

Ranking Purdue's Top 10 Football and Basketball Teams





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Where Does This Year's Purdue Team Fit In 10 Best?

A few weeks removed from Purdue's run to the NCAA championship game is as good a time as any to determine where these Boilermakers belong among the best teams in school history.

The argument favoring the 2023-24 Boilermakers as Purdue's finest begins with two-time National Player of the Year Zach Edey. But any team with Rick Mount, Glenn Robinson and Joe Barry Carroll also deserves serious consideration.

Having watched Boilermaker basketball from Mount's senior year to the present, here's my Top 10 ranking. As you'll see, two teams on this list precede my existence by about 30 years but Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame members are a rare sight in West Lafayette.

2023-24

Record-setting seasons by Edey and first-team All-Big Ten guard Braden Smith paced national runner-up Purdue to its best finish since 1969.

Coach Matt Painter wasn't born when Mount, Billy Keller and Co. lost to UCLA and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (then Lew Alcindor) in the 1969 title game. Painter hadn't turned 10 years old when Purdue last reached the Final Four in 1980.

Edey led the nation in scoring at 25.2 points per game and broke Mount's 54-year-old career scoring mark of 2,323 to finish with 2,516 points. Edey also shattered All-American center Joe Barry

Carroll's 44-year-old career rebounding record of 1,148 with 1,321.

Smith became the Big Ten's all-time single-season assists leader with 292. Bruce Parkinson had set the Purdue record of 207 in 1975.

Among the team records that fell were most victories (34), points (3,211), rebound margin (plus 11.2), assists (720), assist/turnover ratio (1.63), field goals made (1,109), free throws made (675) and free throw attempts (938).

The Boilermakers won their second consecutive Big Ten championship by three games.

1968-69

The Boilermakers won their first Big Ten championship since 1940, topping Illinois and Ohio State by four games, and went all the way to the championship game in their first NCAA tournament appearance.

Rick Mount set six Big Ten and seven Purdue records during his junior season, including scoring average (33.4) and points in a season (810). Backcourt mate Billy Keller and forward Herman Gilliam, future professionals like Mount, combined to set four free throw records.

Purdue led the nation in scoring average (94.8 points per game) and free throw percentage (.784) under head coach George King.

A record that still stands is the 120 points Purdue scored on Indiana in the regular season finale, a 44-point victory. Mount scored 40 and Keller 31 in his final home game. The 71 combined points also are still a Purdue record.

Mount became the Purdue and Big Ten career scoring leader during the game.

Imagine the outrage today if any team was 40 of 49 from the free throw line, which the Boilermakers were against the Hoosiers. For the record, Indiana was 18 of 29 at the line.

Mount sent Purdue to the Final Four with a last-second shot against Marquette. But the Boilermakers lost 7-foot center Chuck Bavis to a shoulder injury in the NCAA opener against Miami (Ohio). His absence wasn't felt in a 92-65 national semifinal victory against North Carolina but UCLA and Lew Alcindor took advantage for a 92-72 victory in the title game. Alcindor put up 37 points and 20 rebounds

1979-80

These Boilermakers allowed Lee Rose to pull off the rare feat of coaching two schools to the Final Four in a three-year period. Rose came to Purdue after guiding North Carolina Charlotte to the 1978

Final Four.

At Purdue he inherited Joe Barry Carroll, who blossomed into a 7-1 All-American center in 1980. Another future NBA first-round draft pick, guard Keith Edmonson, paired up with Brian Walker to form one of the Big Ten's best backcourts. Athletic forwards Arnette Hallman and Drake Morris rounded out the starting lineup.

Victories against LaSalle and St. John's in Mackey Arena began Purdue's tournament path. One of the season's sweetest victories came in Lexington when the Boilermakers avenged their NIT final loss the year before to Indiana. Duke, which upset host Kentucky in the other regional semifinal, fell to Purdue 68-60 with Carroll outplaying fellow All-American Mike Gminski.

A bitter 67-62 loss to UCLA, which had its runner-up finish voided by the NCAA for recruiting violations, denied Purdue a shot at eventual champion Louisville. Purdue won the next-to-last third-place tournament game in NCAA history, routing Iowa 75-58 behind Carroll's 35 points and 12 rebounds.

Rose left for South Florida after the season and was replaced by Gene Keady.

1931-32

John Wooden was a national champion long before coaching UCLA to 10 NCAA titles.

In the days before the Associated Press rankings and the NCAA tournament, a national champion was determined by a panel of experts called together by the Helms Athletic Foundation at the conclusion of each and every season from 1901 to 1938.

Purdue was tabbed the 1932 champion when Wooden, a three-time All-American guard, led the Boilermakers to a 17-1 record and the Big Ten championship. Purdue's only loss was at Illinois, a game that Wooden played at less than 100 percent following a car accident also involving coach Ward "Piggy" Lambert.

