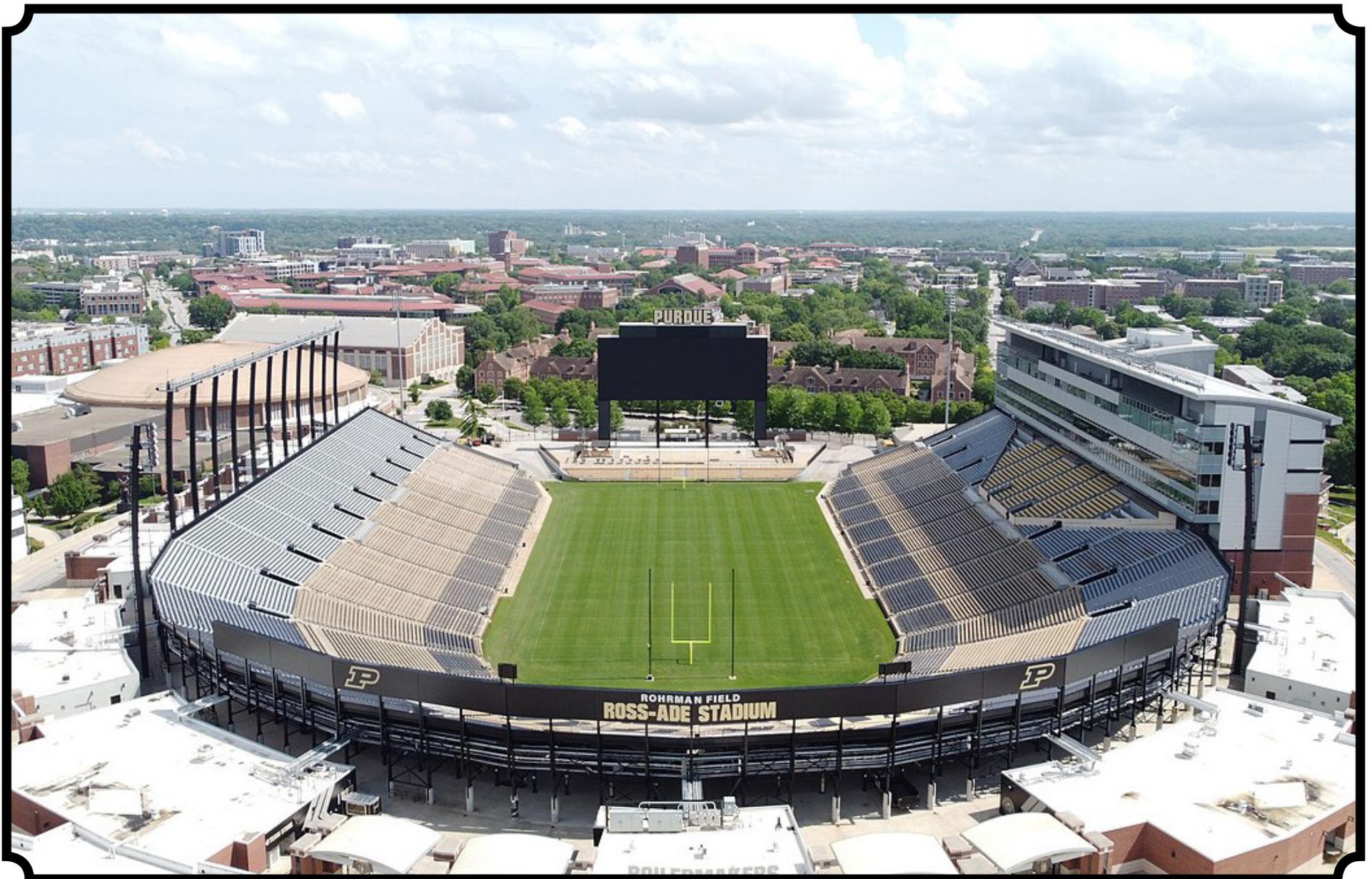


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Possibilities and Five Foes



Ross-Ade Stadium at Purdue University

Postseason possibilities and record against top five foes

With most of the Big Ten Conference's football teams reaching the two-thirds mark of the season, let's take a look at each school's chances of reaching postseason play.

BOWL ELIGIBLE

No. 5 Michigan State (8-0) – The surprise of the Big Ten, with Wake Forest transfer Kenneth Walker II running himself into Heisman Trophy contention with 197 yards and five touchdowns against Michigan. Walker, the Big Ten's Offensive Player of the Week, leads all FBS rushers with 149.2 yards per game.

