



MICHIGAN

BRETT CIANCIA @PickSixPreviews

#2

#9

BigTen E. OVERALL



MICHIGAN				
5-YEAR WIN TREND				
13				
12	OHIO ST	OHIO ST	(B) FSU	(B) S. Carolina
11	MARYLAND	MICH ST	OHIO ST	OHIO ST
10	MICH ST	Utah	IOWA	WISCONSIN
9	RUTGERS	(B) Florida	INDIANA	PENN ST
8	MINNESOTA	PENN ST	MARYLAND	MICH ST
7	Utah	INDIANA	MICH ST	MARYLAND
6	Notre Dame	RUTGERS	ILLINOIS	MINNESOTA
5	N'WESTERN	MINNESOTA	RUTGERS	RUTGERS
4	INDIANA	N'WESTERN	WISCONSIN	INDIANA
3	PENN ST	MARYLAND	PENN ST	PURDUE
2	Miami OH	BYU	Colorado	Air Force
1	App. State	UNLV	UCF	Cincinnati
		Oregon St	Hawaii	Florida
	2014	2015	2016	2017
	HOKE		JIM HARBAUGH	

Heading into The Game, Michigan was playing like a Playoff team and was one win away from clinching the East Division and securing a very winnable rematch with Northwestern in the conference title. Coming into 2018, I had predicted the Big Ten would get two teams into the Playoff, with Ohio State & Michigan each finishing with 1 loss. I wasn't that far off. Michigan's opening 7-point loss to Notre Dame and Oklahoma's 2-point conversion against Oklahoma State would have flipped the Playoff scene towards that initial prediction. No one else had Michigan in the Playoff.

Even with the loss in South Bend, Michigan was playing at Playoff level, and had the best Game Grade average among the 1-loss contenders heading into rivalry week. This was looking like the year that Jim Harbaugh breaks through and finally beats Ohio State, finally wins the East, and finally wins the league.

Then Ohio State dropped 62 points on this vaunted Michigan defense. A steady onslaught of crossing routes and other man-to-man beating concepts spread Ohio State's athletes all over the field and let

them run wild. It was a contrast in offensive styles; Ohio State representing the modern aerial attack, while Michigan looked like a 1980s Big Ten team. And that was by design. The same scheme helped Harbaugh turn doormat Stanford into a perennial contender. This style has also elevated Michigan from .500 level (Rich Rodriguez era) to near-Playoff level.

But allowing 62 points and losing by 23 to your rival on the biggest possible stage will cause some reflection. This offseason, Harbaugh scrapped the traditional offense and brought in offensive coordinator Josh Gattis to fully modernize the offense. And give the guy some credit here. Too often in college football, the veteran, established head coach gets too stuck in his ways even when the game changes around him and some tweaks become necessary. Think Les Miles at LSU. Give credit to Harbaugh for giving this scheme change a full shot this spring/summer into the 2019 season.

OFFENSE

Gattis has been a part of the modernization at Penn State and Alabama over the past 5 years and is attempting the same here. What was always an under-center, fullback, double tight, conservative offense will now be primarily shotgun, no-huddle, and designed to spread the ball around. Now, very often you hear coaches talk about "updating" their offense in press conferences and media days but then once the ball is kicked off they revert to their old ways. The Ferentz's talk about this every year, yet Iowa still trots out their caveman offense in the fall.

But this isn't just coach-speak here. In the spring game, Michigan only had one play snapped under center, they did not huddle, they looked to the sideline for playcalls and adjustments, the tight ends were usually split out, and overall it did not resemble the old style. There were quicker reads, some RPO's, and more option than I recall from Michigan in the past.

The scheme change seems to fit their current personnel strengths, namely at the wide receiver position where a proven trio of big frame playmakers will create matchup issues for opponents. Donovan Peoples-Jones earned 1st team All-BigTen honors last fall, while Nico Collins received All-BigTen Honorable Mention. Tarik Black was a former Top100 recruit who was sidelined with an injury in 2018 but will be back at 100%. They are all similar outside receivers, and the only thing missing from moving this group from "great" to "elite" was a quick, shifty slot receiver as a complement. Out of nowhere, incoming freshman Mike Sainristil has emerged in the spring and is drawing the most freshman receiver hype here since Steve Breaston.

