



Saturday, October 9, 2010

Ohio Stadium, Columbus, Ohio

Indiana at Ohio State

12:00 p.m. (ET)

TV: ESPN

The Indiana Hoosiers bring their pass-happy offensive attack into Ohio Stadium on Saturday as the unbeaten Buckeyes try to extend the nation's third-longest winning streak and give Jim Tressel his 100th victory as OSU head coach. No. 2 Ohio State (5-0, 1-0) has dominated the

series with the Hoosiers for decades, but Indiana has shown an explosive passing game this season, and they'll look to exploit a Buckeye secondary thinned by injuries.

All eyes will be on quarterback Terrelle Pryor to see if he shows any lingering effects of the strained quad muscle suffered in last week's 24-13 OSU win at Illinois. Tressel said Thursday that he expects Pryor to be ready for Indiana. "He's been 100%," Tressel said, going on to say of Wednesday's practice that his quarterback had "as crisp a day, footwork-wise in the passing game...and the sets and the delivery...I thought he had as sharp a day as we've had."

This is of course welcome news to OSU football fans everywhere, who feared the worst as Pryor lay on the field early in the 3rd quarter in Champaign Saturday, before limping off to the locker room in pain. Keep in mind though, that to say the OSU staff is less than forthcoming with information on player injuries is sort of like saying that Cavs fans are a bit upset at LeBron. What you get out of Jim Tressel in a press conference is exactly what Jim Tressel wants Indiana and future opponents to hear...no more, no less.

The Hoosiers (3-1, 0-1) are led by Bill Lynch, who is in his fourth year as head coach at Indiana. He is 17-24 overall, and 5-20 in the Big Ten during his tenure in Bloomington. Indiana was 4-8 a year ago, with a win over Illinois their only conference victory.

Just Winning, Baby

One of the major storylines of the game Saturday will be how the offensive game plan for the Buckeyes is tailored to the physical condition of Pryor, whatever that turns out to be. Will he be limited, either by his own physical capability, or by the coaches' aversion to risking aggravation of the injury?

After Pryor went down last week, Tressel went to a second-half strategy consisting almost entirely of handing the ball off to Dan Herron, punting when necessary, and playing the customary stout defense. In other words, take no unnecessary chances...don't turn it over...trust the defense...win the game...go another week with a zero in the loss column.

That style of play has a name, by the way. It's Tresselball, and it is a major reason why its practitioner will probably reach 100 victories on Saturday in his 121st game at OSU, which is faster than all but two Big Ten coaches in history reached that milestone (Michigan's Fielding Yost and Bo Schembechler did it in 119 games)

No one expects quite that degree of classic Tresselball this week against the potent offense of Indiana, but it sure served its purpose last week, as Tressel came away with a big road win in the Big Ten against an emotionally-charged opponent with an extra week to prepare...on a windy day...with his best player seriously limited by an injury. OSU held a 14-10 lead when Pryor went down, and according to Buckeye defensive tackle Dexter Larimore, the OSU

defenders decided right then among themselves that they simply had to prevent any more Illini scores, and victory would be assured.

As it turned out, Illinois would get a field goal with less than five minutes to play, but the Illini did not pick up a third down conversion after their first drive of the first quarter, going 0 for 11 for the rest of the game. Dan Herron rushed for 89 of his 95 yards after halftime, and picked up *seven first downs*

on rushing plays after his quarterback got hurt. An offense that had struggled to run the ball effectively with anyone not named Pryor, was able to summon the will to do so when it mattered. Say what you will about style points. It was a winning formula.

So it wasn't an artistic victory, and it was hard to find any Buckeye afterward who was satisfied with the way the team played, but it's worth noting that the 11-point margin of victory for the Buckeyes is the largest in any of the last five games they've played in Memorial Stadium. For whatever reason, it's always a struggle there.

And for all the OSU partisans coming away underwhelmed with the Buckeyes' performance against the Illini, it's also worth mentioning that the two teams expected to battle for (at least) the Big Ten title with OSU this year, Iowa and Wisconsin, are both no longer undefeated. Both have had their national title hopes pretty much trashed before the leaves turned. Consider also that three of the perennial powerhouses of college football over the last decade, Texas, Florida and USC, are all no longer undefeated. Insert your own moral of the story, but here's mine: It's hard to win them all.

