

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

By Brendan Stiles

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 Boilermakers will play Iowa twice this season – Jan. 27 at Mackey Arena in West Lafayette, Ind., and Feb. 27 at Carver-Hawkeye Arena.

Last season saw the Purdue Boilermakers take a small step back from being the contender it had become in the Big Ten under head coach Matt Painter. Yes, Purdue reached the NCAA Tournament (losing in the third round in heartbreaking fashion to Kansas) and yes, Robbie Hummel managed to get through an entire season without injury. But the Boilermakers had to play their way into the Field of 68, which they ended up doing by finishing sixth in the conference and more importantly, over .500 in league play.

This team lost three starters from last year's squad that were all valuable. Hummel led Purdue in scoring and was its heart and soul a year ago. Lewis Jackson also averaged double figures scoring and led the Boilermakers in both assists and steals. Ryne Smith was their 3-point assassin, knocking down 43.2 percent of his shots from beyond the arc. There were five players who played in every game. This trio of guys no longer around made up three-fifths of that group.

As far as this year's roster is concerned, Purdue has a new trio of upperclassmen it will be depending on to lead it back

to the NCAA Tournament for the seventh straight season. D.J. Byrd is one of two seniors, but the only one who plays significant minutes. Among returning players, the 6-5 Byrd had the best shooting percentages from 3-point range and at the free-throw line.

Junior guard Terone Johnson returns after a sophomore campaign where he appeared in all 35 games and started 12 of them. At 6-2, he'll be at the point for the Boilermakers. Johnson was third on the team in scoring and second in rebounding, assists and steals. He shot 47 percent from the floor, but was also one of Purdue's worst free-throw shooters, only knocking down an anemic 43.8 percent from the foul line.

The third guy who will be heavily counted on alongside Byrd and Johnson is 6-9 junior forward Travis Carroll. Last season, he started 20 of 35 games and shot 48 percent from the floor. He was third with 19 blocked shots, but also only averaged around three rebounds per contest. That's a number that's going to need to go up for him this season if Purdue is going to have any sort of front court presence.

Sophomore guard Anthony Johnson has a chance to provide some depth to the Boilermakers' backcourt and sophomore forward Jacob Lawson is a guy who can be a post presence. Both should probably expect their playing time to increase this season.

Purdue does have one of Painter's best recruiting classes coming in as freshmen this season. The three names to watch are 6-5 guard Rapheal Davis, 6-0 guard Ronnie Johnson and the headliner, 7-0 center A.J. Hammons. Of these three guys, Hammons is the most likely to start from the get-go given his height and his prior background. He's a native of Carmel, Ind., but played two seasons at the well-renown Oak Hill Academy in Virginia and was part of a team that went 44-0 last year. Numerous recruiting services had Hammons ranked as a top 20 center. Given the depth of big men entering the Big Ten, this was an essential get for the Boilermakers.

In examining Purdue's non-conference schedule, the 2K Classic in New York City is a winnable tournament for the Boilermakers. Purdue opens the two-day event against Villanova and then plays either Alabama or Oregon State. Of those three teams, only the Crimson Tide made the NCAA Tournament last season. The Boilermakers also get Xavier and West Virginia at home, plus they play Notre Dame at the Crossroads Classic in Indianapolis.

As for its Big Ten slate, Purdue is going to be heavily judged on how it performs in its final eight games of the season. This stretch starts with No. 14 Michigan State paying a visit to Mackey Arena. After that game, the Boilermakers play four of five away from West Lafayette against Illinois, No. 1 Indiana, Iowa and No. 23 Wisconsin (who is one of Purdue's single-plays). The lone home game in the middle of that is against another likely bubble team in Northwestern. The season concludes with a pair of home contests against No. 5 Michigan and Minnesota.

If the freshmen can provide a positive jolt to this team come January, Purdue's a team that should likely be back in the NCAA Tournament because it'll be able to hold its own in the conference. But it also won't be surprising if the Boilermakers find themselves in danger of having to settle for the NIT instead.