

MSR: montgomerySPORTSreport

The Paper of Montgomery County

August 2021

Ranking top five Purdue gridgers



Purdue Boilermakers's Dave Butz

Ranking top five Purdue gridgers, by position, of all time

Last week in the Purdue football A to Z column, I mentioned that the Boilermakers have seldom had quality depth at more than one or two positions at any time over their 130-plus year history.

That got me to thinking about who were the best Purdue football players by position. As I suspected, some positions (quarterback, defensive end, wide receiver) were overflowing with memorable names to longtime Boilermaker fans.

As is the case today, however, finding all-time great offensive linemen and cornerbacks / safeties strained the self-imposed limitation of five Boilermakers per position. It's been more than 20 years since Purdue has lined up from tackle to tackle five All-Big Ten caliber linemen. Purdue's secondary hasn't had a Bernard Pollard or Stu Schweigert in over 15 years.

This week and next, I'll be ranking the top five Boilermaker football players at each position. Let's start with everybody's favorite side of the ball, offense.

Quarterback

1. Drew Brees: Maxwell Award winner in 2000, still holds many Purdue passing records. A lock to be the third Boilermaker QB in the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

2. Bob Griese: Should have been Purdue's first Heisman Trophy winner in 1966, the year he led the Boilermakers to victory over USC in the Rose Bowl. College and Pro Football Hall of Fame member.

3. Mark Herrmann: Former NCAA record-holder for passing yards. He and College Football Hall of Fame coach Jim Young led Purdue to the only 10-win season in school history.

4. Mike Phipps: Probably the best passing arm of any Purdue QB. Should have won Heisman in 1969. First quarterback to beat Notre Dame three times.

5. Len Dawson: Nicknamed "Golden Boy," which led to Purdue bands creating the Golden Girl. Beat Notre Dame twice. Super Bowl IV MVP and Pro Football Hall of Fame member.

Running back

1. Leroy Keyes: The greatest player in Purdue football history. Probably the second-best cornerback in school history, too. First 1,000-yard rusher at Purdue. College Football Hall of Fame member.

2. Mike Alstott: Career (3,635) and single season (1,436) rushing leader. Second in career rushing TDs (39).

3. Otis Armstrong: Rushed for 1,009 yards as a sophomore in 1970. Consensus All-American in 1972 when he set school season records for rushing attempts and yards (243 for 1,361). His 276 rushing yards in his Boilermaker finale against Indiana remains a record. NFL rushing champion in 1974 with 1,407 yards. College Football Hall of Fame member.

4. Duane Purvis: If there had been a



KENNY THOMPSON
Columnist

Heisman Trophy in 1934, Purvis probably wins it. All-American in 1933 and 1934, he averaged 5 yards a carry as a senior with touchdown runs of 80 and 73 yards. Was Purdue's career rushing leader for 34 years with 1,802 yards.

5. Kory Sheets: Set career records for rushing touch-

downs (48) and career TDs (54) as well as single-season rushing touchdowns (16). Second at Purdue with 3,341 yards, 4,944 all-purpose yards and 324 points.

Wide receiver

1. Rondale Moore: Only the third player in college football history to be a Consensus All-American as a true freshman. The other two: Adrian Peterson and Herschel Walker.

2. Taylor Stubblefield: From 2004 to 2011, held the NCAA career receptions record at 316. His 3,629 career receiving yards ranked second in Purdue and Big Ten history at the time.

3. Dorien Bryant: His 6,219 all-purpose yards and 2,125 kickoff return yards are Purdue records. Caught 292 passes for 3,548 yards and 21 TDs.

4. Brian Alford: A first-team All-American in 1997 after starring in Joe Tiller's basketball-on-grass offense with 67 catches for 1,228 yards. Graduated as Purdue's all-time leader in receiving yards (3,029) and TD receptions (31).

5. Larry Burton: Consensus All-American in 1974, the former Olympian sprinter led the Big Ten in receptions (38) and receiving yards (702) as a senior.

