



- Saturday, October 30, 2010

- TCF Bank Stadium, Minneapolis, MN

- Ohio State at Minnesota

- 8:00 p.m. (ET)

- TV: ABC -

The Buckeyes will make their first ever visit to TCF Bank Stadium in Minneapolis this Saturday to square off against a Minnesota team desperately looking for a way to salvage their season. The Golden Gophers are playing their second season in their new outdoor stadium, and their second game under their new head coach. Seems like the only thing not new about [Minnesota](#)

football is the way they've been playing.

The new facility is stunning (take a virtual tour [here](#) ) but the Gophers (1-7, 0-4) haven't managed to win a home game yet in 2010, a problem that helped boost 4th-year head coach [Tim Brewster out the door](#) after seven games. From Ohio State's standpoint, they liked the old Metrodome just fine, having gone 11-0 indoors, and the Buckeyes are 23-1 against the Gophers since they last dropped a decision in the Land of 10,000 Lakes in 1981.

11th-ranked Ohio State (7-1, 3-1) will be on the road for just the third time this season, and they'll have to fight the tendency to be complacent against another lower-tier Big Ten team, even though they haven't exactly covered themselves in glory in their first two road outings of 2010. Illinois gave them all they wanted over in Champaign earlier this month, and Wisconsin pretty much ended OSU's national title hopes two weeks ago in Madison.

Any slim hope Ohio State still harbors of advancing to the BCS title game via the attrition of nine teams above them in the polls rests on winning out to finish 11-1. This is one of those "gimme" games that remain on the schedule on the way to the big game everyone is pointing toward...at Kinnick Stadium in Iowa in mid-November. So is it possible that a loose, desperate, reinvigorated Golden Gopher team could sneak up on the Buckeyes in another Big Ten night game on the road?

Sure it is...but probably not enough for them to win.

Legit Talent on Gopher Offense



Unlike the Purdue Boilermakers, who last week had all their best skilled position players sidelined with injuries, the Gophers will field several very talented performers on the offensive side of the ball. And it starts at quarterback, where Adam Weber will start for the fourth straight year against Ohio State.

Weber, who has been around Minneapolis so long it seems like he came in with Marion Barber, has quietly joined an exclusive club of Big Ten quarterbacks by passing for over 10,000 yards in

his Gopher career. Only Drew Brees, Curtis Painter, Brett Basenez and Chuck Long have been more productive throwing the football in conference history. So far in 2010, Weber has completed 55.8% of his throws for 1,961 yards, with 17 TD's and 7 interceptions.

Weber and interim head coach Jeff Horton know that in order to have a chance at beating Ohio State, Minnesota will have to come out throwing, and then throw some more. And they know that the short stuff isn't going to get it done. They'll need to throw the ball down the field repeatedly, and come up with several big plays if they want to stay in the game.

Horton moved up from the role of co-coordinator on offense for the Gophers, so he has a good grasp of what his offensive talent can and can't do. He was quoted this week as saying he's realistic about how tough it will be to run the ball against OSU, so we can expect Weber to come out winging it downfield to a pair of big, athletic wide receivers who might both wind up playing on Sundays.

### A Test For OSU Secondary

MarQueis Gray came to Minnesota as a quarterback with Pryoresque athletic skills and a glittering prep resumé, but after a year in the program playing only in spot duty behind Weber, the Gophers felt they had to get his athleticism on the field, and he has been moved to receiver. At 6' 4", 230 with great speed, Gray can be a big-playmaker in a passing offense, and he has contributed 33 receptions already, for 432 yards and four TD's.

Gray's running mate at wideout is Da'Jon McKnight, a 6' 3", 209 lb. junior with exceptional leaping ability and good ball skills in traffic. McKnight has made a big splash this season after recording 17 catches a year ago. He had a three touchdown game against Penn State last week, and now has six TD receptions in his last three games, and nine scores for the season. McKnight now has 36 catches for 542 yards through eight games, with two 100-yard games to his credit.

Bryant Allen has 17 receptions as the third Gopher receiver, and you'll see them use the tight end a lot as well. Starter Eric Lair has 29 catches for 407 yards to rank him third in receptions on the team.

The Gophers have some experience and talent coming back at running back as well, with Duane Bennett (104 att, 444 yds, 2 TD) and DeLeon Eskridge (118 att, 444 yds, 2 TD) both capable backs who played against OSU a year ago.

The Minnesota offensive line is experienced and deep. Four Gopher O-line starters have at least two seasons of starting experience coming into 2010. On paper, the offensive unit looks like it should be productive. And they have had their moments, especially with the combination of Weber connecting with his two big wideouts.

As a team, the Gophers are 3rd in the conference in first downs, and 2nd in time of possession, but only 8th in scoring offense. If that suggests to you that they have been plagued by mistakes,

penalties and turnovers, you guessed right. They have moved the ball fairly well, but have also been their own worst enemy. It's the kind of showing that gets head coaches fired, but that alone might be enough to give the Buckeye defense pause. The talent is there...they just haven't put together a consistent error-free game yet...and they're hungry.

### Defense an Ongoing Problem

What you just read was the good news. The bad news is that the Gophers have to spend approximately half of each game on defense...and they're not very good on defense. Minnesota is dead last in the conference in rushing defense (194.1) and scoring defense (31.9 ppg), and they are last among all FBS schools with just three sacks for the season.

The Gophers will field some good talent on the defensive line, but things get thinner the farther you get into the back seven. Anthony Jacobs and D.L. Wilhite are solid lining up at the defensive ends, and they have a couple of young but talented run-stoppers in the middle of the line in tackles Brandon Kirksey and Jewhan Edwards.

Gary Tinsley is the leading tackler on the Gopher defense from his middle linebacker spot, with 63 stops on the season, including 6.5 TFL, plus an interception. Sophomore Mike Rallis and Keanon Cooper are the projected starters at outside linebacker, though Rallis has been banged up and has missed some time.

The secondary has been a major problem for the Gophers, as injuries and losses have forced them to try all kinds of different combinations, and the only thing consistent has been their overall ineffectiveness. Tackling especially has been a weak point for this group, and Gopher opponents have also made Minnesota last in the league in pass efficiency defense.

This group has given up almost 32 points per game, and they have yet to play three of the top teams in the Big Ten, with games still to come against OSU, MSU, and Iowa.

For the first time in recent weeks, the Buckeyes will come into the game with the better looking kicking game, as both the Gophers' punter and placekicker have really struggled in 2010.

### Idle Speculation



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