

Kenny Talks Boilermaker Football and Pacer Basketball



Photo courtesy of Purdue Athletics

Kenny Breaks Down A Potentially Chaotic Big Ten Fianle

It's not the path optimistic Purdue football fans, and this columnist, predicted when forecasting a Big Ten West Division championship this season.

Saturday's 31-24 victory at Illinois not only secured The Cannon trophy for another season in West Lafayette, it helped create a four-way tie for first place with two weeks to go.

With Iowa traveling to Minnesota on Saturday in a clash of co-leaders, at most there could be a three-way tie going into the final weekend. No one needs three guesses to figure out which of the four division leaders has the most favorable remaining schedule.

Purdue.

Let the angst begin.

A noon Saturday game against Northwestern on Senior Day. The same Wildcats who are giving up 28 points a game and averaging a league-worst 15 per game. A team that has yet to win a game in the continental United States this season, having beaten Nebraska 31-28 in the season opener at Dublin, Ireland.

Indiana has been even worse defensively than its last-place numbers of a year ago. The Hoosiers again rank last in total defense and are giving up almost 35 points a game.

So, Purdue is going to be the West Division representative against Ohio State or Michigan in Indianapolis on Dec. 3?

To borrow Lee Corso's catch phrase on ESPN GameDay, not so fast my friend.

Purdue fans will be rooting for P.J. Fleck's Gophers to row the boat one more time against the Hawkeyes. A tie with Minnesota would send the Boilermakers to Indianapolis. If Purdue ties Iowa for the division, the Hawkeyes advance based on the head-to-head victory over the Boilermakers.

A three-way tie, not outside the realm of possibility, is complicated. First tiebreaker is record versus the other two leaders. If the three-way tie is Purdue, Minnesota and Illinois, the Boilermakers advance with a 2-0 mark. If the three-way tie is Purdue, Iowa and Illinois, all three teams are 1-1.

That would move us to tiebreaker No. 2, winning percentage inside the division. For argument's sake, let's give Purdue and Illinois wins over Northwestern, and Minnesota beats Iowa and Wisconsin. The Fighting Illini get the Big Ten championship berth with a 5-1



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Columnist

division record over 4-2 marks by Purdue and Minnesota.

In all, the Big Ten has eight tiebreakers if three or more teams share the division's best record. Imagine the Big Ten Network ratings if somehow we got to tiebreaker No. 8, a random draw?

Here's a more likely scenario:

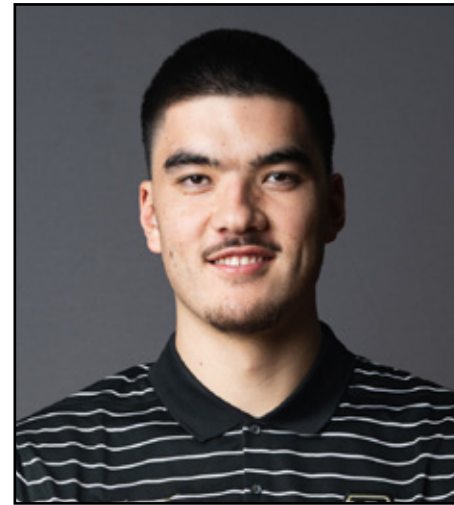
- Purdue beats Northwestern and Indiana to finish 6-3 in conference play
- Illinois loses Saturday at Michigan, beats Northwestern to finish 5-4.
- Minnesota wins at home against Iowa and at Wisconsin to finish 6-3
- Or, Iowa scrapes together enough defensive touchdowns and field goals to win at Minnesota and then smothers Nebraska to finish 6-3 as well. The Hawkeyes finish 5-1 in division play and go to Indianapolis.

Ties are unusual in Big Ten divisional play. Since the conference went to an East-West format in 2014, there has been an outright West champion every year but 2019 when Wisconsin earned the tiebreaker over Minnesota. The East Division has had four ties, all involving Ohio State.

