

- *Saturday, October 23, 2010*
- *Ohio Stadium, Columbus, Ohio*
- *Purdue at Ohio State*
- *12:00 p.m. (ET)*
- *TV: Big Ten Network -*



Ohio State has a score to settle with the Purdue Boilermakers, but they'll be battling both the hangover of last week's loss to Wisconsin and a rash of injuries to their defensive personnel

when the two teams meet Saturday on Homecoming weekend in Columbus. After upsetting Ohio State in West Lafayette last season, the Boilermakers will surely not be lacking for confidence, and the Buckeyes are coming into the game very thin at both safety and linebacker. The pressure in this game won't be as great as it was a week ago, but what pressure there is will all be on the guys in the scarlet jerseys.

A short month ago no one would have expected the Buckeyes (6-1, 1-1) to be looking up at Purdue (4-2, 2-0) in the Big Ten standings when their October meeting rolled around, but that's where they find themselves. The Boilermakers dropped non-conference games to Notre Dame and Toledo to go 2-2 before Big Ten play began, but have been a mild surprise so far in conference action. They ended Northwestern's unbeaten run at five games with a [20-17 upset](#) win over the Wildcats two weeks ago, and then [downed Minnesota](#) last week 28-17, in a game that wasn't that close.

Second-year Purdue coach Danny Hope went 5-7 a year ago, but finished the season strong after a 1-5 start. Ohio State leads the all-time series between the schools 37-13-2, and the Buckeyes are 25-5-2 against the Boilermakers at Ohio Stadium.

### Hobbled on D

As for the Buckeyes, it's difficult to predict what their collective mindset will be until they take the field Saturday and we see how they react to the sudden end of their national championship aspirations last Saturday in Wisconsin. Complicating matters in a big way will be the absence of two defensive starters; captain and leading tackler Ross Homan at linebacker, and Star back Christian Bryant, as well as two backup linebackers, Dorian Bell and Storm Klein, all of whom will be sidelined for the Buckeyes.

Normally we're not dealing with the OSU injury situation this prominently or this early in the game preview, but as far as I can see, there is no greater single factor affecting this week's game than the battered and bruised Buckeye defense. It's even more worrying coming as it does after they were pushed around the field last week by Wisconsin in a way we haven't seen since USC did something similar to them early in 2008. A significant turnover and a further shuffling of personnel is not what this unit needed after the blow to their confidence inflicted last week by the Badgers.

Homan has a foot injury, and is expected to miss at least two games, and Bryant, the third OSU starting safety lost to injury since the season began, has a foot infection which required surgery this week, and he'll be out indefinitely. Andrew Sweat will move over from the strongside (Sam) to take Homan's spot at the weakside (Will) linebacker position, and redshirt freshman Jonathan Newsome will fill in on the strong side.

At safety, Jermale Hines will stay at safety in the base defense, but will move to the hybrid Star

role to replace Bryant when the Buckeyes go to their five-DB, nickel package. Aaron Gant is the probable replacement at safety when Hines switches to Star. As you can see, "two starters out" doesn't really tell the whole story, since at times Saturday there will be *four* OSU defenders out of their back seven who will be playing positions at which they haven't started a game this year.

### Purdue Injuries Are Offensive



Before Buckeye fans do too much crying in their beer about OSU injuries, they might consider that Purdue has already lost their starting quarterback Robert Marve, their All-Big Ten wide receiver Keith Smith, and their best running back Ralph Bolden for the season, all to ACL injuries. Their No. 2 wideout Justin Siller will also likely miss this game with a foot injury.

But out of adversity comes opportunity, and redshirt freshman quarterback Rob Henry has made the most of his chances for the Boilermakers so far. Having lost his best passer when Marve went down, Coach Hope is transforming his traditional pass-happy spread offense to more of a read-option running attack, and has had good success to this point, with Henry at the controls. Purdue has rushed for over 200 yards in five consecutive games, and the 6' 2", 200 lb. Henry has proven to be a capable runner from the quarterback position.

Henry has rushed for 356 yards on 64 carries for a 5.6 yd average, with four touchdowns, including three last week against Minnesota, all on read-option keepers of one kind or another ([video highlights](#)). He is not an accomplished passer, so the Purdue braintrust has limited what they have asked him to do in that phase of the game. He has completed 40 of his 79 attempts (50.3%) for 443 yards, with three TD's and three interceptions. Despite his youth and inexperience, the Purdue staff likes what they see in Henry in terms of poise and toughness.

It looks like Dan Dierking, a 5' 10", 195 lb. senior, has grabbed the job as the featured running back in Purdue's attack. He has rushed for 353 yards for the season, for a 6.2 yd average. Dierking had a huge game against the Gophers last week with 126 yards on just 12 carries. He had another 100-yard game earlier against Western Illinois, and has also pulled in 11 pass receptions on the year for 83 yards and one TD. Dierking is complemented by two other speedy running backs for the Boilermakers in Keith Carlos (21 carries for 129 yards) and Terek McBurse (14 carries for 93 yards).

