

Prediction: Ohio State Rolls Over B1G On Way To Top Seed In CFP



With the Big Ten expanding to 18 teams this season and the College Football Playoff expanding to a 12-team format, there will be countless storylines to keep track of over the course of the college football season, but perhaps the one that will matter most to Ohio State fans will be to end the three-game losing streak to Michigan.

Ryan Day's 1-3 record against the Wolverines is a stain on what has been an extremely great start to his head coaching career, and he spent the entire offseason trying to make sure the Buckeyes can get back on the right side of the rivalry. If they are able to do that, there will be no concern about making the College Football Playoff.

One thing that shouldn't be a question when it comes to whether they can do that is the talent on the defensive side of the ball. The Buckeyes were already a top defense in the country last year and retained seven starters, also adding Caleb Downs at safety. It should be the best defense in all of college football with Jim Knowles leading the way.

The biggest questions for this team remain on the offensive side of the ball with quarterback Will Howard and the offensive line. Howard has the talent around him to be able to lead the Buckeyes to an undefeated record, a Big Ten championship, and a national championship, but whether the former Kansas State signal caller will be able to do that or not is yet to be seen. However, his ability to run — whether he is a better passer than Kyle McCord or not — provides something entirely new to this offense that defenses last season didn't have to account for, and Chip Kelly will be able to exploit what that does to the opposition.

Beginning the season with Akron, Western Michigan and Marshall at home will be an easy way for Howard to get acclimated to playing in Ohio Stadium with three big wins right off the bat, then going into a new-look Michigan State with Jonathan Smith now at the helm will be a good way for him to ease into Big Ten play, but after that is when the real competition begins.

Playing Iowa at home and Oregon on the road - in what will be a primetime game according to Joel Klatt - will be the Buckeyes' biggest test of the season in a back-to-back. When I made a season prediction in the print version of BSB, I thought the Buckeyes wouldn't be able to go into Eugene and come home with a win, but I have changed my tune since then. I believe they will be ready for the test and will go into Oregon and beat the Ducks on their home turf, proving themselves to be the best team

in college football when the defense holds Dillon Gabriel to what will be his worst game of the regular season.

Penn State and Michigan are the other two teams that will likely be ranked when Ohio State plays them on Nov. 2 and Nov. 30, respectively.

Ryan Day has been able to handle James Franklin and the Nittany Lions well so far since he took over in 2019, and that shouldn't change this year. The Buckeye defense gave quarterback Drew Allar a lot of trouble a year ago, and they have only gotten better. What new offensive coordinator Andy Kotelnicki brings to the table will help them have a better game, but the Ohio State offense should also be better than it was last year as well.

Then when the Wolverines head to Ohio Stadium, Day will exercise his Michigan demons and stop them from winning four straight versions of The Game. I don't expect this one to be particularly close, with Day likely wanting to win this one early on and keep running the score up if that's possible. I don't expect it to be that type of blowout, but I also don't expect it to come down to the final minute like it did last season.

The Buckeyes and Ducks could match up in the Big Ten Championship for a rematch and regardless of how that goes, both teams should make the 12-team playoff. However, with a bye up for grabs in the CFP, Ohio State will be ready to keep its undefeated record and earn a top seed in the new expanded playoff, getting an extra week off when it will be much needed. What they will do after that is a crapshoot, needing three wins — even with the bye — to win its first national championship in a decade, but if the team can stay healthy, I like their chances.

For my Big Ten award predictions, I stuck with the most chalky picks someone could make, which I am willing to take the heat for. Yes, these are boring, but they are also seen as some of the most likely for a reason.

Big Ten Title: Ohio State over Oregon

Offensive POY: Dillon Gabriel, Oregon

Defensive POY: Will Johnson, Michigan

Coach of the Year: Ryan Day, Ohio State

Freshman POY: Jeremiah Smith, Ohio State