When Ohio State or Michigan improve the East's record to 9-0 against the West in the Big Ten Championship game, what happens next?

For the Buckeyes/Wolverines, an almost certain berth in the College Football Playoffs. The loser of the regular season matchup likely is going to Pasadena for the Rose Bowl

Entering Saturday's games, eight Big Ten schools are bowl eligible: Ohio



Zach Edey

State, Michigan, Penn State, Maryland, Illinois, Purdue, Minnesota and Iowa. Michigan State is likely to make it nine schools barring an upset at home by Indiana on Saturday. Wisconsin will be favored to win at Nebraska, elevating the Badgers to bowl eligibility as well.

Rutgers' path to bowl eligibility requires beating Penn State at home and winning at Maryland the following week. Very slim hopes for the Scarlet Knights to pull off that sweep.

Indiana, Nebraska and Northwestern are out of the bowl picture.

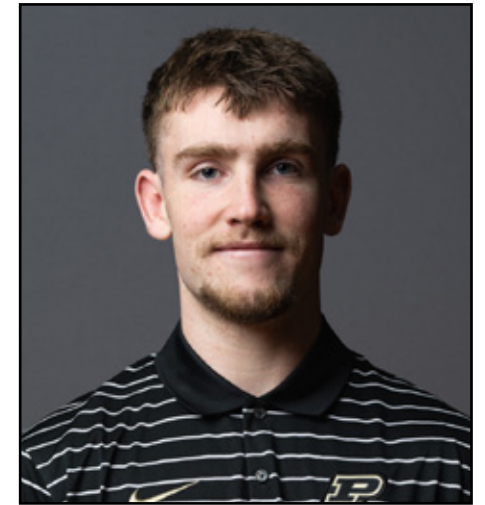
Next up on the Big Ten bowl list are the Jan. 2 Florida games. Pencil in Penn State for the Citrus in Orlando. An educated guess says the Big Ten West winner gets the former Outback Bowl, now called ReliaQuest, against an SEC foe in Tampa. Purdue graduate Jerry Palm, a contributor to CBS Sports online and on screen, has the Boilermakers facing Florida in the ReliaQuest Bowl.

If Purdue doesn't go to Florida, it is very unlikely to be sent back to Nashville for a second consecutive Music City Bowl on New Year's Eve. This spot would probably go to Iowa or Illinois.

The Duke's Mayo Bowl, set for Dec. 30 in Charlotte, N.C., probably comes down to Illinois or Purdue against an ACC rival.

I'll agree with Palm that Minnesota is a good bet for the Pinstripe Bowl in New York City on Dec. 29 against an ACC foe.

The Liberty Bowl, site of Purdue's 1980 victory over Missouri, is back on the Big Ten postseason list. Palm has Maryland taking on this year's Cinderella team, Kansas, on Dec. 28 in Mem-



Braden Smith

phis.

Palm also has Wisconsin taking on Oklahoma in the Guaranteed Rate Bowl on Dec. 27 in Phoenix. That leaves a quasi-home game for Michigan State in the Quick Lane Bowl, with Palm projecting Miami (Ohio) as the opponent Dec. 26 in Detroit.

Noteworthy

Carolyn Peck, who coached Purdue to the 1999 NCAA championship, is among the 12 finalists for the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame class of 2023.

Peck was the first African-American women's head coach to win a national title, guiding the Boilermakers to a 34-1 record that season. In two seasons before departing to coach the WNBA's Orlando Miracle, Peck went 57-11.

The hall of fame class will be announced Nov. 27 at halftime of ABC's broadcast of the Phil Knight Invitational championship.

Previous inductees include former Purdue coach Lin Dunn and former player Amy Ruley, who coached North Dakota State to five NCAA Division II titles. ...

Westfield's Braden Smith took advantage of his first nationally televised game with Purdue on Tuesday night, matching 7-4 center Zach Edey for a team-high 20 points in the Boilermakers' 75-70 victory against Marquette in the Gavitt Games.

