

# Ohio St., U-M early favorites

*Buckeyes begin quest to defend national championship*

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Ohio State and Michigan can't wait for the season to start.

The longtime rivals are once again the favorites to battle for the Big Ten and should be in the hunt for another national title.

The No. 2 Buckeyes return 18 starters from last year's championship team, while No. 4 Michigan brings back a three-year starter at quarterback and the conference's preseason player of the year on defense.

Now if only things were going as well off the field.

Ohio State's 14-0 season and national title was called into doubt with questions about the academic eligibility of its star, Maurice Clarett, and then an NCAA investigation into his claim that he had thousands of dollars of stereo equipment stolen from a car.

The Big Ten's top returning defensive player, Marlin Jackson, also faces off-field troubles. The Michigan defensive back pleaded guilty last week to aggravated assault for striking a man in the eye.

Michigan coach Lloyd Carr hasn't commented on Jackson's future with the team. Clarett, the league's preseason offensive player of the year, is being held out of practice until the issues are resolved.

"I don't think anything off the field is really going to affect this team," said Ohio State defensive end Darrion Scott. "Coach (Jim) Tressel has taught us to handle adversity. We can overcome a lot of obstacles. When adversity comes we don't run away from it — we face it head on."

Ohio State won't have to wait long for those challenges.

The Buckeyes, who return every starter on offense, open the season against No. 17

## 2002 STANDINGS

	Big 10		Overall	
	W	L	W	L
Ohio State	8	0	14	0
Iowa	8	0	11	2
<b>MICHIGAN</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>3</b>
Penn State	5	3	9	4
Illinois	4	4	5	7
Purdue	4	4	7	6
Minnesota	3	5	8	5
<b>MICHIGAN ST.</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>
Wisconsin	2	6	8	6
Indiana	1	7	3	9
Northwestern	1	7	3	9

Washington on Aug. 30 and play No. 16 North Carolina State two weeks later in another tough nonconference game. Wisconsin, Penn State and Michigan are also on an unforgiving schedule that will test the reigning national champs.

A year ago, the Buckeyes passed every tough test.

Ohio State won seven games by a touchdown or less and needed overtime to get by Illinois during the regular season and Miami in the Fiesta Bowl.

"We have stressed to our team that in some ways we were fortunate to be undefeated last season," Tressel said. "I think our team has learned that, but we will not know until we get out on the field this year."

Eight schools have won at least a share of the Big Ten championship in the past 10 years. In the past, such parity was considered a weakness for the Big Ten. Coaches hope Ohio State's title changed that perception.

"We all sat up here a year ago having to say what's wrong with the league. People said it was a weak league," Wisconsin coach Barry Alvarez said. "We proved that we were a very strong league last year. We're a stronger league than a year ago."

A capsule look at the Big Ten, based on predicted order of finish:

**OHIO STATE:** Two-way starter Chris Gamble led the Buckeyes with four interceptions and was second in receptions with 31. ... If Clarett is out, Lydell Ross and Maurice Hall will fill in at running

back. Ross rushed for 619 yards and six TDs; Hall ran for 370 yards and four TDs. ... All-American kicker Mike Nugent converted 25 of 28 field goal attempts.