Between West Lafayette and Champaign, Lambert lost control of his car on a patch of ice and overturned. The wreck shattered the windows and Wooden suffered a cut hand. Purdue then went on an 11-game winning streak, including a 34-19 victory against the Fighting Illini in West Lafayette.

Wooden would go on to win the Big Ten scoring title, outscoring Chicago 21-18 in the 53-18 Big Ten finale at Memorial Gymnasium. Wooden was selected the national player of the year by the All-America Board of Basketball.

Future Purdue coach Ray Eddy, guard Harry Kellar and center Ralph Parmenter excelled in Lambert's pressing defense and fast break offense.

1993-94

For years, if it weren't for bad luck Purdue would have no luck at all. Such was the story of Glenn Robinson and the hotel wrestling horseplay hours before playing Duke in the NCAA regional final at Knoxville, Tenn.

Former Purdue beat writer Nathan Baird of the Lafayette Journal and Courier wrote in 2019 of the incident, which saw Robinson's back "slammed into a headboard." Robinson was not himself against the Blue Devils, who went to the Final Four with a 69-60 victory.

Frustrating to Purdue fans was the impressive performance by Robinson and Cuonzo Martin in an 83-78 victory against Kansas two days earlier that raised hopes of a Final Four trip. Robinson scored a Purdue tournament record 44 points and Martin had 29 on a then-school record eight 3-pointers.

Robinson led the nation in scoring and was the unanimous National Player of the Year.

1987-88

Climbing as high as No. 2 in the Associated Press rankings, Purdue seemed destined for the Final Four and maybe a national championship behind the senior trio of Troy Lewis, Todd Mitchell and Everette Stephens.

"The Three Amigos" carried Purdue to back-to-back Big Ten championships and a No. 1 seed in the NCAA Midwest Regional. The journey to the Final Four, much like this year's tournament path, would start in South Bend and continue in Pontiac, Mich.

Fairleigh Dickenson (94-79) and Memphis State (100-73) were road kill for Purdue, which would face Kansas State in the regional semifinals. Confidence was high since the Boilermakers had won the regular season matchup in December, 101-72.

Purdue jumped out to a 10-0 lead on the Wildcats but future NBA All-Star Mitch Richmond rallied Kansas State to a 73-70 victory.

2009-10

More than a decade before Purdue earned its first No. 1 ranking in the Associated Press poll, another Boilermaker squad seemed destined to climb to the paper mountaintop.

Ranked third with a 23-3 record, the

Boilermakers went into Minnesota looking to maintain its hold on first place in the Big Ten and making a case for a No. 1 seed in the NCAA tournament.

What might have been had not junior forward Robbie Hummel tore his ACL that February night? A stunned Purdue team held on for a 59-58 win but was emotionally flat days later in a 53-44 home loss to Michigan State. Victories over Indiana and at Penn State allowed Purdue to share the Big Ten crown.

Chris Kramer's game-winning basket in overtime sent Purdue to the Sweet 16, where it was no match for No. 3 Duke.

2017-18

The first Purdue team to win 30 games in a season looked like a Final Four contender with Carsen Edwards, Vincent Edwards, Isaac Haas and Dakota Mathias all career 1,000-point scorers and a veteran point guard in P.J. Thompson.

Then Haas suffered a broken elbow in the NCAA tournament opener against Cal State Fullerton. Purdue managed to defeat Butler in the second round and reach the Sweet 16. Despite Carsen Edwards' 39 points, third-seeded Texas Tech pulled away for a 78-65 victory.

2018-19

A different kind of gut punch took place a year later. A historic scoring run by Carsen Edwards carried co-Big Ten champion Purdue within a second of the Final Four.

Edwards scored 139 points in four NCAA tournament games, including 42 against Virginia in the regional final at Louisville. Mamadi Diakite's jumper as time expired forced overtime, and Virginia would go on to win 80-75 and capture the national championship a week later.

The loss overshadowed a classic confrontation with Tennessee in the regional semifinal. With the lead changing 17 times, Purdue reached its first Elite Eight in nearly 20 years with a 99-94 overtime victory. Edwards had 29 points and Ryan Cline put up a career-high 27 on 7 of 10 shooting from 3-point range.

1929-30

With one of college basketball's first true big men, aptly nicknamed "Stretch," and the "Indiana Rubber Man," Purdue enjoyed one of its greatest seasons.

Hall of Fame coach Ward "Piggy" Lambert coached the Boilermakers to a 10-0 Big Ten record and 13-2 overall thanks to his two All-Americans: 6-6

Charles "Stretch" Murphy and 5-10 John Wooden, who earned the "Indiana Rubber Man" nickname for his hard-nosed play and frequent head-first dives for loose balls.

