

2014 Big Ten football previews: Maryland (premium)

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Our first six season previews have dissected [Penn State](#), [Rutgers](#), [Michigan](#), [Ohio State](#), [Michigan State](#) and [Indiana](#). The final preview from the East Division examines one of the Big Ten's newest members, the Maryland Terrapins. Iowa will visit Byrd Stadium in College Park, Md., on Oct. 18.

In its final season as an ACC member, 2013 began well for Maryland as it started out 4-0. Injuries began to decimate the Terrapins during a 34-10 loss to Wake Forest and they limped to a 7-6 finish that featured a 31-20 loss to Marshall in the Military Bowl. Now in its inaugural Big Ten season, Maryland is going to face much stiffer competition. But if the injury bug can be avoided, Randy Edsall's squad might fare better than expected.

Returning as a sixth-year senior at quarterback is C.J. Brown, who has been productive for the Terrapins when healthy. Brown only had 13 touchdown passes last season, but seven of those came before suffering a concussion against Florida State and the other six came after he lost his top two wideouts to season-ending injuries. Brown also rushed for 12 touchdowns on the ground last season, which makes him just as much of a threat on the ground as he would be through the air.

As for the rest of Maryland's backfield, junior Brandon Ross returns after leading the team in rushing with 776 yards and four touchdowns on 166 carries. The Terrapins will also have the services of sophomore Wes Brown, who missed all of 2013 after rushing for 392 yards in 2012.

When healthy, the strength of Maryland's offense is its receiving corps. Junior wideout Stefon Diggs is already being regarded as the best receiver in the Big Ten and the duo of him and senior Deon Long is considered among the best. Both players were on their way to big seasons last fall before both suffered season-ending injuries in the aforementioned loss to Wake Forest.

Prior to their injuries, Diggs had 34 catches for 587 yards receiving and three touchdowns while Long – who transferred to Maryland last year from Iowa Western – had 32 catches for 489 yards and a touchdown. Add in former NFL wideout Keenan McCardell now coaching the Terrapin receivers and both could have monster seasons if they're able to stay on the field.

Up front, Maryland brings back four players with starting experience. This group is led by senior center Sal Conaboy, who started every game there for the Terrapins last season. After moving from right tackle to left for the final four games of 2013, junior Ryan Doyle will stay at left tackle in 2014, while right tackle will be handled by sophomore Michael Dunn and right guard by junior Andrew Zeller. The lone question mark is at left guard, where true freshman Derwin Gray currently sits atop Maryland's depth chart.

Defensively, the Terrapins present a 3-4 scheme to the Big Ten and return nine starters from a year ago including all three of their guys along the D-line. But after starting most of last season at one end spot, senior Keith Bowers is now moving inside and could very well be second-string behind senior Darius Kilgo, who had more tackles (37) and sacks (2) than Bowers. On the outside, junior Quinton Jefferson returns after recording a group-high 47 tackles in 2013, while senior Andre Monroe will be a permanent starter in 2014 after leading the Terrapins with 9.5 sacks a year ago.

Gone from the linebacking corps is Marcus Whitfield, who had nine sacks in 2013. But his spot is the only vacant one.

Senior inside linebackers Cole Farrand and L.A. Goree were second and third, respectively, on the Terrapins in tackles (Farrand had 84 tackles, Goree had 75). Senior outside linebacker Matt Robinson was right behind them with 73 tackles, including 10 for lost yardage. The most likely candidate to replace Whitfield at the other outside spot is another senior, Yannik Cudjoe-Virgil. He made one start last season and finished with 18 tackles and three sacks. Undoubtedly, this the group Maryland's defense will be leaning on for leadership.

Like the first two levels, the secondary also returns three starters, plus another defensive back that missed 2013, but started every game at corner in 2012. Junior safety Sean Davis' 102 tackles led the team in 2013, while fellow junior safety Anthony Nixon compiled 60 tackles. Sophomore cornerback William Likely returns after a true freshman campaign where he had 70 tackles and a team-high six pass break ups. The other corner spot is a battle between junior Alvin Hill and senior Jeremiah Johnson, who had 43 tackles and eight pass break ups as a starting corner two seasons ago.

Junior punter Nathan Renfro returns after averaging 40.8 yards per punt last season, while junior kicker Brad Craddock looks to build off a sophomore campaign where he was 21-of-25 on field goal attempts. Back returning both punts and kickoffs this season will be Likely, who compiled 934 yards as a return man in 2013.

Maryland has some intriguing non-conference games. Its slate includes a home game against long-time rival West Virginia and road trips to both South Florida and former conference foe Syracuse.

As far as the Big Ten slate is concerned, that first ever Big Ten game on Sept. 27 at Indiana could loom large for the Terrapins. Sandwiched between that contest and the regular season finale at home against Rutgers is a six-game stretch

that is absolutely brutal.

This starts with Maryland playing its first Big Ten home game against Ohio State, then Iowa visits College Park after the Terrapins' first bye week. Another bye follows consecutive trips to Wisconsin and Penn State, then Michigan State pays a visit to Byrd Stadium. This stretch then concludes with a contest at Michigan.

While the schedule isn't doing the Terrapins any favors, Maryland has enough talent on both sides of the ball to be formidable. Assuming it can get that Big Ten opener against Indiana, winning 1-2 of those games during that eight-week stretch wouldn't be too far-fetched.

The defense should be able to keep the Terrapins in most (if not all) of these games. But it's the offense that will need to be productive in 2014 and a lot of that will hinge on whether Brown, Diggs and Long can all manage to stay healthy over the course of the fall. If they can, Maryland can easily reach six wins and maybe even win 7-8 games. If they can't, this could be a long season.

AUDIO:

Maryland wide receiver Stefon Diggs –

<http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Stefon-Diggs-2014-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>