Smith (15) and Edey (14) combined for 29 of Purdue's 43 points in the second half, helping the Boilermakers erase a nine-point deficit. Smith was 6 of 8 from the field (3 of 4 from 3-point range) and 5 of 6 at the free throw line.

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The freshman point guard is now Purdue's second-leading scorer at 10.7 per game, exactly 10 points behind Edey. The junior center recorded his third double-double in as many games with 13 rebounds and is now averaging 20.7 points and 13.7 rebounds in just over 29 minutes a game. ...

Purdue quarterback Aidan O'Connell is one of three finalists for the Bulsworth Trophy, awarded to the most outstanding football player in America who began his career as a walk-on.

O'Connell leads the Big Ten at 297.2 passing yards per game.

Georgia quarterback Stetson Bennett and Troy linebacker Carlton Martial are the other finalists for the award, which will be presented Dec. 5 in Bentonville, Ark.

Bulsworth went from walk-on to an All-American at Arkansas. He passed away in an automobile accident in 1999, 11 days after being a third-round draft pick by The Indianapolis Colts. ...

Purdue basketball signee Myles Colvin and Carmel big man Sam Orme were ranked in the top five of Indiana's high school basketball senior class by Kyle Neddenriep of The Indianapolis Star.

Colvin was second behind Cathedral's Xavier Booker, a ranking Purdue coach Matt Painter disputes.

"I feel he is the best player in the state and one of the top 25 players in the country," Painter said. Colvin is No. 74 on the 247Sports composite rankings.

The 6-9 Orme, a Belmont commitment, was ranked fifth. Orme is a three-star prospect by 247Sports.

Kenny Talks Start of Hoops, End of Football for Boilermakers

Purdue guard Braden Smith earned the first of what could be several Big Ten Freshman of the Week honors Monday for his role in the 75-70 victory against Marquette in the Gavitt Games.

The Westfield graduate and reigning Indiana Mr. Basketball scored a co-team-high 20 points to go with three assists and two rebounds. Smith was 6 of 8 shooting from the field, including 3 of 4 from 3-point range, and 5 of 6 at the free throw line.

More notably, he was turnover-free

for the final 38 minutes. Smith put up 15 points in the second half, nine coming in the final five minutes during Purdue's rally.

Surprisingly, no Purdue basketball player has ever won Big Ten Freshman of the Year, an award launched in 1986. Indiana had four of the first six winners, Dean Garrett (1987), Jay Edwards (1988), Eric Anderson (1989) and Damon Bailey (1991).

The Hoosiers have had 10 Big Ten Freshmen of the Year with A.J. Guyton (1997), Jared Jeffries (2001), D.J. White (2005), Eric Gordon (2008), Cody Zeller (2012) and Noah Vonleh (2014) also winning the award.

Purdue (3-0) entering Thursday night's game against West Virginia in the Phil Knight Legacy, was ranked 24th in this week's Associated Press poll.

Laying the foundation

One reason Purdue football is in position to win a share of the Big Ten West Division championship is the impact of its 26th ranked recruiting class in the 247 Sports composite ratings for 2019.

While the top two members of that class – defensive end George Karlaftis and wide receiver David Bell – are cashing NFL paychecks this season, this was more than a two-person class for coach Jeff Brohm and his staff.

Linebacker/safety Jalen Graham is probably the mostly likely senior to be drafted from this class. Graham is Purdue's second-leading tackler this season with 40 despite missing four games with an injury.

Offensive guard Spencer Holstege is a three-year starter who has another season of eligibility. Fellow lineman Cam Craig had his 2022 season ended prematurely by injuries but was regarded as one of Purdue's best.

Another three-year starter is safety Cam Allen, the No. 3 tackler with 38 stops to go along with three interceptions. Redshirt junior linebacker Jacob Walhberg is sixth with 28 tackles and an interception. Both have eligibility remaining.

Redshirt junior wide receiver T.J. Sheffield has 33 receptions for 351 yards and three touchdowns as the No. 3 option for quarterback Aidan O'Connell. Running back King Doerue had been a three-year starter before an injury kept him on the sidelines for much of 2022.