Tight end

1. Dave Young: Like Drew Brees and Tim Stratton 20 years later, Young and Mark Herrmann were a deadly combination to opponents from 1977-80. Young was All-Big Ten as a junior and a senior. Caught 27 touchdown passes in an era when the tight end was seen as more of a blocker than receiver.

2. Dustin Keller: An NFL first-round draft pick, Keller was the most athletic tight end in school history. He caught 135 passes for 1,732 yards and 15 touchdowns in his Boilermaker career.

3. Tim Stratton: The first winner of the John Mackey Award as the nation's best tight end, Stratton is one of only four Boilermakers to be named first-team All-Big Ten three times.

4. Brycen Hopkins: The Big Ten's Kwalick-Clark Tight End of the Year in 2019. Caught 130 passes for 1,945 yards and 16 touchdowns

in his career.

5. Cliff Benson: Three-year starter following Dave Young's departure. Caught 117 passes for 1,546 yards and 11 TDs. Five-year NFL career.

Offensive tackle

1. Matt Light: Recruited to Purdue by Jim Colletto as a tight end, Joe Tiller moved Light to left tackle in 1998 and changed his football fortunes. First-team All-Big Ten in 2000 as part of a line that allowed just seven sacks on the way to a share of the Big Ten championships. Earned three Super Bowl championship rings with New England.

2. Elmer "Red" Sleight: Purdue's first football All-American as a leader on its undefeated Big Ten title team in 1929.

3. Donnie Green: An All-American in 1970 who became famous as one of O.J. Simpson's "Electric Company" during his 2,003-yard rushing season for Buffalo in 1973.

4. Karl Singer: Earned Associated Press All-America honors as a senior in 1965 while protecting quarterback Bob Griese. First-round draft pick by the Boston Patriots in 1966.

5. Brandon Gorin: Played right tackle opposite Matt Light for the 2000 Big Ten champions. A three-year starter, he followed Light to New England and earned two Super Bowl rings.

Guard

1. Alex Agase: The second of his three first-team All-America honors came at Purdue in 1943, where he was sent by the Marines to train while also playing football. Also playing linebacker, Agase was a key player in Purdue's 9-0 Big Ten championship season.

2. Dick Barwegan: The other guard on that 1943 team, Barwegan not only started as a freshman but he was voted Purdue's most valuable player. Barwegan also starred in the NFL, making its All-Decade Team for the 1950s.

3. Tom Bettis: An All-American in 1954, Bettis was a two-time team MVP and enjoyed a long NFL career with Green Bay, Pittsburgh and the Chicago Bears.

4. Abe Gibron: A three-year starter (1946-48) who played in the NFL for 11 seasons - earning three NFL championships with Cleveland - but also was head coach of the Chicago Bears for three seasons.

5. Gene Mruczkowski: A four-year starter and a member of that 2000 Rose Bowl offensive line that included Matt Light and Brandon Gorin. Like them, Mruczkowski earned two Super Bowl rings with New England.

Center

1. Nick Hardwick: A former walk-on, by 2003 Hardwick was an All-Big Ten center and the first of seven Boilermakers selected in the NFL Draft.

2. Larry Kaminski: All-Big Ten in 1965 before embarking on an eight-year NFL career

with Denver.

3. Ed Flanagan: Earned second-team All-Big Ten honors as a senior in 1964 and went on to be a four-time Pro Bowl selection with the Detroit Lions.

4. Charles Miller: All-Big Ten selection in 1931 for the co-Big Ten champions, he went on to win two NFL championships with the Chicago Bears.

5. Pete Quinn: A four-year starter from 1977-80, Quinn remains a popular figure among Purdue fans. He was selected Purdue's all-time center in 1987.

Kicker

1. Travis Dorsch: A consensus All-American in 2001, he was the first player in Big Ten history to be a first-team all-conference selection as a kicker and a punter. When he graduated, Dorsch was the Big Ten's leader with 68 field goals and 355 kicking points.