Remaining schedule: at Purdue (Saturday), vs. Maryland (Nov. 13), at Ohio State (Nov. 20), vs. Penn State (Nov. 27). If the Spartans can avoid a letdown at Purdue, the Ohio State game will likely decide the East Division race.

No. 6 Ohio State (7-1) – The Buckeyes' defense hasn't always been playoff caliber this season, but the nation's best scoring offense (47.2 points a game) can reach the end zone in so many ways. Ohio State remains the Big Ten's best hope of earning a College Football Playoff berth.

Remaining schedule: at Nebraska (Saturday), vs. Purdue (Nov. 13), vs. Michigan State (Nov. 20), at Michigan (Nov. 27). Buckeyes are likely to head to the Big Ten Championship Game at 11-1.

No. 9 Michigan (7-1) – Does the loss to Michigan State foretell what's to come later this month against Ohio State? The second half defensive collapse against the Spartans was surprising.

Remaining schedule: vs. Indiana (Saturday), at Penn State (Nov. 13), at Maryland (Nov. 20), vs. Ohio State (Nov. 27). What looked like a difficult game at Penn State now seems winnable even with Michigan's defensive issues. But Michigan coach Jim Harbaugh is 0-5 against Ohio State. A 10-win season and a loss to the Buckeyes is considered a failure in Ann Arbor.

Minnesota (6-2) – The Gophers control their destiny in the Big Ten West, an unlikely thought after an embarrassing 14-10 loss at home to Bowling Green. Win at Iowa and beat Wisconsin in Minneapolis on the final day of the regular season, and no one will say the Gophers didn't earn the title.

Remaining schedule: vs. Illinois (Saturday), at Iowa (Nov. 13), at Indiana (Nov. 20), vs. Wisconsin (Nov. 27). The hunch here is that the Gophers either lose at Iowa or to Wisconsin, denying them a trip to the Big Ten Championship Game.

No. 19 Iowa (6-2) – When your offense relies on the defense to put points on the board, that's not sustainable over a 12-game schedule. That said, the Hawkeyes have a favor-



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Columnist

able November schedule that could still put them on the path to the Big Ten Championship Game.

Remaining schedule: at Northwestern (Saturday), vs. Minnesota (Nov. 13), vs. Illinois (Nov. 20), at Nebraska (Nov. 26). Beat the Gophers and just about everybody will forget the upset losses to Purdue and Wisconsin.

ONE MORE WIN

Purdue (5-3) – Seldom in its more than 130-year football history has defense won games for the Boilermakers. Purdue has the 10th-best scoring defense in the nation (17.1 ppg) and the eighth-best pass defense. Linebacker Jalen Graham is the Big Ten's Defensive Player of the Week, and George Karlaftis continues to play like a future NFL first round draft pick. If the offense can find consistency, a previously unthinkable 8-win season is not out of reach.

Remaining games: vs. Michigan State (Saturday), at Ohio State (Nov. 13), vs. Northwestern at Wrigley Field (Nov. 20), vs. Indiana (Nov. 27). The prediction here is that Purdue will be bowl eligible before the Old Oaken Bucket Game.

Maryland (5-3) – The Terrapins have the most difficult path among the Big Ten's five win teams to reach bowl eligibility. Those hopes likely will come down to the final game of the season.

Remaining games: vs. Penn State (Saturday), at Michigan State (Nov. 13), vs. Michigan (Nov. 20), vs. Rutgers (Nov. 27). Maryland will be underdogs in every game but Rutgers, which may also be playing for bowl eligibility.

No. 22 Penn State (5-3) – The Nittany Lions are playing like they want to make sure James Franklin doesn't leave for LSU or USC after the season. An unfathomable nine overtime loss to Illinois was followed by a much better effort in the loss to Ohio State this past Saturday.

Remaining schedule: at Maryland (Saturday), vs. Michigan (Nov. 13), vs. Rutgers (Nov. 20), at Michigan State (Nov. 27). Bowl eligibility won't be a problem for the Nittany Lions but seven victories may be their ceiling with Michigan and Michigan State still to come.

Wisconsin (5-3) – The Badgers are suddenly one of the Big Ten's hottest teams and they have a very favorable November schedule. Wisconsin could very well be back in the Big Ten Championship Game for the seventh time in 11 years.

Remaining schedule: at Rutgers (Saturday),

vs. Northwestern (Nov. 13), vs. Nebraska (Nov. 20), at Minnesota (Nov. 26). Get ready for yet another Ohio State-Wisconsin matchup in the title game. Only the Gophers have the kind of firepower that could outscore the Badgers and who knows if Minnesota will have any healthy running backs by then?

