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Celebrating 100 Seasons Of Purdue Football At Ross- Ade Stadium - Part 7 & 8



Photo courtesy of Purdue Athletics



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Columnist

This is part 7 of a series celebrating 100 seasons of Purdue football at Ross-Ade Stadium.

Purdue football entered its darkest era following the resignation of College Football Hall of Fame coach Jim Young in 1981.

Take away Young's 9-3 mark in 1980 and Leon Burtnett's 7-5 in 1984, the Boilermakers would go 29-57-2 the rest of the decade. Not until Joe Tiller returned to West Lafayette in 1997 did Purdue's football fortunes improve.

The greatness of Rod Woodson, a future College and Pro Football Hall of Fame defensive back, was one of the few bright spots for Boilermaker fans.

Best Ross-Ade games of the 1980s
Nov. 22, 1980: Purdue 24, Indiana 23 – The largest crowd ever to watch a football game in Indiana at the time (71,629) saw the Boilermakers hang on when linebacker Mike Marks batted away a two-point conversion try with 17 seconds remaining.

Mark Herrmann was 19 of 23 passing for 323 yards and a touchdown in his final home game. That TD pass to Bart Burrell gave Purdue the lead for the first time at 17-10 in the third quarter. Ben McCall scored the game-winner with 8:56 to play.

Sept. 12, 1981: Purdue 27, No. 19 Stanford 19 – Jimmy Smith's 100-yard kickoff return for a touchdown opened this nationally televised game with a bang.

Smith also rushed for 91 yards and



Photo courtesy of Purdue Athletics

Rod Woodson

had a pair of 1-yard TD runs. Scott Campbell was 14 of 18 passing for 177 yards and what proved to be the game-winning touchdown to Steve Bryant to start the fourth quarter.

The Boilermakers won despite a career day by John Elway, who had 418 yards on 33 of 44 passing.

Sept. 26, 1981: Purdue 15, No. 13 Notre Dame 14 – A gutsy play call by Purdue assistant Dick Dullaghan led to the Boilermakers stunning the Fighting Irish with 19 seconds remaining.

On fourth-and-goal at the Notre Dame 7, Dullaghan suggested "The Sail" to head coach Jim Young. Steve Bryant's sudden cut to the left side of the end zone left him wide open for Scott Campbell's touchdown pass.

Young went for the win and called the same play to the opposite corner of the end zone. Same result.

Oct. 6, 1984: Purdue 28, No. 2 Ohio State 23 – Was it the power of positive thinking or were future NFL stars Jim Everett and Rod Woodson the edge Purdue needed to upset the Buckeyes?

Head coach Leon Burtnett brought in consultant Fred Mills for the third time in three months, hoping to inspire his team. Mills' keys to success – "Desire, Sacrifice, Discipline and Preparation" – were on the chalkboard in the Boilermakers' meeting room.

Everett completed 17 of 23 passes for 257 yards and three touchdowns. Woodson made 20 tackles and returned an interception 55 yards for a touch-

down that gave Purdue a 28-17 lead.

It also helped that Ohio State quarterback Mike Tomczak lost track of downs on the game's final drive. Tomczak threw a fourth down pass out of bounds at the Purdue 34 with five seconds to play.

Nov. 22, 1986: Purdue 17, Indiana 15 – Boilermaker fans remember this as the Rod Woodson game.

In his final game as head coach, Leon Burtnett had a couple of surprises ready. First was the switch from black jerseys worn during warmups to gold shirts with Old Oaken Bucket emblems on the sleeves.

The second was unleashing Woodson on offense. Playing nearly the entire game at running back, wide receiver and his usual cornerback position, Woodson also ran back punts and kickoffs.

Woodson rushed for a Purdue season-high 93 yards on 15 carries and caught three passes for 67 yards. On defense, Woodson made 10 tackles.

"I don't know about you guys but I've seen a lot of football and I've never seen a young man play a game like that," Burtnett said afterward. "I wouldn't trade anybody in the country for Rod Woodson."