2. Carson Wiggs: Gifted with a powerful leg - he once kicked a 67-yard field goal in the spring game - Wiggs owns the Purdue record for the longest field goal (59 yards). He only trails Dorsch and Kory Sheets with 293 career points.

3. Scott Sovereign: Shares the Purdue record, going 4 for 4 on field goal tries against Wake Forest in 1977. Second-team All-Big Ten in 1978.

4. Jonathan Briggs: Briggs also owns a 4 for 4 field goal record, pulling off the feat at Illinois in 1986. Fourth in career field goals with 36.

5. Ben Jones: The transfer from Butler made 25 of 30 field goals in 2003, setting a school record for field goals made and percentage (.833) in a season.

The "Den of Defensive Ends" was created by former Purdue associate athletic director Tom Schott in 2004 as a counterpart to the Boilermakers' long-standing tradition as the "Cradle of Quarterbacks."

While none of the 12 charter members of the Den of Defensive Ends is in the Pro Football Hall of Fame (Ryan Kerrigan of the Philadelphia Eagles is still active), many are recognizable names to NFL fans.

In fact, it may come as a surprise to fans that during Purdue's long football history, it has had quite a few outstanding defensive linemen in the NFL. That makes for difficult decisions for the top five Boilermakers at each position.

End

1. Ryan Kerrigan (2007-10): After winning Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year honors, Kerrigan was a first-round selection by the Washington Football Team. Kerrigan was an iron man by NFL standards. It was well into his ninth season before Kerrigan missed four

KENNY From Page 2

games due to a concussion and a calf injury. Kerrigan is 4.5 sacks away from 100 for his pro career, which will have a new home at Washington's NFC East rival, Philadelphia.

2. Lamar Lundy (1954-56): The first African-American student to receive a football scholarship at Purdue, Lundy was a threat as a wide receiver and at defensive end. But Lundy blossomed with the Los Angeles Rams. The sack wasn't a recognized statistic in the NFL during Lundy's career. He didn't become a full-time defensive end until 1960, having also seen playing time as a 6-7 wide receiver. Thanks to Pro-Football-Reference.com's research, Lundy is credited with 60.5 career sacks. That number is even more impressive when you consider two of his "Fearsome Foursome" teammates with the Los Angeles Rams were Hall of Famers Deacon Jones and Merlin Olsen.

3. Rosevelt Colvin (1995-98): Colvin was a big reason for Purdue's turnaround in 1997 and 1998 under Joe Tiller. After setting single-season (15) and career sack records (35) in 1998, Colvin was drafted in the fourth round by Chicago in 1999. After the Bears made one of their many personnel mistakes in letting Colvin reach free agency in 2003, the New England Patriots snatched him up. With the Patriots, Colvin won two Super Bowl rings.

4. Keena Turner (1976-79): The star of Leon Burnett's "Junk Defense," Turner played 11 seasons for the San Francisco 49ers. While with the 49ers, Turner earned four Super Bowl rings. But his proudest accomplishment was completing his Purdue degree this past May, walking graduation ceremonies with his youngest daughter, Ella.

5. Chike Okefor (1994-96, 1998): A generation before George Karlaftis pressured quarterbacks while leading West Lafayette High School to a state championship, Okefor was a stud fullback/linebacker for Ernie Beck's 1993 state champs. Okefor reached his potential in his final season under Joe Tiller. Teaming up with Colvin to sack Kansas State's Michael Bishop six times in the 1998 Alamo Bowl, Okefor was a third-round pick by the 49ers in 1999. Also playing 11 NFL seasons for San Francisco, Seattle and Arizona, Okefor racked up 53 sacks and 383 tackles.

Tackle

1. Dave Butz (1970-72): Elected to the College Football Hall of Fame in 2014, Butz was a consensus All-American in 1972 and a finalist for the Lombardi Award. Butz went on to play 16 seasons in the NFL, 14 with Washington. Butz earned two Super Bowl rings and missed only four games his entire NFL career.