Murphy won two consecutive Big Ten scoring titles in 1929 and 1930 and helped Purdue claim three straight league championships. Murphy, Wooden and Lambert were inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in 1960.

Ranking Purdue's Top 10 Football Teams of All Time Easier Than Hoops

Last week's list of the 10 best Purdue men's basketball teams was difficult to assemble. There were probably another 10 teams that could have made the cut.

When putting together the ranking of the 10 best Boilermaker football teams, the decisions weren't as difficult. There have only been four consistent successful eras of Boilermaker football: 1922 to 1936 under James Phelan and Noble Kizer; 1956-69 with Jack Mollenkopf; 1977-81 under Jim Young and 1997-2008 with Joe Tiller.

Perhaps not coincidentally, Phelan, Mollenkopf and Young are enshrined in the College Football Hall of Fame. Kizer, 42-13-3 in seven seasons, probably would have made it four had his coaching career not been halted by what proved to be a fatal illness. Tiller's .575 winning percentage falls below the Hall's .600 standard.

In order, here's my top 10 Purdue football teams of all-time:

1979

To date, no Purdue team has matched the 10 victories won by the 1979 squad.

Coach Jim Young and quarterback Mark Herrmann were elected to the College Football Hall of Fame in 1999 and 2010, respectively.

"If I had to single out one season, our junior year in 1979 when we won 10 games was probably the most enjoyable," Herrmann said in 2007. "We beat Notre Dame and Michigan that year. I think that's as good a team as I've played on."

Victory No. 10 came against Tennessee in the Bluebonnet Bowl inside the Houston Astrodome. Just like Purdue basketball's NCAA tournament victories in 2019 and this past April, the Bluebonnet Bowl came down to the final moments.

Herrmann rallied the Boilermakers to a 27-22 victory, throwing a 17-yard touchdown pass to fellow All-American Dave Young with 1:30 remaining. The Boilermakers marched 80 yards in just over two minutes after the Vols had taken a 22-21 lead.

"I was very confident," Herrmann told me in 1998. "When I stepped in the huddle, there weren't any anxious faces. We felt we could move the ball on them. We were very patient."

Center Pete Quinn liked what he saw from Herrmann during the final drive.

"As soon as I saw Herrmann start that drive, the only thing I didn't know was how long it would take before we scored," Quinn said. "It was a real turning point in Mark's leadership. He took control of the huddle like I'd never seen him do before."

Herrmann would win the second of his three consecutive bowl MVP awards and set numerous Purdue and NCAA passing records.

1943

With a lot of help from Uncle Sam, Purdue fielded its most recent undefeated team.

With World War II escalating, the United States Navy and Marine Corps were using universities like Purdue to train officer candidates. As a side benefit, their recruits were allowed to play collegiate sports for as long as their training period allowed.

More than 30 players from the University of Illinois, Iowa, Missouri and other schools were sent to Purdue. They included All-American guard Alex Agase and running back Tony Butkovich, both former Fighting Illini.

Second-year head coach Elmer Burnham molded 26 Marines, seven Navy men and nine civilians into a 9-0 Big Ten championship team that was ranked fifth in the final Associated Press poll.

"Football is teamwork and we jelled pretty quickly," Agase told me in 2001. "The coaches – Joe Dienhart, Sam Voinoff, Cecil Isbell and of course, Elmer Burnham, did an excellent job of putting that team together. That's not easy to do, to take people who don't know each other, from various universities and get them to jell. But it was a talented team and that is the bottom line."

Agase, the only man to earn All-American honors at two different schools,

anchored an offensive line that included Fordham All-American center Lou DiFilippo and guard Dick Barwegan, "as good a football player as I ever saw," Agase said.

Butkovich won the Big Ten scoring title with 16 touchdowns and led the nation in rushing with 833 yards in just seven games before the Marine Corps called him to active duty. The 16 rushing touchdowns remain a school record, matched by Kory Sheets in 2008.

"He was so tough," Agase said. "He could run over you. He could make you miss. He could stiff arm. He had all the attributes of a great running back."

Butkovich died in action on Okinawa on April 18, 1945.

To learn more about this team, I recommend Cory Palm's book "Perfect Warriors."

1966

College Football Hall of Famers Bob Griese and Leroy Keyes were among the stars of the first Purdue team to reach the Rose Bowl.

Keyes was a sophomore who mostly played defensive back. Even though he was from Newport News, Va., Keyes was well aware how much the Rose Bowl bid meant to the Boilermakers.

"Knowing that we could be the first weighed heavily on us, but I think it weighed in a positive light," Keyes told me in 2000. "We could do something that hadn't been done before. Being the first to accomplish that mission was something we relished."

The Boilermakers finished 9-2 with a 14-13 victory against Southern Cal in Pasadena. The two losses that season were to No. 1 Notre Dame and No. 2 Michigan State. The 1966 season began a spectacular four-year run for Purdue, which would go 8-2 each season from 1967 to 1969.

