



It's National Championship or Bust for the 2010 Ohio State Buckeyes. With the majority of contributors back from a team that went 11-2 and won the Rose Bowl, the Buckeyes will be expected to challenge for the crystal football this season.

But before conquering the college football world, the Buckeyes first have to conquer their 2010 schedule. It isn't going to be easy- not for the most part, at least. Major road tests loom at Wisconsin and at Iowa, while Miami of Florida and Penn State pose challenges within the walls of Ohio Stadium. And one loss on this schedule is one loss too many. Ohio State will probably have to run the table to get an invite to the BCS Championship Game- and that won't be a simple matter.

On to a thumbnail preview of the 2010 schedule:

Thu, Sept. 2- vs. Marshall: The Thundering Herd, with new head coach Doc Holliday make the trip north to the Horseshoe for the first weeknight opener for the Buckeyes since 1997. Expectations in football-mad Huntington are high, and a 6-6 record and Little Caesar's Pizza Bowl bid weren't acceptable to the folks down there. So out went ex-Ohio State assistant Mark Snyder and in came Holliday, a former West Virginia linebacker who cut his coaching teeth under longtime Mountaineer boss Don Nehlen and who Marshall fans of course, hope to be a [peach of a coach](#)

With 1,131-yard rusher Darius Marshall having foregone his senior season for the NFL, the Herd will struggle offensively against the Silver Bullets. They do return seven starters on the defensive side of the ball, however. The last time the Herd came to Columbus, in 2004, it took a [55-yard Mike Nugent field goal](#) for Ohio State to win. It should be easier this time around, but never underestimate Ohio State's capacity for making inferior competition look surprisingly decent.

Sat, Sept. 11- vs. Miami (Fl.): The Hurricanes are just emerging from a descent into mediocrity that ensued with their 2003 Fiesta Bowl loss to the Buckeyes. After a 5-7 finish in 2007 Randy Shannon has guided his team to consecutive bowls- both of which they have lost, including last season's Champs Sports Bowl defeat to Wisconsin. Miami has some weapons returning- quarterback Jacory Harris (3,352 yards, 24 touchdown passes), receiver Leonard Hankerson (801 yards) and five receiving-yards leaders of 2009.

But Miami's reclamation project is far from complete. The Hurricanes were lackluster in most statistical categories- 70th in rushing offense, 31st in passing offense, 31st in rushing defense, 43rd in passing defense, 61st in turnover margin. Miami went 1-3 against ranked teams in 2009 and yielded an average of 403 yards in those losses.

What the Hurricanes want is to duplicate their victory over Ohio State in the [1999 Kickoff Classic](#) at the Meadowlands. Miami, coming off several non-descript seasons, dominated the Buckeyes who had finished second in the polls in 1996 and '98. The difference is that this Ohio State team, unlike that one, has a ton of talent returning. And of course, this game will be in the Horseshoe. These aren't your older brother's Miami Hurricanes. The Buckeyes might lose a game this season; I doubt it's going to be this one.

Sat, Sept. 18- vs. Ohio: Two years ago the Bobcats led Ohio State after three quarters before the Buckeyes rallied to a 26-14 victory. So it wouldn't do to sleep on them in 2010, especially the week after what should be an emotional meeting with Miami of Florida. Ohio is without its starting quarterback, top running back and top receiver from a year ago but returns the bulk of its defense from a squad that went 9-5 and won the MAC East before losing to Marshall in the Little Caesar's Bowl. The Bobcats will play this game with all the zeal of a resentful little brother. Still, a MAC team with an inexperienced quarterback should not be able to hang in the Shoe.

Sat, Sept. 25- vs. Eastern Michigan: Along with Eastern Kentucky, the Artists Formerly Known as the Hurons were one of two winless teams in FBS college football last season. Eastern hasn't had a winning season since 1995 and won't have one in this, Ron English's second year on the job. This should be the frostiest, creamiest cupcake on the schedule, 2010's version of the New Mexico State game from last season.

Sat, Oct. 2- @ Illinois: Ron Zook still has his job after the Illini went 3-9 in '09. He's back in Champaign and although he no longer has Juice Williams or Regis Benn he still has a fairly experienced senior quarterback in Eddie McGee and a very experienced defense (which may not be a good thing, seeing as Illinois went 92nd in the nation in total defense last season.) Ohio State has had its problems with Illinois at times, but not in Champaign: the Buckeyes have won seven straight on the road against the Illini and haven't lost in Memorial Stadium since 1991. Illinois's five victories over Ohio State since '91 have all come at the Horseshoe.

Sat, Oct. 9- Indiana: Last season the Hoosiers were close to being a good football team. They won their first three and were 4-3 going into road games at Northwestern and at Iowa. Indiana blew a 28-3 second-quarter lead to lose at Evanston and completely dominated the Hawkeyes for three quarters before melting down in the fourth. Those two games turned a potential bowl season into a dreary 4-8 slog- the kind that has become very familiar in Bloomington. Close isn't nearly close enough.