The offensive line is also another experienced and talented strength for the offense. 4 of 5 starters return from a unit that ranked #12 in 1st down rushing push and also boasted an above average sack rate in pass protection. Jon Runyan, Ben Bredeson, Michael Onwenu, and Cesar Ruiz all received All-BigTen spots in 2018 – all four return for 2019. Ed Warriner has done an incredible job fixing this unit which had struggled in the past under different staffs. This group looks like the best offensive line in the Big Ten.

They will be protecting Shea Patterson for another season. He had solid stats, and a safe ball control ratio (22 TD to 7 INT), but never seemed to go out and win the game for Michigan. Maybe that was scheme. Maybe that was Michigan not really needing him to go above and beyond in 10 of their 13 games.

Regardless, Patterson has enough mobility to be a threat and will be getting some more carries and designed option plays than last year. But the true dynamic running quarterback

MICHIGAN				
2018 RESULTS				
		Yard +/-	TO +/-	GRADE
NOTRE DAME	L 17-24	5	-1	44.4
W. MICH	W 49-3	243	1	87.6
SMU	W 45-20	115	0	71.4
NEBRASKA	W 56-10	359	1	108.3
N'WESTERN	W 20-17	174	0	75.6
MARYLAND	W 42-21	245	0	88.4
WISCONSIN	W 38-13	161	2	110.5
MICH. ST	W 21-7	301	-1	96.2
PENN ST	W 42-7	217	3	131.8
RUTGERS	W 42-7	201	2	81.2
INDIANA	W 31-20	122	1	69.8
OHIO ST	L 39-62	-166	-1	15.1
(B) FLORIDA	L 15-41	-101	-2	14.3
OVERALL:	4th / 65	BigTen: 1st / 14		76.5

MICHIGAN				
BEST/WORST GAME GRADES (LAST 5 YEARS)				
YEAR	OPPONENT	W/L	SCORE	GRADE
2016	PENN ST	W	49-10	136.9
2018	PENN ST	W	42-7	131.8
2015	FLORIDA	W	41-7	119.7
2015	BYU	W	31-0	110.7
2018	WISCONSIN	W	38-13	110.5
2017	PENN ST	L	13-42	6.9
2014	MICH ST	L	11-35	8.1
2015	OHIO ST	L	13-42	13.6
2018	FLORIDA	L	15-41	14.3
2018	OHIO ST	L	39-62	15.1

MICHIGAN		RANK
Scoring Offense	35.2 ppg	21
Points per Play	0.51	18
Total Offense	420 ypg	50
Yards per Play	6.1	42
Rushing Offense	204 ypg	30
Yards per Carry	4.8	36
1st Down YPC	5.8	12
Explosive Rush	7.9	70
Passing Offense	216 ypg	80
Yards / Attempt	8.1	30
QB Rating	150	20
Sacks / Attempt	7%	56
Explosive Pass	8.0	44
Return. Production	76%	30

MICHIGAN		RANK
Scoring Defense	19.4 ppg	16
Points per Play	0.32	30
Total Defense	275 ypg	2
Yards per Play	4.6	8
Rushing Defense	127 ypg	23
Yards per Carry	3.7	31
Negative Play %	11%	11
Explosive Rush	6.5	50
Passing Defense	148 ypg	2
Yards / Attempt	5.8	8
QB Rating	106	7
Completion %	49.5%	2
Explosive Pass	5.9	57
Return. Production	50%	106

here is Dylan McCaffrey and I wonder if Gattis will experiment with some packages to get him in games and get some guaranteed snaps/touches each week. Ben McDaniels (Josh's brother) is on staff coaching the quarterbacks, along with so-called quarterback guru Harbaugh, so you'd expect the level of play here to continue to rise.

The only personnel question mark is at running back. 2018 leading rusher (1,178 yards) Karan Higdon is in the NFL, and 2nd leading rusher Chris Evans also may be out. With a 5-year recruiting average in the Top 20, I'd expect Michigan to be able to find a feature back in the coming months, but the proven depth is lacking.

DEFENSE

National media and the casual fan will only remember the 2018 defense as the unit that could not stop Ohio State, couldn't cover their quick receivers, and gave up 62 points & 567 yards.

