

# 2013-14 Big Ten men's basketball previews: Purdue (premium)

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With the 2013-14 men's college basketball season kicking off Nov. 8, *HawkeyeDrive.com* will give you rundowns this week on all 12 Big Ten teams. Here, we'll showcase Purdue. The Boilermakers will only play Iowa once this season on either March 1 or 2 at Carver-Hawkeye Arena.

Other than his first season as Purdue's head coach when he was rebuilding the program, last season had to be one of the most challenging for Matt Painter. After years of continuously ending up in the NCAA Tournament, the Boilermakers took a huge step backwards in 2012-13. They finished seventh in the Big Ten, but had issues throughout the entire season, which ended with a 16-18 overall record and a home loss to Santa Clara in the CBI last March.

Entering this season, there's reason for optimism returning to West Lafayette. Purdue returns four starters – all of whom were significant players for the Boilermakers last season – and combined with the fresh faces joining the program, there's a sense Purdue will bounce back and be among those vying for a potential spot in this season's NCAA Tournament.

The Boilermakers bring back their top three leading scorers from last season, including senior guard Terone Johnson, who led Purdue in scoring with an average of 13.5 points per contest. His younger brother Ronnie Johnson (who is a sophomore this season) also returns following a freshman campaign where he averaged 10.3 points per game and led Purdue

in assists with an average of 4.1 assists per contest.

Another guard also returning for his sophomore year that should help bolster the Boilermaker backcourt is Raphael Davis. While his averages were low as a freshman, Davis did start 17 games for Purdue last season and averaged nearly 19 minutes per game.

Then there's sophomore center A.J. Hammons, who will open the season serving a multi-game suspension for violating team policy. It's fair to question whether the light will ever turn on for Hammons because there have been numerous instances where he has come off as immature. But there's no more talented player on this Boilermaker roster and if/when the light does come on, Hammons has potential to be the best center in the Big Ten after finishing second on Purdue in scoring and leading the team in rebounding as a freshman.

One name that should likely play a bigger role this season is senior forward Travis Carroll. Although he only averaged eight minutes of playing time per contest as a junior, Carroll did start two games and will likely be starting early on while Hammons is suspended (at the very least). At 6-9, 247 pounds, Carroll gives Purdue size it needs to have in its front-court in order to rebound from its disastrous 2012-13 season.

In terms of newcomers, Painter brought in a solid freshmen class. The three freshmen to watch for in 2013-14 are 6-6 guard Kendall Stephens, 6-1 guard Bryson Scott and 6-5 forward Basil Smotherman. Stephens is from St. Charles, Ill., and was the most highly-touted freshman in Purdue's recruiting class, while Scott and Smotherman are both in-state products that should be contributors off the bench.

Not only did the Boilermakers bring in a strong freshmen class, but they also landed a transfer from Cornell in Errick Peck, who will be allowed to use his one remaining season of eligibility this year for Purdue. Peck is a 6-6 forward who

can fill the void left by D.J. Byrd as a spot-up 3-point shooter, something the Boilermakers will need to compete in the Big Ten again this season.

In an odd scheduling quirk, there's a small chance Purdue could be playing both Butler and Siena twice during non-conference play. Both teams are competing in the Old Spice Classic along with the Boilermakers during Thanksgiving weekend. Purdue also plays Siena at home on Nov. 24 and Butler on Dec. 14 as part of the Crossroads Classic in Indianapolis. The marquee game non-conference comes Thanksgiving Day at the Old Spice Classic, as Purdue opens up against No. 8 Oklahoma State. The Boilermakers also get Boston College at home as part of the Big Ten/ACC Challenge and have a chance at payback Dec. 7 against Eastern Michigan, a team Purdue inexplicably lost to last season on the road.

As for the Big Ten slate, it doesn't appear as daunting on paper as one might think. Purdue gets home games against in-state rival Indiana and No. 2 Michigan State that are single plays. The Boilermakers also only have to play Illinois and Iowa once each, albeit on the road. If there is a daunting stretch, it's in the back-half. Purdue plays at No. 11 Ohio State on Feb. 8, and that's followed by the two home games against the Hoosiers and Spartans. Then following a trip to Nebraska, No. 7 Michigan visits Mackey Arena, then the Boilermakers play back-to-back road games in March against Iowa and No. 20 Wisconsin.

If Purdue can load up on wins early and often here, it's going to have a good shot at competing in that middle tier of the Big Ten and putting itself in a position where maybe a seventh-place finish again puts the Boilermakers in the NIT or better yet, back in the NCAA Tournament. The pieces are in place and at the very least, this team should be much improved from a year ago.