NEED HELP

Rutgers (4-4) – Following his 75th win with the Scarlet Knights this past Saturday, Greg Schiano is four victories shy of becoming the school's winningest football coach. Unfortunately, from what is ahead for Rutgers, that record will stand until 2022.

Remaining schedule: vs. Wisconsin (Saturday), at Indiana (Nov. 13), at Penn State (Nov. 20), vs. Maryland (Nov. 27). It's likely next week's game in Bloomington will determine Rutgers' bowl fate.

ON LIFE SUPPORT

Northwestern (3-5) – It is difficult to believe that the Wildcats are two weeks removed from a 56-7 loss at Nebraska, the same Cornhuskers who looked offensively challenged in the second half against Purdue. But Northwestern has had ineffective quarterback play from transfer Ryan Hilinski and former Indiana Mr. Football Hunter Johnson.

Remaining schedule: vs. Iowa (Saturday), at Wisconsin (Nov. 13), vs. Purdue at Wrigley Field (Nov. 20), at Illinois (Nov. 27). Three consecutive games against teams ranked in the nation's top 10 in scoring defense means home for the holidays for Northwestern.

Illinois (3-6) – How does a team that beats Penn State lose at home to Rutgers, giving up more points to the Scarlet Knights in regulation than the Nittany Lions scored in nine overtimes?

Remaining schedule: At Minnesota (Saturday), at Iowa (Nov. 20), vs. Northwestern (Nov. 27). Pride is all that will be on the line when the Wildcats come to Champaign.

Nebraska (3-6) – The only question in Lincoln is whether new athletic director Trev Alberts will fire another Cornhuskers legend in Scott Frost. My guess is no. That could change with three likely blowouts to end the season, but if Frost can't turn Nebraska around, who can?

Remaining schedule: vs. Ohio State (Saturday), at Wisconsin (Nov. 20), vs. Iowa (Nov. 26). No Cornhuskers team has ever gone 3-9, and it's been five seasons since this proud program has had a winning record.

Indiana (2-6) – The annual Michael Penix season-ending injury came early this year, but the Hoosiers had no chance to live up to expectations from the fans and media. According to USA Today, coach Tom Allen has a \$30 million buyout. That's three times what it cost Indiana to send basketball coach Archie Miller packing earlier this year.

Remaining schedule: at Michigan (Saturday), vs. Rutgers (Nov. 13), vs. Minnesota (Nov. 20), at Purdue (Nov. 27). Bowl hopes come to an end in Ann Arbor.

It's been 61 years since Purdue football has had two victories over Associated Press top five rivals.

Saturday's 40-29 victory over former No. 5 Michigan State was not unexpected in this corner. Just like the 24-7 win at No. 2 Iowa last month, Purdue caught the Spartans coming off an emotional victory over rival Michigan the week before.

The Boilermakers now own 17 victories against Associated Press top five opponents as an unranked team. Illinois and USC have had 11 such victories. Michigan State is next with 10.

Purdue has recorded three of those victories in coach Jeff Brohm's five seasons.

"I think we're willing to take some chances against really good opponents that maybe others aren't," Brohm said Monday. "I think this year we've been better in all three segments of our team than we have in the past, which is really meaningful to me to see that happen."

"I do think that we're not afraid of the challenge, and we look forward to really tough opponents and seeing how we match up."

Purdue won't have a chance for No. 18 Saturday at Ohio State since the Buckeyes dropped to No. 6 despite its victory over Nebraska. Also surprising was that Purdue did not return to the Associated Press Top 25 behind that impressive victory. The Boilermakers, however, were ranked 19th in the College Football Playoff rankings. The Buckeyes were rated fourth.

It was a record-setting day for junior wide receiver David Bell and senior quarterback Aidan O'Connell.

Bell's 11 catches for 217 yards set the school record for 100-yard receiving games with 15. John Standeford set the previous mark in 2003. That performance continues a trend of excelling against ranked teams. Bell has caught 79 passes for 1,081 yards and seven touchdowns against eight ranked teams in his career.

O'Connell's 40 of 54 passing day set a completion percentage record (.741) with at least 50 pass attempts. Detroit Lions backup quarterback David Blough set the previous mark of .709 (39 of 55) against Missouri in 2018.

According to College Football Reference,

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O'Connell's completion percentage is the best by a Big Ten quarterback with at least 50 attempts since 2000. O'Connell was selected Co-Offensive Player of the Week by the Big Ten on Monday.