Top players of 1980s Ross-Ade
Rod Woodson – The Fort Wayne native joined Bob Griese as the only Boilermakers to be enshrined in the College Football and Pro Football halls of fame in 2016.

He was a consensus All-American and runner-up for the Jim Thorpe Award as a senior. Woodson is one of only four players in Purdue history to be selected first-team All-Big Ten three times.

Scott Campbell – When he graduated from Purdue in 1983, Campbell was the Big Ten's second all-time passing leader, trailing his predecessor Mark Herrmann.

Campbell threw for a record 516 yards against Ohio State in 1981 and finished his career with 7,636 yards and 45 touchdowns.

Jim Everett – After waiting his turn for three seasons, he became the only Purdue quarterback to lead his team to victories against Notre Dame, Ohio State and Michigan in the same season (1984).

Everett led the nation in total offense in 1985 with 3,589 yards.

KENNY From Page 2

In two full seasons as the starter, Everett threw for 7,411 yards and 43 touchdowns. His seven 300-yard passing games in 1986 set a school record.

Steve Bryant – The junior college transfer led the Big Ten in 1981 with 60 receptions and 11 receiving touchdowns. His 971 receiving yards were good for second place.

In his two seasons at Purdue, Bryant caught 110 passes for 1,863 yards and 14 touchdowns.

Rodney Carter – The running back led the nation with 98 receptions in 1985, going for 1,099 yards and four touchdowns.

In four seasons, Carter rushed for 1,149 yards and 10 touchdowns. He also caught 176 passes for 1786 yards and five scores.

Cris Dishman – Converted from wide receiver to cornerback, Dishman would intercept nine passes in his Purdue career and go on to play in the NFL for 13 seasons.

Fred Strickland – The linebacker led the Big Ten as a senior with 130 tackles and never finished out of the top four in the conference during his three seasons as a starter.

He left Purdue for a 12-year NFL career with the record for solo tackles (321) and second in school history in total tackles (479).

Calvin Williams – One of the few bright spots in the coach Fred Akers era, Williams caught 138 passes for 1,855 yards and 17 touchdowns.

Williams went on to play seven seasons in the NFL, all but one with the Philadelphia Eagles.

Bucket thoughts

In retrospect, COVID was the worst thing that could have happened to now former Indiana football coach Tom Allen.

No, as far as anyone knows, Allen wasn't among the millions to contract the disease. Instead, he was able to take advantage of its impact on his Big Ten peers.

With Michael Penix's heroics, the Hoosiers upset No. 8 Penn State 36-35 in overtime in the abbreviated 2020 season opener. After a win at Rutgers, next to fall was No. 23 Michigan 38-21. After a 14-6 win at No. 16 Wisconsin, Indiana closed the regular season at 6-1. An Outback Bowl loss to Mis-

issippi didn't dampen the enthusiasm and support for Allen, who received a seven-year contract that bumped his salary to \$4.9 million annually. It also included a buyout of \$20.8 million if IU elected to fire Allen before Dec. 1, 2023. One more season would have dropped the buyout to approximately \$8 million.

But Penix left for the University of Washington, where he has guided the Huskies to a 12-0 regular season in 2023. The Hoosiers haven't come close to the expectations created from 2020, posting a 9-27 record with three consecutive Old Oaken Bucket losses to Purdue.

As the nice person he seems to be, Allen gave Indiana a financial break when the school fired him this past Sunday. Allen will be paid \$15.5 million over two installments not to coach any more.

In retrospect, 2020 was a fluke - not just for Indiana but for the traditional powers the Hoosiers knocked off that season. Penn State is 28-10 in the three seasons since posting a 4-5 mark in 2020. Michigan went 2-5 in 2020, putting Jim Harbaugh on the hot seat. Whether it's coincidence or the impact of the recently discovered illegal spying on opponents, the Wolverines have gone 37-3 since then and are almost certainly making the College Football Playoffs for the third consecutive season. Wisconsin was the only name school on the IU 2020 schedule to have a winning record (4-3) and has been an OK program since (23-15), transitioning from Paul Chryst to Luke Fickell as head coach.