With Smith out, Purdue's starting wide receiver jobs have fallen to senior Cortez Smith and true freshman O.J. Ross. Smith leads the wide receivers in receptions with 17 catches for 220 yards and one touchdown. Ross has chipped in with 10 catches for 146 yards and one TD. The focus of the Boilermaker passing game has been the tight ends, as Kyle Adams (20 rec, 122 yards)

and Jeff Lindsay (4 rec, 31 yards) have combined for 24 catches.

The Purdue offensive line is a veteran group, and they know that the offense as it is presently constructed must run the ball successfully if they are going to have a chance to win games. That mindset will be running into a Buckeye defensive unit that was embarrassed a week ago by the offensive front of the Badgers, and will no doubt have a few things to prove to themselves and to their coaches and fans about what they are made of. It should make for an interesting matchup to watch.

Statistically, the Boilermakers rank 9th in the [Big Ten](#) in scoring offense (22.5 ppg), 10th in passing offense (159.2 ypg), 5th in rushing offense (202.3 ypg), and 9th in total offense (361.5 ypg)

### Kerrigan Leads Rugged Purdue Front



Purdue is probably a better team on the defensive side of the ball than they are on offense, and big part of that is the defensive line featuring Ryan Kerrigan. The big senior defensive end has terrorized the Buckeyes in their last two meetings, totaling five sacks and 7.5 TFL in those games. You'll recall his combination sack-forced fumble against Terrelle Pryor last year as one of the key plays in Purdue's upset win.

As a team, Purdue leads the Big Ten in sacks with 3.0 per game, and in tackles for loss with a 7.5 average. Gerald Gooden (6' 3", 235) plays opposite Kerrigan at the other end, and he has contributed 16 tackles on the season. Purdue is ranked 6th in the league in rush defense, and 6th in total defense, but they have been fairly solid against the run, having not allowed a 100-yard rusher, and giving up 123.5 yards per game on the ground.

The linebacking is experienced if unexceptional for the Boilermakers, with Jason Werner the senior leader, joined by Joe Holland and Dwayne Beckford. In the secondary, they suffered some graduation losses, and are playing first-time starters at every position in the defensive backfield. Sophomore Josh Johnson and promising freshman Ricardo Allen are the starters at the corners.

The Boilermakers have headaches at the safety position as well, as starting free safety Albert Evans is expected to miss Saturday's game with a knee injury, with junior Max Charlot his expected replacement. At the strong safety spot, the Boilermakers have had a strong performance from Logan Link, a former walk on from West Liberty, Ohio, who has 36 tackles, a forced fumble and an interception on the season.

Once again this week, the Buckeyes will be facing an excellent kicker for the opposition. Carson Wiggs does the placekicking for Purdue, and kicks off as well. He is 7 of 10 on field goal attempts this year, with a 49-yarder to his credit.

### Idle Speculation

Last year the Buckeyes responded to the loss at Purdue with an admirable stretch run to end the season, and an overall winning streak that lasted until last week. The revenge factor against Purdue has been played down this week by OSU players, but one hopes there's more motivation there than they're willing to admit.

Purdue has been playing better the last few weeks (after they looked truly awful early in the season), but this is a group that the Buckeyes *should* be able to handle easily, especially if they respond to the sting of an embarrassing defeat the way they should. Still something makes me stop short of predicting that they will actually do that.

The shuffling of personnel on defense is only part of my hesitance to forecast a dominating victory. The rest may be nothing more than the "once bitten, twice shy" effect of having been so confident last week and turning out to be so wrong.

It may also be the knowledge that Jim Tressel often makes games like this closer than they ought to be...or that I'm still not convinced Terrelle Pryor's leg is 100% healed...or that OSU's skilled position players other than Pryor may not be all that and a bag of chips...or that the habitual reliance on the Buckeye defense to bail the offense out no matter what else happens might be a bad bet this week...or that all the pressure is on the Buckeyes...or all of the above.

I do think OSU fans will like what they see from young linebacker Jonathan Newsome, who will be making his first start Saturday (if they start in the base defense). He's and fast and rangy and athletic and mean. I wish I were as confident about the debut of Aaron Gant at safety.

Andrew Sweat has been playing better the last couple games, and some people feel he's better suited to the run and pursue and tackle game that he'll be playing at the Will linebacker spot

than he was shedding blocks and battling the tight end on the strong side. We'll get a look at that experiment this weekend.

Pryor should be able to throw the ball effectively against this Purdue back seven...the big "if" being the line's ability to keep Ryan Kerrigan off Pryor's back. (I said nearly the exact same thing last week about Wisconsin's J.J. Watt...and Watt certainly had his moments, although a couple of his sacks and pressures of TP were of the coverage variety).

Dan Herron is firmly established as the tailback of choice, and while he remains unspectacular, he has been tough and reliable, and he seems to continue improving, even as a fourth year player.

The answer to my primary question about this game should be apparent fairly early Saturday. How much intensity and emotion will the Ohio State Buckeyes bring with them to the contest? This game really shouldn't be close if the Buckeyes respond to a deflating loss the way the coaches want them to. Somehow I still think it will be closer than it ought to be.

I've got the Buckeyes 28-13.

---

Links:

[OSU Athletics Communications Game Notes \(pdf\)](#)

[2010 OSU Roster](#)

[2010 Purdue Roster](#)

---