2. Jeff Zgonina (1989-92): Owns Purdue records for tackles for loss in a game (7), season (28) and career (72). His 29 sacks rank third. As a senior, Zgonina recorded 28 tackles for loss and 13 sacks to win Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year honors. He went on to play 17 seasons in the NFL, winning a Super Bowl

ring with the St. Louis Rams in Super Bowl XXXIV.

3. Kawann Short (2008-12): First-team All-Big Ten in 2011-12, Short was athletic enough at 6-3, 314 pounds to block a school-record eight kicks. His 19.5 career sacks and 49 tackles for loss rank among the top three for a Boilermaker defensive tackle. Short would be a two-time Pro Bowl selection with the Carolina Panthers, for whom he played eight seasons.

4. Ken Novak (1973-75): In an oddity, Novak made several All-America teams in 1975, when he led Purdue with 87 tackles, but wasn't a first-team All-Big Ten selection. Even more strange, Novak had been a first-team All-Big Ten choice in 1974. Novak was taken in the first round by the Baltimore Colts in 1976.

5. Bill Yanchar (1967-69): Brilliant in the classroom (Academic All-American in 1969) and on the field (first-team All-Big Ten in 1968-69), Yanchar closed his career in style with 15 tackles in a 44-21 victory against Indiana. He played one season with the Cleveland Browns, making the team as a 10th-round draft pick.

Middle guard*

(Only three selections here due to the short period Purdue played with a five-man defensive line)

1. Chuck Kyle (1966-68): Consensus first-team All-American as a senior and one of four Boilermakers to earn first-team All-Big Ten honors three times. In his final game, he set a school record with 27 tackles in the Old Oaken Bucket victory against Indiana. Kyle played three seasons in the Canadian Football League and with the New York Jets in 1972.

2. Ken Loushin (1976-79): A four-year starter and two-time first-team All-Big Ten selection, Loushin is among the all-time Purdue leaders in tackles for loss (42) and career tackles (301).

3. Gregg Bingham (1970-72): A three-year starter, Bingham was All-Big Ten as a junior and a senior. He recorded a team-high 89 tackles, including eight for loss, in 1972. The Houston Oilers drafted Bingham in the fourth round in 1973 and moved him to linebacker. He started 173 regular-season games and recorded 21 interceptions and 14 fumble recoveries.

Linebacker

1. Kevin Motts (1976-79): Purdue's career tackles leader for more than 40 years earned him this spot over some more prominent names. His 520 career tackles from the middle linebacker spot is 41 more than the next man on this list. Somehow, Motts was only a second-team All-Big Ten selection as a senior during Purdue's only 10-win campaign.

2. Fred Strickland (1984-87): One of the best tacklers in school history, Strickland set himself up for a 12-year NFL career by leading the Big Ten with 130 tackles as a senior. That was only his third-best total as a Boilermaker, having recorded 132 as a sophomore

and 140 as a junior.

3. Niko Koutouvides (2000-2003): First-team All-Big Ten middle linebacker as a senior after recording 101 tackles. He was even better as a junior with 121 stops that included 11.5 tackles for loss and four sacks. Koutouvides played nine seasons in the NFL with Seattle, Denver, Tampa Bay and New England.

4. Mark Brown (1981-82): One of the better junior college transfers to suit up for Purdue, he made 209 tackles as a senior. More amazingly, 161 of them were solo tackles. Both are Purdue records. Brown went on to play nine seasons in the NFL with Miami and Detroit.

5. Landon Johnson (2000-03): One of several freshmen who played key roles for the 2000 Big Ten championship team. Johnson led Purdue in tackles in 2003, which earned him a third-round selection by Cincinnati. He played seven seasons in the NFL.

Cornerback

1. Rod Woodson (1983-86): A member of the College (2016) and Pro Football (2009) Halls of Fame, Woodson was a special athlete Purdue is lucky to get once a generation. He left Purdue a consensus All-American and holder of 13 individual records. A three-time first-team All-Big Ten selection, Woodson's records include a 100-yard interception return against Iowa in 1986. He played 17 seasons in the NFL and was one of a handful of active players selected to the NFL's 75th anniversary team in 1995.

