

Prediction: Ohio State Overcomes Midseason Road Tests To Win Big Ten Title



Before the Big Ten regular season schedule was even announced, the average Buckeye fan already had rivalry week on their minds. While there's no bad time for Ohio State to beat Michigan, this year's rendition of 'The Game' feels like it needs to go the Buckeyes' way. With a more talented, experienced team and coach on paper, Ohio State will likely be a fairly heavy favorite against its most hated rival. For that reason, Ohio State's massive road matchups against Oregon and Penn State are being slightly overlooked.

In years past with Michigan and Ohio State being in the same division and Penn State failing to rise to the occasion against its Big Ten East rivals, the entire season for both teams conceivably did come down to just one game. The winner of 'The Game' got a seat in the Big Ten Championship against a highly-flawed Big Ten West team and, with a win, a trip to the CFP. The loser received a trip to what was then a not as important bowl game.

In 2024, the days of divisions are gone, as are the days of the winner of 'The Game' having a cakewalk to the Big Ten Championship. Instead, there's a conceivable reality where a Michigan team that replaces the majority of its starters from a year ago is eliminated from Big Ten contention before Week 14, and a nightmare scenario for Ohio State where the team loses to both Penn State and Oregon taking itself out of contention to go to Indianapolis.

Although the Buckeyes won't have a substantial test until their Week 7 matchup, the same is true for the Ducks. Despite all of the optimism surrounding Dan Lanning's team, Oregon hasn't necessarily had the landmark win to cement itself as national championship contenders yet. The home matchup against Ohio State presents a golden opportunity to achieve such a win.

The same sentiment is true for Penn State. If Ohio State players, coaches and fans have heard the same mantra about failing to beat Michigan for the last three years, Penn State has listened to the same thing about its narrow losses to top 10 opponents like Ohio State and Michigan over the last three years.

Ohio State will likely be two top 10 teams' biggest games of the season, both of them occurring on the road in the span of a month. If the Buckeyes are not ready, they could cost themselves all of the rewards that formerly came with defeating Michigan: the Big Ten Championship Game appearance and potentially even a College Football Playoff appearance.

This is a sort of nightmare scenario for a reason, though. The Buckeyes are the best team in the Big Ten on paper and even with all of Oregon and Penn State's home crowd power — there certainly is a lot of it at Autzen Stadium and Beaver Stadium, respectively — the Buckeyes appear to have the talent and motivation to overcome inevitable adversity.

In my prediction, I have Ohio State losing to Oregon on the road in Week 7 before winning the rest of its regular season games. I see the Buckeyes defeating a decent, but not great, Michigan team comfortably to end the regular season, potentially turning the tide of the rivalry back into its favor.

Then, Ohio State gets its revenge over Oregon to win its first Big Ten championship since 2020.

As difficult as it is to win a national championship, one team has to. The Buckeyes — led by a championship-winning, perhaps slightly underrated, Will Howard — are as well-suited to win the national championship as any team in college football.

With an elite defense, supremely talented playmakers, and an offensive line that projects to take a leap in 2024, Ohio State gets to the national championship where it will defeat a strong SEC opponent like Texas or Georgia to win its first national championship since 2014.

Big Ten Title: Ohio State over Oregon

Offensive POY: Dillon Gabriel, Oregon

Defensive POY: Jack Sawyer, Ohio State

Coach of the Year: Matt Rhule, Nebraska

Freshman of the Year: Dylan Raiola, Nebraska

Big Ten teams in the College Football Playoff: Ohio State and Oregon