

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

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*HawkeyeDrive.com*

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 Indiana, [Nebraska](#) and [Purdue](#). The Hoosiers were selected as the preseason No. 1 team in the country entering this season and will play Iowa twice – Dec. 31 at Carver-Hawkeye Arena, and March 2 at Assembly Hall in Bloomington, Ind.

It was only a matter of time before Indiana was going to elevate out of the Big Ten cellar and evolve into a perennial contender in the conference under head coach Tom Crean. Led by center Cody Zeller, who is perhaps the most decorated Crean recruit to date at Indiana, the Hoosiers made that climb from the basement into becoming a team that reached the Sweet 16 last season. Not only that, but Indiana beat eventual national champion Kentucky at home during the regular season and played the Wildcats closer than anybody else in the NCAA Tournament last March.

With Zeller back in the fold, as well as Crean's best recruiting class to date, Indiana has become the No. 1 team in the country preseason and the prohibited favorite to win the Big Ten this season. The Hoosiers look every bit the part and are more than fully capable of returning to Atlanta, the site of their Sweet 16 loss to Kentucky, for the Final Four next spring.

Zeller returns following a freshman campaign where the 7-0

center averaged 15.6 points and 6.6 rebounds per game, both of which led the team. He also recorded 42 blocked shots at the defensive end and tied for the team-lead in steals with 49. His frame makes him a beast in the paint, particularly with pulling down offensive boards and finishing plays.

The Hoosiers also bring back a pair of seniors who, like Zeller, started every game last season. Forward Christian Watford, who is now part of Indiana lore after his game-winning 3-pointer as time expired to beat Kentucky last December, is coming off a junior year where he averaged 12.6 points and 5.8 rebounds per contest. Guard Jordan Hulls also averaged double figures scoring with 11.7 points per game and led Indiana with 120 assists. He was also one the Hoosiers' best 3-point shooters and was their best free-throw shooter in 2011-12.

Indiana also returns a pair of juniors that have played significant minutes in guard Victor Oladipo and forward Will Sheehey. Oladipo averaged 10.8 points per game and shared the team-high 49 steals with Zeller. Sheehey only started 11 games but shot over 50 percent from the field and played over 22 minutes a game on average last season. Another name to keep an eye out for is guard Maurice Creek, who has been injury-plagued throughout his career and missed the 2011-12 season with a ruptured Achilles injury.

These players all bring experience. But there's also the blend of youth adding to the excitement level in Bloomington right now. Indiana has four true freshmen on its roster this season, including McDonald's All-American point guard Yogi Ferrell.

The Indianapolis native was touted as one of the top recruits in the country at point guard and he comes in at 6-0, 178 pounds. In winning an Indiana state title his senior year, Ferrell came up one rebound shy of a triple-double in the championship game. Whether he starts right away or not, he and Hulls provide the Hoosiers with depth at the point.

Also hailing from Indianapolis is 6-8 forward Jeremy Hollowell, who was also a prize piece in this recruiting class. Hollowell averaged close to 24 points and nine rebounds per game as a high-school senior and was ranked top 10 by multiple recruiting services at his position. Like Ferrell, he's a guy who can see a lot of immediate playing time, even if he doesn't start.

Indiana's non-conference slate is highlighted by its Big Ten/ACC Challenge contest against No. 11 North Carolina at Assembly Hall on Nov. 27. Before that though, the Hoosiers are participating in the Legends Classic being played at Barclays Center in Brooklyn, N.Y., and a potential showdown with No. 13 UCLA could take place there. In December, Bankers Life Fieldhouse in Indianapolis plays host to the Crossroads Classic, which this year pits Indiana against Butler.

As far as the Big Ten schedule is concerned, there are two key stretches for the Hoosiers. The first is a two-week stretch starting at the end of January where Indiana plays three of four away from Assembly Hall. The one home game is against No. 5 Michigan and the three road games are in-state rival Purdue, Illinois and No. 4 Ohio State. The final week of the season, Indiana plays Ohio State and Michigan again, with the Buckeyes visiting Assembly Hall and the Wolverines being at home on the season's final day.

In the best conference in college basketball, Indiana is the best team. The Hoosiers might not win a national championship, but a Big Ten title and appearance in the Final Four are both fair expectations for this squad in 2012-13.