With the exception of some injuries, including the torn pectoral muscle that will sideline safety Tyler Moeller for the rest of the season...and that one sore left thigh...the 5-0 Buckeyes are right where they want to be.



Air Hoosiers

One rarely sees the words "Indiana" and "juggernaut" in the same sentence, but never say never, and now seems like a fairly good time. It does seem odd to be talking about the Hoosiers averaging over 450 yards per game, 350 yards through the air, and scoring nearly 40 points per game (39.8), but there it is on the stat sheet. Before we get into whatever is in the water in Bloomington these days, let's look at a little history in this series.

Ohio State and Indiana have played 83 times, and OSU has a record of 66-12-5 in those

games, including victories in the last 15 straight contests, dating to a 41-7 loss in 1988, John Cooper's first year at the helm in Columbus. After a couple of close games in the early 90's, the OSU victories over the Hoosiers have come by an average score of 35-9 since 1994, and an average of 36-10 in the seven games during the Tressel era. Only once has Indiana come within two touchdowns of a Tressel team at OSU, that a 27-14 loss to the Bucks in Tressel's first year in 2001. So if nothing else, the Hoosiers will arrive in Columbus hungry.

Goin' to the Chappell

For Indiana on offense, it all revolves around their 5th-year senior quarterback [Ben Chappell](#) and his veteran group of skilled wide receivers. Chappell is big (6' 3", 242), he is smart, and he has a strong and accurate throwing arm. Now in his third year of action and his second as the full time starter, Chappell has over 5000 career passing yards and 33 career TD's. He completed 62.6% of his passes in 2009, and threw 17 TD's with 15 interceptions.

So far in his senior campaign, Chappell is a lot more efficient, ranking 12th in the nation after four games with a 165.85 QB rating. He has hit on 71.6% of his passes for 1370 yards, and has thrown 12 TD's to just one interception.

Chappell is coming off a record-setting performance last Saturday against Michigan, when he set IU records for passing attempts (64), completions (45) and passing yards (480), also throwing for three touchdowns in the Hoosiers' 42-35 loss to the Wolverines. The Hoosiers will operate mostly out of a "Pistol" set, in which Chappell takes the snap in sort of a short shotgun formation, trying to distribute the ball quickly to a very talented crew of wideouts.

Spreading the Wealth

Tandon Doss is the wide receiver name most familiar in Big Ten circles, as the 6' 3", 200 lb. junior is coming off an first team All-Big Ten season a year ago when he had 77 catches for 962 yards and 5 TD's. But Doss is just one of three big receivers working with Chappell this year. He has 23 receptions already for 323 yards, but that ranks him third among Hoosier wideouts in the young 2010 season. Doss had a remarkable 15 catches in the Michigan game for 221 yards, including several highlight reel plays. He also had a touchdown catch in last year's matchup with Ohio State.

Damario Belcher is the standout for Indiana at wide receiver through four games, with 31 catches for 375 yards and 3 TD's. The 6' 5", 210 lb. junior leads the Big Ten with those 31 receptions. On the other side is senior Terrence Turner, a senior with good size (6' 3", 210) who has already caught 24 balls this year, for 246 yards and one TD.

Two other players figure prominently in the IU passing attack. Duwyce Wilson, a redshirt freshman with a high upside and big-play potential, has 12 catches for 146 yards. And the Hoosiers feature running back Darius Willis is also a threat in the passing game with 11 catches this season for 102 yards and a TD.

Willis is the primary rushing threat, although the Hoosiers have thrown the ball considerably more than they have run it this year. Willis has 278 rushing yards on 64 carries (4.3 yd avg.) with four rushing touchdowns.

Overall, nine starters return on offense for Bill Lynch's Hoosiers, but the one area they are breaking in some younger players is on the offensive line. They certainly don't lack for size there, especially with the massive 6' 8", 335 lb. senior tackle James Brewer coming back. Will Matte is a solid veteran center, and they have Andrew McDonald at 6' 6", 306 manning the other tackle spot.