Now, the losingest football program in NCAA major college football will have to find someone who can coach, recruit and overcome the obstacles of NIL, which should stand for "Now It's Legal" when it comes to writing big checks to recruits and other schools' players. The cash Indiana has laid out to fire Allen and former basketball coach Archie Miller (another \$10.35 million) could have been used to lure better players to Bloomington.

As for Purdue, a 4-8 mark in Ryan Walters' first season is less disappointing when you factor in how little talent Jeff Brohm left behind on his way to Louisville. The offensive line suffered

two major injuries to its most promising duo (Marcus Mbow and Mahamane Moussa) and was forced at times to use four-year starting center Gus Hartwig at right tackle. The receiving corps also battled injuries, as did quarterback Hudson Card. The only bright spots on offense were Tyrone Tracy successfully making the switch from wide receiver to running back and sophomore Devin Mockobee overcoming fumble issues to rush for a team-high 811 yards and six touchdowns.

Westfield graduate Dillon Thieneman is almost certainly a Freshman All-American, especially after winning the Big Ten's Thompson-Randle El Freshman of the Year award. On Monday, he received his fifth Big Ten Freshman of the Week honor and was selected second-team All-Big Ten.

Thieneman is Purdue's seventh Freshman of the Year, joining quarterbacks Brian Fox (1988) and Eric Hunter (1989), running back Corey Rogers (1991), safety Stuart Schweigert (2000) and wide receivers Rondale Moore (2018) and David Bell (2019).

Thieneman's accomplishments include breaking Schweigert's freshman record with six interceptions. The safety also broke Rod Woodson's freshman record for solo tackles with 74. Thieneman leads all freshmen in interceptions, solo tackles and tackles (106).

Sophomore Nic Scourton led the Big Ten with 10 sacks, but was only given second-team All-Big Ten honors. Purdue also had the Big Ten runner-up in that category, Kydran Jenkins (7.5). Jenkins has announced he will use his COVID year to return in 2024.

Purdue's victory over Indiana was its 300th in Ross-Ade. The first was also against the Hoosiers in 1924.

Walters has been public about his program's need for NIL support, even stating at one point he'd rather have NIL funds than better facilities. Will Purdue's well-heeled boosters climb down from the moral high horse to give their coach the financial wherewithal to pick up quality offensive and defensive linemen, linebackers, cornerbacks, receivers and a kicker? Or will they stubbornly insist that they'd rather lose while doing things "the right way?"

There is no more "right way" of doing things with a weak NCAA worn

down by losing court battle after court battle. Plus, there's the spectre of other schools coming in with blank checks to buy Purdue's best players. One doesn't have to look too far south of the Ohio River for two programs that aren't restricted by rules or ethics.

Purdue basketball makes history

On Monday, Purdue became the first Big Ten men's basketball program ranked No. 1 in the Associated Press poll for three consecutive seasons.

Eight other schools also have been ranked No. 1 in at least three straight seasons: UCLA, Duke, Kentucky, Kansas, Gonzaga, Virginia, North Carolina and Villanova.

The Boilermakers earned that milestone by once again winning a prestigious November tournament, this time the Maui Invitational. Reigning National Player of the Year Zach Edey was the tournament MVP and was joined on the all-tournament team by Westfield's Braden Smith. Edey also was selected Big Ten

Player of the Week for the seventh time in his career, matching Glenn Robinson's school record.

Purdue's victories over No. 11 Gonzaga, No. 7 Tennessee and No. 4 Marquette mark only the second time in the last 40 years a school has defeated teams ranked in the top 15 of the AP poll on three consecutive days. Connecticut accomplished a similar feat in the 2011 Big East tournament on the way to winning the national championship.

