

2012-13 Big Ten men's basketball previews: Wisconsin (premium)

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The Big Ten kicks off its 2012-13 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 [Ohio State](#) and Wisconsin. The Badgers come into this season ranked 23rd nationally and will play Iowa twice – Jan. 19 at Carver-Hawkeye Arena, and Feb. 6 at the Kohl Center in Madison, Wis.

Nothing about last season ended up being too surprising when it came to the Wisconsin Badgers. Aside from being swept by Iowa during Big Ten play, all the games Wisconsin did lose a year ago came to teams that reach the NCAA Tournament and the Badgers beat the teams they were expected to beat.

They were the fourth seed in the Big Ten Tournament and reached the semifinals, where they lost to Michigan State. Wisconsin was also a No. 4 seed in the NCAA Tournament and lost in the Sweet 16 by one point to Syracuse, who held the top seed in the Badgers' regional.

Entering this season, the biggest question surrounding Bo Ryan's squad is who takes over for Jordan Taylor at point guard. The Badgers thought they had their answer in junior guard Josh Gasser. However, Gasser tore his ACL this past weekend and will miss this entire season. Last season, Gasser was Wisconsin's best 3-point shooter and his 25 steals helped secure a spot on the Big Ten's first-team all-defensive squad.

Gasser's absence from the lineup is a huge blow. Not only had he proven to be a key player in the Badgers' success, but without him, Wisconsin will now be relying on either redshirt freshman George Marshall or sophomore Traevon Jackson to handle the point. Jackson played sparingly last year and Marshall is raw, so this is something worth watching.

However, Gasser's not the only player injured right now. While he won't be missing the entire season, there's a good chance the Badgers start their season without the services of senior forward Mike Bruesewitz, who got hurt at the start of October practices. As a junior, Bruesewitz was second on the team in rebounding and proved to be a glue guy with his hustle and willingness to do the little things. When he returns to the lineup, this is a much better squad.

As for the good news, Wisconsin does return a couple of key starters in addition to Bruesewitz that will be the guys heavily leaned on in 2012-13. Both forward Ryan Evans and center Jared Berggren averaged double figures scoring last season. Evans, who is 6-6, actually led the Badgers in rebounding with 243 boards, while Berggren was this team's leading shot-blocker and was second in steals. These are two guys that get it done at both ends of the floor.

Junior guard Ben Brust emerged as a sixth man last season and could very well be playing that role again this year. Brust was Wisconsin's best free-throw shooter and shot close to 40 percent from 3-point range when he was on the court. His minutes will increase, thus his role increases.

The name to watch though is 6-8 freshman forward Sam Dekker, who will likely be starting at the 3 to make room for Evans at the 2-guard spot. Dekker is one of the most highly-touted in-state recruits Ryan has landed in Madison. The Sheboygan native averaged 35.2 points per game as a high-school senior, is fourth all-time in scoring among high-school players from the state and was Wisconsin's Mr. Basketball. He will have an

immediate impact, perhaps more immediate than any true freshman has ever had during Ryan's coaching tenure.

The Badgers' non-conference schedule features some quality games. There's an early trip to No. 10 Florida, as well as a game against No. 16 Creighton that will be played in Las Vegas on Nov. 23 as part of the Las Vegas Invitational. In December, Wisconsin hosts California and plays in Milwaukee against in-state foe Marquette, who beat the Badgers at the Kohl Center last season.

In Big Ten play, Wisconsin has the fortune of drawing both No. 1 Indiana and No. 5 Michigan as two of its single-plays. However, the contest with the Hoosiers is not only a road game, but it also starts what will likely be a key stretch for the Badgers.

After playing at Indiana on Jan. 15, Wisconsin goes back on the road to play Iowa on what will be an emotional evening at Carver-Hawkeye Arena. Then the next four games feature No. 14 Michigan State and Minnesota at home, followed by trips to No. 4 Ohio State and Illinois. How the Badgers fare during this six-game stretch will prove critical.

This is a tournament team once again, but how far this team can go both in the Big Ten and nationally will depend on how it does with Gasser sidelined. If Wisconsin can get enough from its backcourt, it'll be a contender like it usually is. If not, then it might be a bubble team.