

Pat Fitzgerald Previews First Ever Big Ten Championship Game Appearance Against Ohio State



INDIANAPOLIS - Despite opening the season 1-3, Northwestern finished the season strong and reached the Big Ten Championship Game for the first time in program history, closing the regular season with an 8-4 record.

Pat Fitzgerald's squad is on the verge of reaching the Rose Bowl for the first time since 1995, when Fitzgerald was a player. He met with the media Friday afternoon ahead of Saturday's title game against Ohio State. What follows are the main takeaways from his press conference.

Fitzgerald Notes:

- "I would have voted for him to win the Heisman," Fitzgerald said of Ohio State quarterback Dwayne Haskins. "He has an incredible understanding of what Ryan Day and Urban Meyer want him to do in the offense."
- Paid tribute to former coach Randy Walker who passed away of a heart attack in 2006. Walker's 2004 Wildcat team was the last one to beat Ohio State. Fitzgerald was an assistant coach on Walker's staff that season.
- "This is the most successful senior class that we have ever had," he said. Added quarterback Clayton Thorson is underrated around the country. Thorson is a four-year starter for Northwestern.
- Said his team has learned a lot from playing teams like Michigan and Notre Dame this season. Despite losing both of those games, Fitzgerald said he feels those matchups helped prepare his team to play Ohio State.
- "I have 100 percent confidence this is going to be a consistent theme in our program," he said when discussing the impact of being at the Big Ten title game.
- Praised Urban Meyer for his impact he has made in the Big Ten both on and off the field. "Talk is talk, but he has backed it up with action. I have had the utmost respect for him for a long time."
- Talked about the importance of recruiting the state of Ohio. "We haven't beat the Buckeyes on a recruit yet," he added. Northwestern has 18 players on its roster from Ohio.

- Discussed how safety Nate Hall can play multiple positions for Northwestern's defense. Hall is a Toledo, Ohio native.
- On running back Isaiah Bowser: "He took it over. The Rutgers staff gave him a lot of confidence and he has moved forward each week." Bowser, a true freshman from Ohio, has stepped in as a starter for Jeremy Larkin who was forced to medically retire from football.
- Praised Ohio State's performance against Michigan. "To see the way they executed, was flawless."
- "I think everyone else has done a really good job of that," Fitzgerald said when asked whether or not he has to play up the underdog role of the Wildcats.
- Said that around 50 busses are traveling to Indianapolis from Evanston, Ill. filled with Northwestern students for the game.
- "I would rather earn it," Fitzgerald said of Northwestern's lack of national respect. "We are building a legacy."
- "I think both guys are atop the offensive coordinator charts," he said when discussing Ryan Day and Kevin Wilson. "They will put a ton of pressure on our defense tomorrow."
- Said he believes a lot of Ohio State's issues on defense surround lack of experience and miscommunication.