

# Buckeyes Near The Top Of New Preseason Projections



The preseason rankings have been friendly to Ohio State for years. Since Jim Tressel took over in 2001, Ohio State has entered the season as a top 10 team far more often than not, and that doesn't look to be changing in 2021, despite the departure of quarterback Justin Fields to the NFL. Though many of the preseason rankings have not yet dropped, Pro Football Focus and Athlon have now released their preseason projections, and kept with the tradition, both slotting Ohio State inside the top five.

PFF is a bit higher on the Buckeyes than Athlon, placing them at No. 3 in the nation, behind only No. 1 Alabama and No. 2 Clemson. The analytics site also lists national championship and conference title probabilities, and has the Buckeyes at 13 percent in the former and 48 percent in the latter. The 13 percent is tied for third with Oklahoma and trails Alabama's 23 percent and Clemson's 17 percent, while the 48 percent is easily the best in the Big Ten, followed by Iowa (17 percent), Wisconsin (11 percent), Indiana (7 percent) and Michigan (5 percent).

Chance to win the Big Ten after 10,000 simulations of the season  
[pic.twitter.com/ThoIBuBQM9](https://pic.twitter.com/ThoIBuBQM9)

— PFF College (@PFF\_College) May 25, 2021

Left tackle Thayer Munford is listed as Ohio State's top returning player.

"Justin Fields may have gone lower in the 2021 NFL Draft than we all thought he should have, but make no mistake: He was wonderful last year for the Buckeyes in an abbreviated campaign and will be hard to replace," Eric Eager and Ben Brown of PFF write. "We have Ohio State winning the Big Ten a bit more than the market-implied number, which includes an over 30% hold, but less than what you would need to have the team winning it at current market numbers (-125, 55.8 percent breakeven). As is the case with the other two favorites above, this is a wait-and-see team in the marketplace for season-long bets."

Ohio State will square off with four teams in the PFF top 25: No. 13 Oregon, No. 19 Penn State, No. 24 Indiana and No. 25 Michigan.

Meanwhile, Ohio State is No. 4 in Athlon's top 25, trailing Alabama, Clemson and Oklahoma.

"The Buckeyes are 23-2 and have yet to lose a regular-season game in coach Ryan Day's first two years at the helm in Columbus," Steven Lassan of Athlon wrote. "And despite the loss of quarterback Justin Fields (and some others) to the NFL, Ohio State is once again a clear favorite to win the Big Ten. A three-man battle between C.J. Stroud, Kyle McCord and Jack Miller III to replace Fields will continue into the fall, with Stroud expected to earn the starting nod. Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson are back to lead the nation's No. 1 receiving corps, and the pieces are in place for Ohio State to also possess the top offensive line in college football.

"Trey Sermon departed at running back, but Master Teague, Miyan Williams and touted freshman TreVeyon Henderson provide Day with plenty of choices. Improving the defense was priority No. 1 this offseason. The Buckeyes finished an uncharacteristic 11th in the Big Ten in pass efficiency defense, ranked near the bottom in big plays allowed and surrendered 5.9 yards per play - the highest mark in school history. The line is in good shape with the return of Zach Harrison, Tyreke Smith and (Haskell Garrett), but question marks remain at linebacker and in the secondary. A road trip to Minnesota and a home date against Oregon to start '21 provide Day with a good barometer of where this team is in early September. Road trips to Indiana and Michigan are on tap, but it's hard to find a game where Ohio State will stumble in the regular season."

The Ducks (No. 9), Nittany Lions (No. 19) and Hoosiers (No. 21) are all included on this list as well.