"He's always done a great job with playing with poise and composure and not letting anything rattle him, and that's always been a strength of his since we started playing him," Brohm said.

"He's understanding that, hey, let's get the ball out, let's get it to our playmakers, let's not turn the ball over. He's done a really good job of taking care of the ball and making sure that we don't give the team another possession, and that's been critical for our success."

Only Drew Brees has completed more passes in a Purdue game (55 at Wisconsin in 1998). O'Connell's 536 yards ranks third in program history behind Blough's 572 yards against Missouri and Curtis Painter's 546 against Central Michigan in the 2007 Motor City Bowl.

O'Connell is on pace to set the Purdue career (.674) and season (.716) completion percentage records. Robert Marve holds the career mark of .638, while Blough's .660 percentage in 2018 is the single-season record.

More importantly for Jeff Brohm's program, it is bowl eligible for the first time since 2018. Penn State and Wisconsin also reached the necessary six victories to qualify for postseason play. That gives the Big Ten eight bowl eligible teams with only Indiana and Nebraska eliminated from the postseason.

Purdue also shares the Big Ten West Division lead at 4-2 with Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin. The Badgers, however, have the most favorable schedule down the stretch and own the head-to-head tiebreaker over the Boilermakers.

GREATEST UPSETS

Where does Saturday's victory against Michigan State rank among Purdue's all-time upset victories?

Let's start with those two Associated Press Top 5 victories in 1960.

Purdue owned a 1-1-1 record when No. 3 Ohio State came to West Lafayette on Oct. 15. Senior running back Willie Jones rushed for 72 yards and three

touchdowns in the 24-21 triumph. Quarterback Bernie Allen also had a field goal for Purdue.

Jones' 26-yard touchdown run in the third quarter, just three minutes after Ohio State had taken its only lead, proved to be the game-winner.

Players carried coach Jack Mollenkopf to midfield after the game to meet with notoriously ungracious loser Woody Hayes. Lafayette Journal and Courier sports editor Gordon

Graham wrote that the postgame meeting was "one of the shortest handshakes on record."

An odd fact from the game: Purdue started more Ohio natives (9) than the Buckeyes (8).

Nearly a month later, the Boilermakers pulled off the upset of the season by defeating top-ranked Minnesota 23-14 at Minneapolis.

Sophomore end Forest Farmer earned United Press International Midwest Lineman of the Week honors with two sacks and hauling in four passes for 69 yards. Two of his receptions set up first-and-goal situations for Purdue at the Minnesota 2 and 5, respectively.

"The Minnesota game was the greatest game we played that year and one of the greater games I played in my career," Farmer said in 2002.

"Purdue came out blasting and we couldn't stop them," said Bobby Bell, the Minnesota star linebacker and future Pro Football Hall of Famer with the Kansas City Chiefs.

The victory elevated Purdue to 3-4-1. The Boilermakers would reach .500 the following week with a 35-0 victory against Indiana.

"I have said all along that we've been playing good ball," Mollenkopf said after the game. "We have just not been getting the breaks."

Mollenkopf's opinion is backed up by his team's earlier victory over No. 12 Notre Dame and a 27-27 tie with No. 8 UCLA.

It would never happen today but despite the loss, Minnesota went on to be chosen national champions by The Associated Press and UPI coaches poll. That title was the Gophers' seventh and most recent national championship.

Other top upsets in Purdue history:

- The gold standard remains the 1950 victory at No. 1 Notre Dame, a 28-14 triumph that snapped the Fighting Irish's 39-game unbeaten streak.

"The feeling going into Notre Dame Stadium on that rainy day was plain euphoria," Bernie Flowers, a sophomore wide receiver that day, said in 1999.

"You'd think you were playing against the Four Horsemen, the Seven Mules and Knute Rockne. Notre Dame coach Frank Leahy was a carbon copy of 'the Rock.' We were nobody; they had like five preseason All-Americans."

College football's version of David vs. Goliath saw a 5-9 sophomore quarterback named Dale Samuels topple the seemingly unbeatable giant. Notre Dame had not lost at home since 1942.

- Purdue was 0-3 when it traveled to top-ranked Michigan State on Oct. 19, 1957. Now, the three losses were to Notre Dame, No. 3 Minnesota and No. 16 Wisconsin by a combined 25 points so it wasn't like the Boilermakers were a terrible team.

"One of these days we'll put everything

together and somebody will get clobbered," Purdue lineman Neil Habig said after the Minnesota game. Two weeks later, Habig's prediction came true.