2000

One of the most memorable months in Purdue football history capped Joe Tiller's rebuilding project in West Lafayette.

A season of high expectations began with a 3-2 record and a pair of two-point losses at Notre Dame and Penn State. Then came October. A dramatic second-half comeback and Travis Dorsch's field goal in the final seconds lifted Purdue past No. 6 Michigan 32-31. A



41-28 victory at No. 17 Northwestern was followed by a 30-24 overtime victory at Wisconsin when Ashante Woodyard returned a blocked field goal 27 yards for a touchdown.

Finally, the stirring 31-27 come-from-behind victory against No. 12 Ohio State when Drew Brees threw a 64-yard touchdown pass to a wide open Seth Morales with 1:55 remaining.

Thanks to its victories against Michigan and Northwestern, Purdue received its second Rose Bowl berth following a 41-13 victory against Indiana.

1929

The Boilermakers claimed their only outright Big Ten championship with this undefeated squad under coach Jim Phelan.

Purdue's first two consensus All-Americans, tackle Elmer Sleight and halfback Ralph "Pest" Welch, set the tone for the season in the fourth quarter of their second game. Trailing Michigan 16-6 after three quarters, the Boilermakers thrilled

the Ross-Ade Stadium crowd by scoring four touchdowns in less than 15 minutes to win 30-16.

During the final six games of the season, Purdue recorded four shutouts and allowed just two touchdowns.

1967

This team could have been much higher in the rankings if not for a puzzling home loss to Oregon State after climbing to No. 2 in the national polls and an upset by Indiana that sent the Hoosiers to their only Rose Bowl.

Leroy Keyes and Mike Phipps began to establish the credentials that led to their induction into the College Football Hall of Fame in 1990 and 2006. Keyes rushed for 986 yards and was a consensus All-American. Phipps led Purdue to the first of three consecutive victories against Notre Dame, which was ranked No. 1 when the two schools met on Sept. 30 in Ross-Ade Stadium.

"We had great players on offense and defense," Phipps told me in 1998. "We

expected to win. Notre Dame just happened to be in the way. Both programs were at a peak in those years. It meant a lot to the season of both teams."

Indiana's 19-14 victory denied Purdue an outright Big Ten championship, which it also had to share with Minnesota.

1952

The co-Big Ten champions with Wisconsin were denied a trip to the Rose Bowl when a vote of athletic directors favored the Badgers.

"They thought Wisconsin was the most representative team. We didn't agree," quarterback Dale Samuels told me in 2018 upon the occasion of his induction into the Indiana Football Hall of Fame. "In our opinion, our non-conference games were much tougher than Wisconsin. That was a big disappointment."

Purdue had to rally against Indiana to gain a share of the Big Ten. Trailing 16-14 in a downpour, Samuels guided the Boilermakers 66 yards for the winning touchdown, a Rex Brock 24-yard run with 4:22 remaining.

End Bernie Flowers was a consensus All-American pick.

1968

Purdue began the season ranked No. 1 in the nation, and Sports Illustrated featured Leroy Keyes on the cover of its college football preview.

"It will be the greatest disappointment of my life if we do not have a very successful season," coach Jack Mollenkopf said before the season opener against Virginia.

Including a 37-22 victory at No. 2 Notre Dame, Purdue was off to a 3-0 start before losing at eventual national champion Ohio State 13-0.

An 8-2 season was capped by a come-from-behind 38-35 victory against Indi-

ana. In his farewell game, Keyes scored four touchdowns and surpassed 1,000 rushing yards for the season. His 1-yard touchdown run with 1:35 remaining capped a comeback from a 28-10 deficit.

1978

These Boilermakers came within one point of being the second Rose Bowl team at Purdue.

A 24-24 tie at Wisconsin cost Purdue a three-way share of the Big Ten title with Michigan and Michigan State. Under rules at that time, Purdue would have gotten the bid due to beating MSU head to head and Michigan having been in the Rose Bowl more recently.

Mark Herrmann led a talented offensive unit to only the second bowl game in school history, dominating Georgia Tech 41-21 on Christmas Day in the Peach Bowl.

1980

Riding consensus All-American seasons from Herrmann and tight end Dave Young, the Boilermakers (9-3) finished tied for second in the Big Ten at 7-1.

Herrmann won the Chicago Tribune's Silver Football as the Big Ten's Most Valuable Player. He set the career NCAA passing yards record with 9,946. Herrmann led the Big Ten in passing yards and TD passes.

The Carmel graduate would earn his third bowl MVP honor at the Liberty Bowl, guiding Purdue to a 28-25 victory against Missouri. Herrmann threw two touchdown passes to fellow Carmel graduate Bart Burrell and one apiece to Steve Bryant and Young.

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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