Doerue has his COVID year of eligibility available.

Another promising player, tight end Garrett Miller, was lost for the season with a torn ACL. He's expected back in 2023.

Of the 25 players Purdue lists as seniors on its roster, seven sixth- or seventh-year players will have exhausted their eligibility following the bowl game: quarterbacks O'Connell and Austin Burton, wide receiver Charlie Jones, linebackers Kieren Douglas and Semisi Fakasiieiki, defensive tackle D.J. Washington and long snapper Nick Zecchino.

Purdue's best bets for selection in the NFL Draft – Graham, cornerback Cory Trice and tight end Payne Durham – will probably pass on their extra year of eligibility due to COVID.

Starting cornerback Reese Taylor, kicker Mitchell Fineran and defensive end Scotty Humpich are using their extra COVID year in 2022 and will be moving on.

Six starters are among the Boilermakers who could use their COVID year in 2023: Allen, wide receiver Tyrone Tracy, tackle Eric Miller, defensive tackles Branson Deen and Lawrence Johnson and defensive end Jack Sullivan.

Key regulars who also have that COVID year include cornerback Jamari Brown, injured wide receiver Broc Thompson, safety Bryce Hampton and offensive linemen Sinone Finau and Daniel Johnson.

Title implications

Purdue and Indiana's season finale for the Old Oaken Bucket has seldom meant more than bragging rights for a year. This year it could also mean a share of the Boilermakers' first Big Ten West Division championship.

The Hoosiers have just two Big Ten Conference championships in their history. Both times those seasons have ended with victories against the Boilermakers. In 1945, IU wrapped up a 5-0-1 conference slate with a 26-0 victory against Purdue in Bloomington. That victory led university president Herman B. Wells to call off classes on Monday.

Indiana's lone Rose Bowl appearance came in 1967 after earning a tie with Purdue and Minnesota by defeating the Boilermakers 19-14 in Bloomington.

The Boilermakers have eight Big Ten championships but the first chance

Indiana had to play spoiler was 1929. Purdue came to Bloomington with a 7-0 record and left with a 32-0 victory and its second league title.

Indiana was but a speed bump to Purdue's 1931 and 1932 championship seasons, losing 19-0 in Bloomington and 25-7 in West Lafayette.

The Hoosiers provided one of the few challenges to the 1943 undefeated Boilermakers. The lone touchdown came in the first quarter on a Sam Vacanti pass to Frank Bauman. A goal line stand in the final minute preserved the 7-0 victory.

Purdue had a shot at its first Rose Bowl appearance in 1952 but needed a victory against Indiana to secure a tie with Wisconsin. The Hoosiers led 16-14 but Dale Samuels led a 66-yard scoring drive in the fourth quarter, ending with Rex Brock's 24-yard touchdown run with 4:22 to play.

The championship was Purdue's but not the Rose Bowl. Wisconsin won the secret vote of the league's athletic directors. However, the Badgers went on to suffer the Big Ten's first Rose Bowl loss, 7-0 to USC.

It was 14 years before Purdue had another shot at the Rose Bowl, and it punched the ticket to Pasadena with a 51-6 victory over Indiana at Ross-Ade Stadium. A 34-point second quarter left no doubt about the outcome.

After the Hoosiers' 1967 Rose Bowl trip, the era of "the Big Two and the Little Eight" began. Purdue had a few brushes with cracking the Michigan-Ohio State dynasty (1969, 1972, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1984) before breaking through in 2000 with Drew Brees quarterbacking the Boilermakers back to Pasadena.

A sold-out Ross-Ade Stadium celebrated the 41-13 victory against Indiana that clinched a share of the Big Ten title.

Purdue will know by Saturday's 3:30 game time if it has a chance to be cannon fodder for Michigan or Ohio State in the Big Ten Championship game. A victory by Iowa at home on Friday against Nebraska sends the Hawkeyes to Indianapolis.

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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