2. Leroy Keyes (1966-68): His offensive feats are well known but Keyes was a shutdown cornerback before that term was created. He was mostly a defensive player as a sophomore but still finished with four career interceptions. Keyes' ability to cover All-American wide receiver Jim Seymour proved invaluable in Purdue's 1967 and 1968 victories against Notre Dame.

3. Ricardo Allen (2010-13): An immediate impact player out of Florida, Allen owns the Purdue record for interception returns for a touchdown with four. Allen finished with 13 overall interceptions before moving on to the NFL with the Atlanta Falcons for seven seasons.

4. Bill Kay (1977-80): A member of Jim Young's first recruiting class at Purdue, Kay had 10 career interceptions and was a first-team All-Big Ten selection as a senior. Kay's 18 passes broken up in 1980 and his career total of 32 both rank among the top five in Boilermaker history. Kay played four seasons in the NFL.

5. Cris Dishman (1984-87): Shifting from wide receiver to cornerback paved the way for a 13-year NFL career. Dishman finished with nine career interceptions and was an All-Big Ten selection as a senior.

Safety

1. Stuart Schweigert (2000-2003): One of the most heralded recruits brought in by Joe Tiller, Schweigert would leave Purdue as its

career interceptions leader (17). A four-year starter, Schweigert was a second-team All-Big Ten choice as a freshman and sophomore before moving up to first-team status as a junior and a senior. His 360 tackles trail only Rod Woodson among Purdue defensive backs.

2. Bernard Pollard (2003-05): Long before his crushing tackle of Tom Brady ended the future Hall of Famer's 2008 season, Pollard earned his reputation as a hard hitter on his way to earning Freshman All-America honors. He led Purdue with 96 tackles in 2004 and 92 in 2005. His five blocked kicks are a school record.

3. Tim Foley (1967-69): An All-American for Jack Mollenkopf's final Purdue team in 1969, Foley played 11 seasons with the Miami Dolphins. In addition to starting for the 1972 undefeated Dolphins, Foley earned Pro Bowl honors in 1979.

4. Adrian Beasley (1996-99): His 11 career interceptions are tied for third-most in school history but he'll be best remembered for his fumble return for a touchdown that helped seal the upset of Notre Dame in 1997.

5. Rock Supan (1975-78): Although best known for kicking the game-winning field goal in a 16-14 victory against No. 1 Michigan in 1976, Supan also made 11 tackles that day and would be named Sports Illustrated's Player of the Week. Supan was a three-year starter who collected eight career interceptions.

Punter

1. Travis Dorsch (1998-2001): Dorsch won the Ray Guy Award as a senior and was Purdue's first consensus All-American since Rod Woodson in 1986. Dorsch led the nation with a 48.4 punting average.

2. Shawn McCarthy (1986-89): McCarthy led the Big Ten with a 44.6 punt average in 1989 and was Purdue's lone first-team all-conference selection. He played two seasons with the New England Patriots.

3. Cody Webber (2010-13): Owns single-game punt average record of 56 yards against Indiana as a freshman. His 43-yard career average ranks second to Dorsch's 48.4 mark.

4. Joe Schopper (2015-18): When Schopper wasn't kicking for a career 41-yard average, he proved to be a special teams weapon with his arm and his legs. His fake field goal run set up Purdue's second touchdown in its 49-20 upset of Ohio State in 2018.

5. Eric Bruun (1990-91): His 42.4-yard career punting average is third all-time at Purdue. He was a first-team All-Big Ten selection in 1991, averaging a league-best 43.2 yards per kick.

Kenny Thompson is the former sports editor for the Lafayette Journal & Courier and an award-winning journalist. He has covered Purdue athletics for many years.



TOGETHER, WE'RE BUILDING A BETTER TEAM.

Our more than 25,000 teammates are the heart and soul of Nucor. Our teammate-focused culture is delivering powerful results for our customers.

POWERFUL PARTNERSHIPS. POWERFUL RESULTS.

www.nucor.com

NUCOR®