

Staff Predictions: Ohio State vs. Northwestern For The Big Ten Championship



No. 6 Ohio State (11-1) and No. 21 Northwestern (8-4) are set to square off Saturday night in Indianapolis with a Big Ten title on the line. The Buckeyes are battling to keep their College Football Playoff hopes alive, while the Wildcats are aiming to win their first-ever Big Ten championship game.

Ahead of the 8 p.m. kickoff at Lucas Oil Stadium, the BSB staff took a stab at predicting what will happen Saturday night. Here's what they had to say:

Joe Dempsey

It's difficult to imagine Ohio State would lose to a team that lost to Akron, but then again, the Buckeyes' sole loss came against a team that lost to Eastern Michigan.

But that's irrelevant.

Coming off an upset victory against Michigan in blowout fashion, the nation's No. 2 offense has momentum heading into its Big Ten championship showdown against Northwestern. The Wildcats had an up-and-down start to the season, beginning with a victory at Purdue, followed by a 21-7 loss to Duke and two narrow losses to Akron and Michigan. However, Northwestern bounced back after a tough loss to the Wolverines, winning seven of its last eight games.

The Wildcats will face their most potent offensive opponent yet. Ohio State has failed to gain 500 yards of offense only three times this season, in victories against Penn State (389), Nebraska (481) and Michigan State (347). Meanwhile, Northwestern has not amassed 500 yards in a single game this year and surpassed the 400-yard threshold just three times. Northwestern will play hard but won't keep up with the Buckeyes.

Score: Ohio State 48, Northwestern 17

James Grega

Well, let's try this again.

Last week, I predicted Michigan would win by nine. While no one could have predicted what actually transpired in Columbus last week, a few of my coworkers correctly predicted the Buckeyes would win. And did they ever.

This week, Ohio State enters as clearly the more talented team. However, in the two times Pat Fitzgerald's squad has matched up against Urban Meyer, the games have been too close for comfort for Buckeye fans.

I expect much of the same on Saturday in Indianapolis. The Wildcats are a gritty, hungry and tough football team that will scratch and claw to get their first Big Ten title in more than 20 years. However, the Buckeyes are still in the hunt for a CFP bid and Ohio State has the offensive firepower to hang another 60 spot on the board if it gets rolling.

Because Northwestern plays a lot of zone and tries to take away the big plays, I think they will limit Ohio State's explosive hits, but as long as the Buckeyes don't beat themselves, they should come away with a win.

Score: Ohio State 45, Northwestern 24

Tim Moody

First, I want to take a moment to brag about being one of the few (along with Joe) who picked Ohio State to beat Michigan while actually having a good reason for doing so.

Now that that's out of the way, let's get to the Big Ten Championship Game.

I took the Buckeyes to beat the Wolverines, which means I'm obviously taking them to beat No. 21 Northwestern, too. There was a clear talent gap between Ohio State and Michigan, and that gap is even bigger between Urban Meyer's team and the Wildcats.

But Pat Fitzgerald isn't going to field a pushover on Saturday. I actually expect this game to be closer than The Game. Northwestern runs a zone defense that will, if executed, limit big plays and at least partially prevent Ohio State from running as many crossing routes - the passes over the middle to Parris Campbell and K.J. Hill that have done a ton of damage since Ryan Day arrived in Columbus.

That said, Dwayne Haskins is still Dwayne Haskins. J.K. Dobbins is still J.K. Dobbins. The Buckeyes are still the Buckeyes. This team will find a way to put up more than 40 points at Lucas Oil Stadium, and Wyatt Davis - getting his first career start in Indianapolis, just like Pat Elflein did in 2013 - will provide a glimpse into the future.

On the other side, Ohio State's defense should be confident, something that's been lacking all year. Confidence counts for a lot, and Northwestern isn't a killer on offense. If the Silver Bullets can play like the Silver Bullets, then the kind of performance needed to get the Buckeyes into the College Football Playoff could be in store.

Either way, though, Ohio State probably needs Texas to beat Oklahoma for the second time this year - something I think will happen, for what it's worth.

Next up, 'Bama?

Score: Ohio State 45, Northwestern 28

Garrett Stepien

Which version of Ohio State plans to show up Saturday in Indianapolis?

That's the question that lingers after the Buckeyes bullied Michigan last Saturday in The Game, and Northwestern is an overmatched but scrappy opponent in the Big Ten Championship Game.

OSU's roller-coaster ride of this season comes to a close with style points and more needed against the Wildcats, who present a unique challenge after they held each of their past three opponents to 16 points or fewer.

Ohio State's offense enters with momentum on its side after carving the Wolverines' single-high safety looks and man coverage, but Northwestern's zone coverage could limit the big plays and slow things down.

The Buckeyes have been consistently inconsistent, so who really knows what goes down in the latest twist and turn of this ride?

While I'm expecting an OSU win, just from the body of work, I don't see a repeat of Wisconsin (59-0) in 2014. In fact, I'd feel more comfortable right now saying it's going to end up a lot closer to Wisconsin in 2017 (27-21).

Score: Ohio State 34, Northwestern 20

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