Playing two quarterbacks (Bob Spoo and Ross Fichtner), Mollenkopf engineered a 20-13 before the largest crowd in Spartan Stadium history at the time (64,950). Touchdown runs by Bob Jarus, Mel Dillard and Kenny Mikes were the difference.

- The odds were not in Purdue's favor when No. 5 Iowa came to West Lafayette on Oct. 28, 1961.

Head coach Jack Mollenkopf was in the hospital, putting offensive coordinator Bob DeMoss in charge of the Boilermakers. DeMoss, the architect of Purdue's Cradle of Quarterbacks, had an 18-year-old quarterback named Ron DiGravio. DeMoss also had a defense that never allowed more than 22 points in a game during a 6-3 season.

"Iowa hasn't been shut out for 78 games, but I think you can do it," DeMoss told the Boilermakers the day before the game. "Not only can you win, but you can be the first team in nine years to hold them scoreless."

DeMoss was right. The 9-0 victory spurred Purdue to a 4-1 finish. DiGravio scored the game's only touchdown on a 1-yard sneak in the first quarter, and Skip Ohl tacked on a field goal in the third.

- After a 48-0 whipping by Notre Dame in the second game of the 1970 season, Purdue was a 19-point underdog at No. 3 Stanford. That wounded the pride of first-year head coach Bob DeMoss.

"I told our kids there's no way we're 19-point underdogs," DeMoss said following a 26-14 victory against future Heisman Trophy winner Jim Plunkett.

Randy Cooper intercepted three of Plunkett's passes. Otis Armstrong and Darryl Stingley hinted of greatness to come. Armstrong rushed for 120 yards and Stingley caught nine passes for 85 yards.

- The Boilermakers were even bigger underdogs (35 points) when they traveled to No. 2 Notre Dame on Sept. 28, 1974.

All Purdue did was put up 24 points in the first quarter on its way to a 31-20 victory. It was the most points Notre Dame had ever given up in the first 15 minutes of play.

"It made our kids mad. They played for respect, and to win, and they did just that," Purdue coach Alex Agase said afterward, referring to the point spread.

- Bo Schembechler never won a national championship at Michigan. One of the reasons why occurred on Nov. 6, 1976, when Scott Dierking and safety/place kicker Rock Supan led Purdue to a 16-14 victory against the top-ranked Wolverines in Ross-Ade Stadium.

On the Monday before the game, Agase was offered advice by a Lafayette minister: "pray for a miracle."

Whether Agase did or not, we'll never know. But Dierking set Purdue and Ross-Ade Stadium records with 38 carries which resulted in 162 yards and both

touchdowns. Supan, who missed an extra point, redeemed himself with 4:20 to play by kicking the game-winning 23-yard field goal.

Agase said afterward that the victory made this "the happiest day of my life."

- Purdue football channeled Rodney Dangerfield the week leading up to its game against No. 2 Ohio State on Oct. 6, 1984.

"Nobody says we're any good, before they play us or after, but we've got a bunch of ordinary people who play hard and believe in themselves," Purdue coach Leon Burtnett said following the 28-23 victory in Ross-Ade Stadium.

To be fair, ordinary would not describe all-time great Rod Woodson or quarterback Jim Everett. Woodson made 20 tackles and returned an interception 55 yards for a touchdown during the Boilermakers' 21-0 spurt that erased a 17-7 deficit in the third quarter. Everett was 17 of 23 passing for 257 yards and three touchdowns.

- Drew Brees became a national name to college football fans the night of Dec. 29, 1998. His 19-yard touchdown pass to Isaac Jones with 30 seconds remaining rallied Purdue to a 37-34 victory over No. 4 Kansas State in the Alamo Bowl.

"I think Kansas State might have underestimated us," said defensive end Chike Okefor, who set an Alamo Bowl record with 3 ½ sacks. "Rosey and I were unblockable tonight."

"Rosey," a.k.a. future Super Bowl champion Roosevelt Colvin, blocked a field goal, forced a fumble that led to a Purdue field goal and recorded 1 ½ sacks.

- It will be forever remembered as the Tyler Trent game.

Inspired by the 20-year-old Purdue student's battle with terminal cancer, the Boilermakers thrashed No. 2 Ohio State 49-20 on Oct. 20, 2018. Just like Saturday's Michigan State game, an estimated 10,000 students rushed the field at game's end to celebrate with the players.

"From the atmosphere to the game, to the win, to Tyler Trent and everything he's been going through, I don't know what else more you can ask for," coach Jeff Brohm told the Journal & Courier's Mike Carmin.

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.



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