But in their other 11 regular season games, this looked like a Top 3 defense and arguably the #1 defense in America. Don Brown built another elite unit, which is no surprise considering he was able to field the #2 defense in 2015 at Boston College with some of the lowest raw talent in Power 5 football. At Michigan, he is given an elite level of prospects and the results have been an annual suffocating, aggressive, blitz-happy unit.

As evidenced by their #11 rank in negative play percentage, #2 rank in completion percentage – this defense attacks, creating havoc at or behind the line of scrimmage. The downside of such an aggressive strategy is usually allowing the big play more often than average. It's an all or nothing gamble. Yes, Michigan has relatively worse explosiveness prevention (#50 vs. rush, #57 vs. pass) but given their high success rate in blitzing and bringing pressure, this is an overall net win.

The only foil to the plan was against Ohio State, who has a stable of 5-star speed receivers. Michigan almost exclusively plays man-to-man coverage, and Ohio State exploited that by running crossing routes all day. That said, I do not foresee a scheme shift like the offense is going through.

There is some roster turnover to deal with on this side of the ball, as Michigan ranks just #106 in defensive returning production. Star power is gone. Chase Winovich, Rashan Gary, and Devin Bush are all in the NFL. Former 5-star Aubrey Solomon transferred. 5 of the Top 8 tacklers are gone, and 6 of Top 11.

But with "Dr. Blitz" Don Brown, he *reloads* not rebuilds. The next wave of dominant defensive linemen is closer to a breakout than you'd expect. Kwity Paye, while not considered a "returning starter," actually filled in for injured Gary and thrived with the opportunity. Donovan Jeter is looking like a beast, and Aidan Hutchinson will also add quality here. Look for Ben Mason to get serious time along the defensive line. Yes, you read that correctly – running back Ben Mason at defensive line. Harbaugh said they want to get Mason on the field for 60-70 snaps per game, up from his usual 20-30, and will play him all over the field: RB/FB/TE/DE/DT/LB.

Khaleke Hudson is poised for a comeback season at linebacker. In 2017, he was virtually unblockable, and should regain that top form in 2019. Lavert Hill has one corner spot locked down, while a mix of four former blue-chip recruits battle for the other one. Few sides of the ball have earned my trust to reload despite roster turnover year-after-year. Michigan's defense under Brown is one of them.

OUTLOOK

It seems that Michigan is fully committed to modernizing the offense, but the end result is still a massive question mark. Does the personnel fit the scheme change? Harbaugh spent 4 years building Stanford 2.0 here.

Even if the change is successful and they produce a Top 20 offense, will the defense be able to remain strong enough to keep the team at Playoff level? A ton of star power and experience are gone from the defense. I can give Brown the benefit of the doubt to a degree, but not enough to say confidently that the defense will remain as a Top 3 unit.

With all the stars aligned last year, and 10 straight weeks of Playoff-caliber football, Michigan still laid a 62-point egg in the one that mattered. If not then, why now? Until it happens, Michigan remains behind Ohio State in East Division powerhouse arms race.

MICHIGAN	
2019 SCHEDULE	
A. 31	MID TENN STATE
S. 7	ARMY
S. 14	--- BYE ---
S. 21	@ Wisconsin
S. 28	RUTGERS
O. 5	IOWA
O. 12	@ Illinois
O. 19	@ Penn State
O. 26	NOTRE DAME
N. 2	@ Maryland
N. 9	--- BYE ---
N. 16	MICHIGAN STATE
N. 23	@ Indiana
N. 30	OHIO STATE

MICHIGAN		RANK / 65
All-Time Wins	953	1
All-Time Win %	0.730	1
Wins (Last 100)	731	11
Wins (Last 50)	444	6
Wins (Last 25)	214	14
Wins (Last 10)	81	23
Wins (Last 5)	43	17
Game Grader (5 yr)	65.8	9
Game Grader (3 yr)	71.7	7
Draft Picks s' 2000	83	11
Draft Picks s' 2010	37	14
Player Development: Recruit Rank ('13-'15) vs. Draft ('17-'19)		8
Win Conversion: Recruit Rank ('10-'18) vs. Wins ('14-'18)		29

MICHIGAN		GAME GRADER (RANK / 65)			
2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	
76.5 (4)	59.3 (24)	79.2 (4)	70 (9)	43.8 (47)	

