elevate his game, as will fellow juniors Jamonne Chester and Duwyce Wilson, who combined for 457 yards receiving in 2011.

Up front, the Hoosiers are fairly young with three sophomores listed atop the team's preseason depth chart. The lone returning starter is a good one though in senior center Will Matte. Prior to an injury that took place during Indiana's game against Wisconsin last season, Matte had started the first 32 games of his Hoosier career. He ended up starting nine of the 10 games he appeared in during 2011. His leadership will be essential in 2012.

Defensively, the front four looks to be the strength, led by a pair of senior defensive tackles who started every game last season – Adam Replogle and Larry Black, Jr. In 2011, Replogle recorded 49 tackles and led the Hoosiers with seven sacks. Black, Jr., had nearly identical numbers with 47 tackles and 5.5 sacks. At the two end positions, sophomores Bobby Richardson and Ryan Phillis both made six starts for Indiana last season, including each of the last four games. Richardson also recorded four sacks in the nine games he appeared in.

The biggest question mark surrounding this defense is at

linebacker, where only one starter – sophomore Chase Hoobler – returns on the outside. Sophomore David Cooper was listed first-string at the middle spot on the preseason depth chart, while the weak side spot looks to be occupied by junior Jacarri Alexander.

In the secondary, sophomore safety Mark Murphy looks to build off an impressive freshman campaign where he finished second on the team with 76 tackles. Indiana's third-leading tackler from last year also returns – junior cornerback Greg Heban. He also had a team-high two interceptions in addition to his 62 tackles. Fellow junior cornerback Lawrence Barnett is coming off a season where he recorded 46 tackles and broke up six passes, but like Hughes, Barnett was also suspended for the Indiana State game for a violation of team rules.

Indiana will break in a new punter in 2012 with junior Mitchell Voss. It does return its placekicker however in senior Mitch Ewald, who connected on 13-of-16 field goal attempts last season. The return game features sophomore Shane Wynn, who had the Hoosiers' lone special teams touchdown in 2011, a 99-yard return on the opening kickoff of their game against Illinois.

Looking at the schedule, the non-conference slate is lackluster as it doesn't feature a single team that had a winning record in 2011. It does, however, include two road games – at Massachusetts on Sept. 8 and during the middle of Big Ten play, a game at Navy on Oct. 20.

The Big Ten portion will be brutal again, as it was last season. Michigan State, Ohio State, Iowa and Wisconsin all have to play at Memorial Stadium this fall, but the Hoosiers will be likely underdogs in all four games. Indiana's best shot at a home win during Big Ten play might be that game against the Hawkeyes on Nov. 3, as the Hoosiers have made Iowa sweat in each of its head-to-head victories over the past three seasons. The season concludes with four of six games

away from Bloomington, including the last two against Penn State and Purdue.

Again, Indiana will probably be a better team in 2012. But it’s not going to be fully evident in the win-loss column.

AUDIO: Indiana DT Adam Replogle