

2013 Big Ten football previews: Indiana (premium)

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So far, we have previewed [Penn State](#), [Illinois](#) and [Purdue](#). The next Big Ten team we will examine is the Indiana Hoosiers. Iowa does not play Indiana in 2013.

When I look at Indiana, I see a team that should be good enough to reach a bowl game in Kevin Wilson's third year at the coaching helm. This is a program that showed glimpses last season of maybe turning the corner under his guidance and with the amount of experience the Hoosiers return, this is easily the best team Wilson has assembled thus far over in Bloomington.

Now in saying this, Indiana isn't a team I expect to be neck-and-neck with the likes of Wisconsin and Ohio State in the Leaders Division this season. But the confidence Wilson exudes has rubbed off on his players to the point where everyone has bought in unlike when he first arrived there in 2011.

One of the big questions with this team will be at quarterback. Last season, Tré Roberson started out as the guy before a torn ACL during the Hoosiers' game at UMass ended his 2012 campaign. From there, Indiana found itself rotating between Cameron Coffman and Nate Sudfeld. All three signal-callers are back in 2013 and assuming Roberson is fully healthy, I would be shocked if he isn't the starter because he's the most athletic of these quarterbacks and again, this was his job prior to his season-ending knee injury.

The backfield will be led by senior running back Stephen Houston. Last season, Houston led the Hoosiers in rushing with

749 yards on the ground and 12 touchdowns. Indiana has depth at the running back spot, but Houston's body of work suggests he'll be the top guy and stay that way barring injury.

Indiana will have options in the ground game, but the receiving corps is the unquestioned strength of this offense as all of its key playmakers return. Junior wideout Cody Latimer led the Hoosiers with 805 yards receiving on 51 catches and six touchdowns, while junior Shane Wynn posted a team-high 68 receptions for 660 yards and also had six TDs. Then there's senior Kofi Hughes, who is viewed as the leader of this group. Hughes had 649 yards receiving on 43 catches and three scores in 2012. Indiana also returns its top tight end in senior Ted Bolser, who caught 41 balls for 445 yards receiving and three touchdowns. These four guys were a huge reason why the Hoosiers had the top passing offense in the Big Ten last season and there's no reason to think they can't duplicate this in 2013.

Up front, the only player it lost from last year is center Will Matte (who also happens to be the only offensive starter Indiana lost, period). He also happened to be the Hoosiers' best lineman though. The likely replacement is junior Collin Rahrig, who played the final six games of 2012 at left guard. Returning at left guard is junior Bernard Taylor, who started the first six games. The other three spots are occupied by players who started all 12 games at their respective spots for Indiana – sophomore left tackle Jason Spriggs, sophomore right guard Dan Feeney and junior right tackle Peyton Eckert. This is still a relatively young group that gained a lot of game experience last season.

The offense looks solid. It's the defense where the biggest challenges remain. If there's good news for the Hoosiers, they return nine starters on this side of the football, including the entire back seven. This is also a defense though that was the worst in the Big Ten against the run in 2012, which has to improve if Indiana's going to take that next step.

Returning along the front four are the two D-ends – junior Ryan Phillis and sophomore Zack Shaw. These two ends combined for 63 tackles and five sacks in 2012. Inside is where younger guys will likely be stepping up to fill the voids left by Adam Replogle and Larry Black.

The linebacking corps appears set at two spots for sure. Senior Griffen Dahlstrom is coming off a season where he posted 48 tackles and he current sits atop the depth chart at strong-side backer. The middle spot is held down by junior David Cooper, who was second on the Hoosiers in tackles with 86 of them last year. The weak-side spot is where there's competition between senior Jacarri Alexander and junior Chase Hoobler.

In the secondary, the leader of this group is senior strong safety Greg Heban, who led the Hoosiers with 91 tackles and three interceptions in 2012. The free safety spot is currently occupied by junior Mark Murphy, who was fourth on the team with 70 tackles during his sophomore campaign. The corners are expected to be senior Antonio Marshall and junior Brian Williams. Marshall had a pair of picks last season, while Williams was the lone defensive back to start every game and posted a team-high eight pass break ups.

Sophomore Erich Toth returns as Indiana's punter after taking over the spot midway through the 2012 season. Placekicking duties are held down by senior Mitch Ewald, who was 42-of-43 on PAT attempts and 15-of-20 on field goal tries last year. Wynn and fellow junior wideout Nick Stoner are currently competing for punt returning duties, while Indiana looks to have sophomore running back Tevin Coleman lead the charge on kickoff returns again following a season where he averaged 23.6 yards per return and housed one in a game against Northwestern.

On top of all the experience Indiana brings back in all three phases, the Hoosiers have eight home games (yes, eight) in

2013, including all four of their non-conference games against Indiana State, Navy (who beat Indiana last season), Bowling Green and Missouri. With the Big Ten opener also at home against Penn State, that's the first five games of the season being played at Memorial Stadium. Throw in contests against Minnesota, Illinois and Purdue, and Indiana should be able to reach six wins just on games played in its own backyard.

The Hoosiers will need to take advantage of that home cooking, too. Because even though they only play four times away from Bloomington, the road slate is brutal. It features a pair of back-to-backs. The first is in October with consecutive trips to Michigan State and Michigan. Then in November, Indiana plays two straight road contests against Wisconsin and Ohio State.

Bottom line, this is a team that should win enough games to become bowl-eligible and there's potential to do as well as 8-4 if the defense makes enough improvements to complement what should be a potent Hoosier offense and if Indiana can make the most of those eight home games. The right guy's in charge and there are enough pieces in place. Now it's a matter of can Indiana take that next step in 2013.

AUDIO:

Kevin Wilson, Indiana head coach – <http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Kevin-Wilson-2013-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>

Mitch Ewald, Indiana kicker – <http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Mitch-Ewald-2013-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>