Fifth-year senior guard Lance Jones sank what is believed to be the longest shot in school history when his 80-footer beat the halftime horn against Marquette.

Hall of Famers

Former Indiana player/coach Dan Dakich and a member of Purdue's 1969 national runner-up team have been elected to the Indiana Basketball Hall of Fame.

Dakich starred at Andean, where he was a first-team All-State selection and an Indiana All-Star in 1981.

Evansville Bosse graduate Larry Weatherford was an Indiana All-Star in 1967 before scoring more than 1,100 points at Purdue.

KENNY

 From Page 3

Part 8

With these words, “we’re here to win a championship,” Joe Tiller brought hope to a fan base who wanted to forget the failures of coaches Fred Akers and Jim Colletto during the first six years of the 1990s.

Every Saturday in 1997 seemed like Christmas as the coach’s wife, Arnette, said at the time. From beating Notre Dame on national TV in his second game to an eventual 9-3 finish and an Alamo Bowl victory against Oklahoma State, Tiller became a hero in West Lafayette.

His promise of bringing a championship to Purdue would come true in 2000, with the foundation of that Big Ten title team coming from the Big Ten’s “worst recruiting class” in 1997 according to the experts.

That class included a Maxwell Award winner (Drew Brees), the first John Mackey Award winner as the nation’s best tight end (Tim Stratton) and three future NFL players in wide receiver Vinny Sutherland, linebacker/defensive end Akin Ayodele and defensive back Billy Gustin.

Best Ross-Ade games of the 1990s
Sept. 12, 1992: Purdue 41, No. 17 California 14 – The Boilermakers scored on their first six possessions and forced three turnovers on the way to a shocking 38-3 halftime lead.

“The first half was probably as perfect a football game as I’ve been around in a long time,” head coach Jim Colletto said.

Arlee Conners and Jeff Hill each scored two touchdowns in the first half.

Nov. 9, 1996: Purdue 9, No. 9 Michigan 3 – Five days after Colletto announced his resignation, the Boilermakers ended the Wolverines’ Big Ten title hopes.

Rick Trefzger’s 5-yard pass to Brian Alford with 7:20 to play accounted for the game’s only touchdown. In the aftermath, students tore down the north goal post.

Sept. 13, 1997: Purdue 28, No. 15 Notre Dame 17 – Joe Tiller’s first victory snapped a string of 11 consecutive losses to the Fighting Irish.

Billy Dicken completed 26 of 39 passes for 352 yards. Edwin Watson scored on a pair of 1-yard runs, and Kendall Matthews added a 2-yard TD.



Joe Tiller

But the biggest play belonged to safety Adrian Beasley, who scooped up a Ron Powlus fumble and went 43 yards for a touchdown that made it 21-10 in the fourth quarter.

Nov. 8, 1997: No. 24 Purdue 22, Michigan State 21 – The first of coach Joe Tiller’s three consecutive victories against Nick Saban was the most dramatic.

Leo Perez blocked a field goal attempt and Rosevelt Colvin returned it 62 yards for a touchdown to bring Purdue within 21-16 with two minutes remaining. Chris Daniels recovered the onside kick, and Edwin Watson scored the game-winning TD with less than a minute remaining. Michigan State missed a 43-yard field goal in the final seconds.

Sept. 11, 1999: No. 20 Purdue 28, No. 16 Notre Dame 23 – “Let’s blitz ‘em!”

That was the call by Joe Tiller with 16 seconds remaining and Notre Dame at the Purdue 1 on third-and-goal. Linebacker Mike Rose and a few of his close friends dropped Jarious Jackson for a 9-yard loss. Without any timeouts, the clock ran out on the Fighting Irish.

Drew Brees rallied Purdue from a 10-0 deficit, scoring on a 9-yard touchdown run and throwing a 30-yard TD to Randall Lane. Two Travis Dorsch field goals were the only points scored in the fourth quarter.

