

# 2013 Big Ten football previews: Purdue (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

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After examining [Penn State](#) and [Illinois](#), the next Big Ten team we will preview is the Purdue Boilermakers. Iowa will visit Ross-Ade Stadium in West Lafayette, Ind., on Nov. 9.

I look at Purdue and see a bright future ahead with Darrell Hazell now in charge of the program. But a heavy emphasis needs to be placed on the word “future” because that’s really what it’s about with the Boilermakers. Yes, Purdue has been to bowl games the last two seasons, but what Hazell’s about to take on in West Lafayette is a rebuild.

This is a program that had an opportunity last season to make its presence felt in the Big Ten’s Leaders Division with Ohio State and Penn State dealing with postseason bans and couldn’t capitalize. The failure to do so is what ultimately cost Danny Hope his job and now Hazell, who previously coached at Kent State for two seasons and before that was the receivers coach for Jim Tressel at Ohio State, has the task of rebranding the identity into something that could behoove the Boilermakers once they’re members of the new West Division next season.

Offensively is where Purdue has the biggest makeover taking place. For starters, it has a new offensive coordinator in John Shoop, who was most recently in the same position at North Carolina. If the name sounds familiar, it’s because Shoop also had a stint as the Chicago Bears’ offensive coordinator under then-head coach Dick Jauron.

If there’s good news here, it’s that there seems to be stability at quarterback for the first time in awhile. Hope

had developed a reputation for playing multiple QBs in games. Hazell is committed right now to one guy as the starter – senior Rob Henry. Henry made a name for himself in 2010 when he led the Boilermakers in both passing and rushing as a redshirt freshman and was set to become the next big-time Purdue signal-caller before an ACL injury sidelined him for all of 2011. He saw the field in 11 games last season, but found himself behind both Caleb TerBush and Robert Marve. Now Henry's the guy again.

The biggest playmaker Purdue will have in 2013 is junior running back Akeem Hunt. He played behind Akeem Shavers all of last season, but still managed to be the Boilermakers' second leading rusher with 335 yards on 42 carries and two touchdowns. His versatility as a return guy last season allowed Hunt to lead Purdue in all-purpose yards, so he's more than capable of creating big plays for an offense that will need them.

As far as the passing game is concerned, there isn't a whole lot (at least on paper). The one notable returnee is senior wideout Gary Bush, who hauled in seven touchdown receptions but was fourth in receiving yards behind a trio of players who accounted for a combined 13 touchdown grabs in 2012. The Boilermakers will have a young receiving corps and combined with more of an effort to run the ball, a player worth keeping an eye on here is senior tight end Gabe Holmes, who had 25 receptions for 158 yards and two touchdowns a year ago.

Up front, Purdue has plenty of experience to build off of. The one major hole at center is likely to be filled by sophomore Robert Kugler, who started the last seven games of last season at right guard. The two tackle spots are currently being held down by a pair of fifth-year seniors in Kevin Pamphile and Justin Kitchens, both of whom started nine games each between the left and right side. Senior Devin Smith is moving over to left guard and the one spot remaining up in the air is right guard.

Greg Hudson is now the defensive coordinator at Purdue and much like Hazell, he has coaching ties to the Big Ten having previously served as Minnesota's defensive coordinator for five seasons under Glen Mason. The group most likely to benefit from this change is the linebacking corps, which returns a solid trio of senior Will Lucas (who was second on the team in tackles last season) and juniors Joe Gilliam and Sean Robinson.

The bigger story with the defense though is along the defensive line. Purdue has had the fortune of having players such as Ryan Kerrigan and Kawann Short manning that front four. While the loss of Short can't be overstated, the Boilermakers have a pair of D-linemen returning in 2013 that both have potential to be that next breakout player. Senior defensive tackle Bruce Gaston will command more respect inside following a year where he had 28 tackles, while junior Ryan Russell looks to build off a sophomore campaign that consisted of 37 tackles and four sacks.

As for the secondary, this group is probably the strength now of Purdue's defense. Once again, it's led by senior cornerback Ricardo Allen, who is regarded as one of the top corners in the entire conference. The Boilermakers also return a pair of safeties that started every game last season in juniors Landon Feichter and Taylor Richards. Feichter led Purdue with 80 tackles and four interceptions while Richards had six pass break ups. The corner spot opposite Allen will likely be held down by sophomore Frankie Williams, who led the Boilermakers with nine pass break ups in 2012 and will likely be used this season not only as a corner, but as the team's top punt returner.

On special teams, Purdue returns senior punter Cody Webster, who had 70 punts for an average of 42.3 yards per punt that was third in the Big Ten. A pair of sophomores – Paul Griggs and Sam McCartney– continue to battle it out for placekicking duties. In addition to Williams, the names to watch in the

return game are Hunt (again) and junior Raheem Mostert, who will likely have a bigger role there this season with Hunt now starting at running back.

The schedule this season does Hazell and the Boilermakers zero favors. Non-conference play consists of a road opener at Cincinnati and home games against Notre Dame and Northern Illinois, both of whom played in BCS bowl games last season. Sandwiched in-between that pair of games at Ross-Ade Stadium is a trip to Wisconsin, and then the next three Big Ten games after that are against Nebraska at home, at Michigan State and against Ohio State at home. There's also road trips to Penn State and Indiana during the month of November.

Again, I think Purdue made a solid hire in Hazell and over time, I believe it's a move that will pay off for the Boilermakers. But between the coaching overhaul, the facelift being done to the offense and the schedule, this is going to take time and Purdue fans are going to have to show some patience here because 2013 might not lead to anything more than a 4-8 record.

#### **AUDIO:**

Darrell Hazell, Purdue head coach – <http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Darrell-Hazell-2013-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>

Ricardo Allen, Purdue cornerback – <http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Ricardo-Allen-2013-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>