Bill Lynch will bring an experienced group of skilled players into Columbus this season. Quarterback Ben Chappell (2,942 yards, 17 touchdown passes), tailback Darius Willis (607 yards as a freshman) and top receivers Tandon Doss (77 catches, 962 yards) and Damarlo Belcher (61 catches, 770 yards) all return. Indiana can score points. But the defense is young and vulnerable and Indiana hasn't won at Ohio State since 1988.

Sat, Oct. 16- @ Wisconsin: The Badgers couldn't beat Terrelle Pryor and Ohio State in Camp Randall at night two years ago, but they'll try again in 2010, with a 7:15 start for the proceedings in Madison. Bret Bielema is 0-3 against the Buckeyes since taking the Wisconsin gig, and his Badgers lost in Columbus in 2009 despite dominating statistically.

If the people in Madison think this might be the year for the Badgers to get over the hump against Ohio State, they have reason to. Wisconsin returns the bulk of a team that surprised many (including me) by going 10-3 and whipping Miami (Fl.) in the Champs Sports Bowl. The

Buckeyes won't have to deal with pass-rushing end O'Brien Schofield, who had a big game in Columbus last season, but they'll still have to deal with John Clay on the other side of the ball, along with more than 90 percent of Wisconsin's offensive yardage from 2009, a veteran quarterback in Scott Tolzien and all five offensive line starters from a year ago.

With the night, the crowd at Camp Randall and the depth of talent returning for the Badgers, this looms as an extremely dangerous game. But it's never easy in Madison.

Sat, Oct. 23- vs. Purdue: Well, you know the Buckeyes won't be taking this game lightly. Purdue's humbling victory in Ross-Ade Stadium set the stage for Ohio State's 2009 finishing kick. Quarterback Joey Elliott, who lit up the Silver Bullets in last year's upset, has moved on, along with much of the defense. But one big-time defender is back for the Boilers- Ryan Kerrigan, the standout defensive end that harassed Terrelle Pryor all afternoon in last season's shocker.

Sat, Oct. 30- @ Minnesota: Bundle up. The Buckeyes make their debut at TCF Bank Stadium under the lights on Halloween Eve, on what should be a nippy evening in the Twin Cities. Minnesota is not expected to be very good in 2010 and if the Buckeyes succeed in not looking past the Gophers to the following-week showdown in Iowa City, they should come out of this game victorious- if in urgent need of blankets and piping-hot beverages. Worth noting (or maybe not): The last time the Buckeyes played outdoors at Minnesota, [they lost](#).

Sat, Nov. 13- vs. Penn State: Two years ago the Lions defeated Ohio State in Columbus, a win that helped them salt away the Big Ten title. Last season the Buckeyes routed Penn State in Happy Valley, a win that vaulted them to the Big Ten title. This season the Lions come back to the Horseshoe, looking to duplicate their accomplishment from 2008 and avenge Ohio State's accomplishment from '09. Penn State returns some talent- 1,169-yard tailback Evan Royster, a veteran offensive line and enough good defenders to keep any team honest. The Lions also play a real, honest-to-goodness quality non-conference game at Alabama, which should sharpen their edge for the Big Ten wars.

Sat, Nov. 20- @ Iowa: The Hawkeyes were in all likelihood the best team Ohio State played last season, and that might very well be the case again this season. Quarterback Ricky Stanzi, top receivers Marvin McNutt and Darrell Johnson-Koulianos, top backs Adam Robinson and

Brandon Wegher are all back in uniform for Iowa, and despite the loss to the NFL Draft of Bryan Bulaga, the Hawkeyes should be sturdy as usual on the offensive line. On the defensive side, star end Adrian Clayborn makes his return along with the bulk of the line and secondary, and although Kirk Ferentz will have to replace stud linebacker Pat Angerer, the cupboard isn't exactly bare in Iowa City.

Last year the Hawkeyes had one of their best seasons ever, going 11-2 and winning their first major bowl game since 1959. Considering the number of tightrope finishes Iowa endured in 2009, this season may not be as fruitful as last. But make no mistake- this is going to be a tough, well-coached, physical opponent; and Ohio State's last great test over the course of the regular season.

Sat, Nov. 27- vs. Michigan: It's been seven years since the Michigan Wolverines defeated the Ohio State Buckeyes on the football field. It's been ten years since they beat the Buckeyes at the Horseshoe. And it doesn't look as if Michigan will have the horses to do it in 2010. They may very well have another freshman starting quarterback in Denard Robinson, the defense is still going to be subpar and the depth just isn't there. Top to bottom the Wolverines just don't have the talent to handle Ohio State, especially in Columbus.