Predictions: Buckeyes Ready For First B1G Challenge

After an easy three-game conference schedule, Ohio State faces its first conference road test this season on Saturday night when it travels north to East Lansing, Mich., to take on Michigan State in primetime.

The Spartans, led by former Oregon State head coach Jonathan Smith, have shown they can compete on the Big Ten stage, having already beaten Maryland on the road in Week 2. But the Spartans faltered against Boston College last week to suffer their first loss of the season, and they are in for an even bigger test against a formidable Buckeyes team looking to keep the train rolling.

With just under 28 hours left into kickoff, set for 7:30 p.m. on Peacock, here are BSB's staff predictions for the Buckeyes' first road game of the season against the upstart Spartans:

Patrick Engels: Ohio State Starts Slow But Wins Big

Through its first three games of the season, Ohio State has often struggled to start fast, most notably letting overmatched Akron and Marshall hold onto some hope at halftime, down both 17-3 and 28-14, respectively, heading into the locker rooms. These issues, although somewhat trivial when considering those two second halves, have mostly been on the defensive side, which may have been a bit surprising considering how talented that unit is.

In Ohio State's Big Ten opener on the road against Michigan State, I can see something similar happening at the start, but this time on offense. The Spartans have some newfound energy under new head coach Jonathan Smith, and I think they will be amped up to take on the Buckeyes in the early going, which will allow them to make some early noise similar to what they did against Ohio State in 2022 when C.J. Stroud threw an early pick-six to tie the game at 7-all.

I'm not saying Will Howard will throw a pick-six, but I can see Ohio State's offense getting off to a slower start than they had hoped for, which may put them down or at least tied in the early going.

But the Buckeyes' running game is just too good to allow the Spartans to hang around. Playing another game with a fully healthy starting offensive line, they should be able to slowly assert their will against a strong Michigan State defensive front as the game progresses. I'm expecting another huge game out of both TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins, with one of them breaking for another huge 50+-yard touchdown rush.

Howard will then shake off his slow start and find his groove as the game goes on, finding his top receivers Emeka Egbuka and Jeremiah Smith. Watch out for Egbuka to have another great night.

As for the defense, I'm not expecting them to come out slow at all, especially after receiving a likely tongue-lashing from Jim Knowles after their sluggish start against Marshall.

With Tyleik Williams returning to the fold in the interior, the Buckeyes should be able to stuff the run and get after new Spartans quarterback Aidan Chiles. Chiles does have some great potential, but he has struggled mightily with turnovers so far with seven interceptions on the season already. This should play into Ohio State's secondary well, who should record at least one key takeaway that further puts the game in the road team's favor.

I'm expecting Ohio State to win this game easily in a tough environment due to a strong running game and dominant defense, which should be the recipe for success for the Buckeyes moving forward into more competitive Big Ten play. **Ohio State 38, Michigan State 10.**

Bobby Gorbett: Buckeyes Blow Past Michigan State

Ohio State's regular season officially started a month ago when the team took down Akron in Ohio Stadium, but in some ways this feels like Week 1. Michigan State is not just the Buckeyes' first Big Ten opponent, but their first real competition.

After three dominant showings from Ohio State, I see this game going one of two ways. The first way is that the Buckeyes, who haven't been on the road all season and have been able to sleepwalk through September, aren't quite ready to play a Big Ten game, and the Spartans are able to keep it much closer than fans and pundits are expecting, similar to the Georgia vs. Kentucky game earlier this season when Georgia barely escaped an upset by one point in a 13-12 victory.

The second way is a group of Buckeyes, who have been chomping at the bit to play in a Big Ten game, play with more energy than they have all year to this point, and cruise past Michigan State.

I think the second option is much more likely, and Ohio State has perhaps its best performance so far this season.

I predict the Ohio State defense will respond to the challenge of defensive coordinator Jim Knowles, who didn't name a defensive player of the game following the 49-14 win over Marshall and shut down the Michigan State offense. **Ohio State 41, Michigan State 7**

Greg Wilson: Ohio State Handles Michigan State In East Lansing

Similar to how the Buckeyes themselves feel going into East Lansing, this game is different than the three Ohio State opened the season with. Last year before entering the brunt of Big Ten play, they finished the nonconference schedule with a big last second win over Notre Dame in what was at the time a top-10 matchup.

It could be expected that this team could come out of three blowout wins and fall flat on their face against a much improved Michigan State team with Jonathan Smith at the helm for his first year, but that has never been the case with Ryan Day-led teams.

He always seems to have his teams ready to go in games that they should easily win, and the players

this year are approaching every game as if its a must win, hoping to reach their three goals of beating Michigan, a Big Ten Championship win, and a national championship.

This will be a big test for Will Howard, who grew up watching Big Ten football and is excited to actually be playing in a game this weekend for his first time. He has been able to do what is asked of him all season, and that won't change against the Spartans.

The rushing attack that Quinshon Judkins and TreVeyon Henderson provide will be too much to handle for Michigan State, but the Spartans shouldn't feel too bad about not being able to stop them since that will be the case for pretty much every defense they line up against this year.

The defense will also bounce back from its "poor" performance against Marshall in which it gave up two touchdowns, keeping Knowles from naming a defensive player of the game. Spartans quarterback Aidan Chiles is very talented, but he doesn't have the experience against a defense like Ohio State's this year and he will struggle to deal with the looks they give him. **Ohio State 31, Michigan State 7**