Clearly the Indiana offense has some potent weapons, and they are no doubt improved from a year ago. The game has slowed down for Chappell, and he is capable of making all the throws and involving all of his receivers. He will certainly cause some problems for the Buckeyes on Saturday, potentially putting up more points than any offense has this season against OSU. But before Buckeye fans begin sweating big silver bullets over the threat posed by the IU offense, consider a couple of things.

First, Indiana has not played anyone with a defense even close to the caliber of OSU's, and that of course includes the Michigan Wolverines. Their wins are against Towson State, Western Kentucky and Akron. Need I say more on that? The OSU defense leads the Big Ten in passing yards allowed (161 yds/game) turnover margin (+1.80/game) and fewest first downs allowed.

Second, Indiana had Ben Chappell, Tandon Doss, Darius Willis, Damario Belcher and Terrence Turner [last year](#) when Ohio State went to Bloomington and handed the Hoosiers their hats 33-14, giving up a meaningless TD to Indiana as time expired, with the second string OSU defense on the field, making it look closer than it was.

The Hoosiers were outrushed 219-18 by OSU in 2009, and converted just 3 of 14 third downs. They got 11 first downs in the game, and it was played on their home field. This year, the personnel on both sides will be largely the same as last year when the Hoosiers have the ball.

There now...feel better?

A Work in Progress on D

The Indiana defense has been putting up numbers almost as big as the ones their offense has been generating...and that's not good. Numbers like 397.2 total yards per game, 207 rushing yards per game, 6.3 yards allowed per rush, 25 points per game (remember...Towson, WKU, Akron), 13.8 yards per pass completion. You get the idea.

The Hoosiers do have some talent on defense that will jump out and get your attention. At strongside linebacker, co-captain Tyler Replogle is the heart of the defense for Indiana. The

senior from Centerville, OH leads the team in tackles with 26. Don't confuse him with his brother Adam, a 6' 3", 295 lb. sophomore who has taken over one of the defensive end spots for the Hoosiers.

Big defensive tackle Larry Black Jr. a 6' 2", 326 lb bruiser in the middle of the defensive line, has quickness and power, and he'll be a key to slowing down the OSU rushing attack. And senior cornerback Richard Council is one of few experienced players in a Hoosier secondary that might be in for a long day in the Horseshoe this Saturday.



Idle Speculation

With a defense as porous as this Hoosier group, the success of OSU's offense should depend more on their own execution than on what Indiana is doing to stop them. As noted above, the story will be what kinds of things Ohio State is attempting to do on offense, and what things they leave untried based on Terrelle Pryor's limitations, if any.

I expect the OSU offensive line to come out with attitude this week, after being frustrated and unhappy with their own performance at Illinois. The Illini confused them with slants by the linemen and blitzes behind the slants. It will be interesting to see if the Hoosiers try more of the same, and how the OSU O-linemen adjust.

Buckeye-watchers will be attentive to which running backs are getting the carries in the running game, and which ones are most effective. The lack of productivity this year by the #1 tailback Brandon Saine has been the favorite topic on OSU message boards for weeks. Herron showed last week that he is the running back the coaches trust most when it matters late in a tight game.

The search for a #3 wide receiver for OSU will continue, as tight end Jake Stoneburner (ankle sprain) is again unlikely to suit up for the Bucks, which eliminates one of Pryor's favorite receiving options.

If I start regularly predicting a touchdown on a kickoff return by Jordan Hall or Jaamal Berry, sooner or later I'll be right. Consider that done.

With Moeller out, Christian Bryant (#2) will start at the Star position, and he should get a real baptism under fire with Chappell winging the ball all over the field. Bryant, the true freshman from Glenville, both covered and tackled well last week in his first extended game action for OSU, leading the team in solo tackles with five.

I think Chappell will show well for the Hoosiers on Saturday, maybe even putting up a couple of TD's against the Bucks. But the IU defense won't be able to contain the Ohio State offense, and the Bucks win it going away....something on the order of 38-17.

Links:

[OSU Athletic Communications - Game Notes](#)

[2010 OSU Roster \(pdf\)](#)

[2010 Indiana Roster](#)

[Indiana - ESPN Home](#)