**MICHIGAN:** See Page 26.

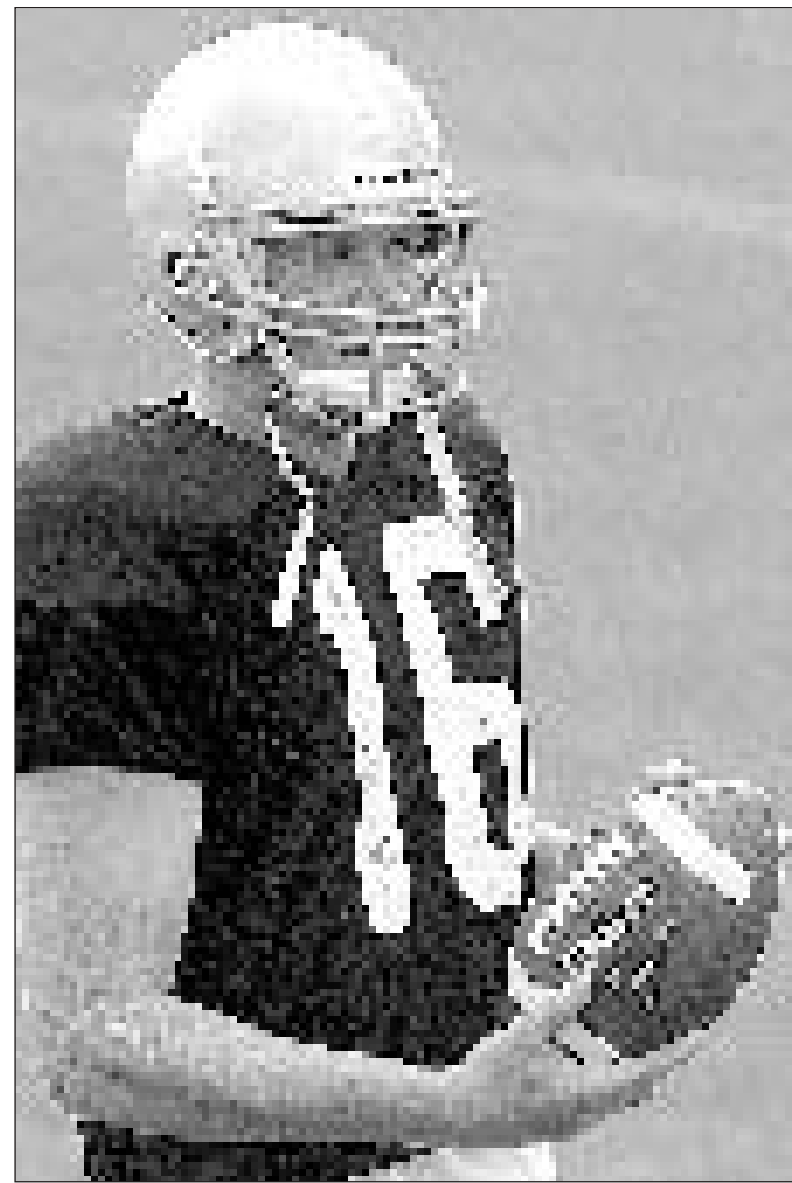
**WISCONSIN:** WR Lee Evans returns after missing the 2002 season with a knee injury. The school's all-time receiving leader set a Big Ten record with 1,545 receiving yards in 2001. ... Ranked last in the Big Ten in passing last season. ... Walk-on safety Jim Leonhard led the nation with 11 interceptions. ... Junior RB Anthony Davis rushed for 3,021 yards in his first two seasons, best in the country.

**PURDUE:** Lading rusher Joey Harris was ruled academically ineligible for the season. Harris rushed for 1,115 yards and eight TDs last season. ... Faces Michigan and Ohio State on the road. The Boilermakers' road record against those teams since 1968? 1-27.

**PENN STATE:** Went 9-4 after consecutive losing seasons. ... Big shoes to fill at running back with the loss of Larry Johnson, the school's first 2,000-yard rusher. ... RBs Mike Gasparato, Donnie Johnson and freshman Austin Scott should compete for playing time. ... Defensive line a question after three starters were chosen in the first two rounds of the NFL draft. ... The Nittany Lions play at Nebraska Sept. 13 but get Ohio State and Wisconsin at home.

**MINNESOTA:** Marion Barber III ran for 742 yards and scored seven touchdowns as a freshman in 2001 but was injured for most of last season. Terry Jackson ran for 1,317 yards and six touchdowns, while Thomas Tapeh added 806 yards rushing and seven touchdowns. ... Glen Mason needs seven wins to reach 100 for his career.

**IOWA:** Lost eight starters from an offense that averaged a conference-best 37 points a game. ... Nathan Chandler steps in for Heisman Trophy runner-up Brad Banks at



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**After leading Ohio State to the national title, quarterback Craig Krenzel is all smiles about the upcoming season.**

quarterback. The 6-foot-7, 250-pound senior is short on experience, playing just five games as backup. ... Returns seven starters to a defense that allowed 82 yards a game rushing.

**ILLINOIS:** QB Jon Beutjer led the Big Ten in passing at 228 yards a game despite splitting time in four games and sitting for one. ... Receivers are unknown and untested. Kendrick Jones is the only returning wideout with a reception, and he had one. ... Defense was third worst in the Big Ten, allowing 421 yards a game. ... Won four of final six games.

**MICHIGAN STATE:** See Page 27.

**NORTHWESTERN:** The Wildcats have gone 3-13 in the Big Ten since winning a share of the conference title in 2000. ... Must improve its defense to have a chance. The Wildcats allowed 41 points and 502 yards a game last season. ... Quarterback Brett Basanez has fully recovered after breaking his leg in a 45-42 loss to Minnesota.

**INDIANA:** QB Matt LoVecchio, a transfer from Notre Dame, beat out freshman Graeme McFarland for the starting job. ... Averaged a conference-low 21.5 points a game last season. ... Linebacker John Kerr, who led the Hoosiers in tackles as a freshman, transferred to Ohio State.