Oct. 16, 1999: No. 20 Purdue 52, No. 5 Michigan State 28 – Chris Daniels set a Big Ten record with 21 catches for 301 yards to go along with three

touchdowns in Purdue’s final matchup to date with a Nick Saban team.

Drew Brees threw for 509 yards and five touchdowns. The Boilermakers forced six turnovers, including four interceptions of MSU quarterback Bill Burke.

Top players of 1990s Ross-Ade
Jeff Zgonina – More than 30 years after his final game in a Purdue uniform, Zgonina still holds school records for tackles for loss in a game (7), season (28) and career (72). Zgonina still ranks in Purdue’s top 10 for career tackles (382) and sacks (29). The defensive tackle was the 1992 Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year. Zgonina went on to play 17 seasons in the NFL, earning a Super Bowl ring with the St. Louis Rams in 2000.

Mike Alstott – The only three-time Purdue Most Valuable Player, Alstott holds school records for rushing yards in a season (1,436) and career (3,635) as well as most 100-yard rushing games in a season (9 in 1995) and career (16). An All-American fullback as a senior in 1995, Alstott is the only Boilermaker to have more than 2,500 career rushing yards and 1,000 career receiving yards. His 39 career rushing touchdowns rank second to Kory Sheets’ 48.

Rosevelt Colvin – One of the stars of Joe Tiller’s first two Boilermaker teams, Colvin remains the record holder in season (15) and career (35) sacks 25 years after his final game. Colvin was the 1998 Alamo Bowl’s Defensive MVP. He went on to earn two Super Bowl rings with the New England Patriots.

Chike Okeafor – The first of two West Lafayette High School graduates to earn a place in Purdue’s Den of Defensive Ends, Okeafor recorded nine tackles and three and a half sacks in the 1998 Alamo Bowl upset of No. 4 Kansas State. Okeafor went on to play 11 seasons in the NFL.

Brian Alford – An immediate beneficiary of Joe Tiller’s passing offense, Alford became a first-team All-American after catching 63 passes for 1,228 yards and 10 touchdowns as a senior in 1997. His 31 career touchdown catches remain a Purdue record and his 3,029 career receiving yards rank fourth behind John Standeford, Taylor Stubblefield and Dorien Bryant.

Matt Light – One of many to benefit from Joe Tiller position changes, having come to Purdue as a tight end, Light became the anchor of the best offensive line the Boilermakers have seen in a generation. Light started 37 consecutive games at left tackle. As a fifth-year senior in 2000, Light was chosen first-team All-Big Ten. He would go on to earn three Super Bowl rings in 11 seasons with the New England Patriots.

Drew Brees – The face of Purdue football today, Brees set two NCAA records, 13 Big Ten records and 19 school records as a three-year starting quarterback. For leading Purdue to its second Rose Bowl appearance and most recent Big Ten title in 2000, Brees won the Maxwell Award as the nation’s outstanding player and the Chicago Tribune Silver Football as the Big Ten’s MVP.

Noteworthy

Two former Purdue guards were among the 18 men selected to the Indiana Basketball Hall of Fame’s Silver Anniversary team for 2024.

Darmetreis Kilgore came to Purdue via South Bend Washington and Tyler Junior College. At South Bend Washington, Kilgore led the program to its first sectional title in 32 years. He was a second-team NJCAA Division I All-American in 2001 before spending two seasons at Purdue.

Kenneth Lowe was a 1999 Indiana All-Star from Gary West. He was a three-year starter at Purdue and scored 1,079 career points. Lowe was a two-time Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year. He owns the second-best career free throw percentage (86.4) in Boilermaker history.

Purdue’s Matt Painter matched Indiana national championship coach Branch McCracken with his 210th Big Ten Conference victory Monday night against Iowa. The five Big Ten coaches ahead of Painter are Indiana’s Bob Knight (353), Michigan State’s Tom Izzo (333 as of Dec. 6), Purdue’s Gene Keady (265) and Ward “Piggy” Lambert (228) and Illinois’ Lou Henson (214).

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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