

POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2006

QUARTERBACKS - In 2002 soph Kyle Orton suffered a concussion and split time with true frosh Brandon Kirsch (PS#27) who threw for 1,067 (59%) with an 8-5 ratio (468 rushing). Kirsch redshirted in 2003 while Orton took over the starting job. In 2004 Tiller signed Curtis Painter (PS#29) calling him the program's best looking prospect since Orton. He redshirted and Orton threw for 3,090 (60.7%) with a 31-5 ratio. With Orton's production slowing down in the 2H of the season due to a hip injury, Kirsch started two and threw for 711 (61.7%) with a 7-3 ratio (153 rush). To take advantage of Kirsch's mobility and to open up the running game, they added more option to the offense in 2005. Kirsch threw for 1,727 (59.1%) but with just a 7-8 ratio and surprisingly despite being an excellent runner, was never able to master the art of running the option. He almost always pitched the ball to a RB, leaving the defense having to cover just 10 players. Against Northwestern, Kirsch hit 37 of 58 for 360 but also threw 2 int and was subsequently benched. Painter started the final 5. Painter was more adept at running the option and threw for 932 (52.4%) but with only a 3-5 ratio (289 rush). Painter is expected to start with the backup being rFr Joey Elliott (PS#27). Tiller called Elliott a gym rat as he spends a lot of time working on his game and in the film room. Kirsch, when told he would likely be 3rd string, opted to leave early for the NFL so adding depth are Thomas Haan (6-0 195 rFr, PS#250), Chris Bennett (6-3 186 rFr), Henry Lau (6-5 253 rFr) and this year's true frosh. I look for improved numbers in the second year of their spread option offense.

RUNNING BACKS - The Boilermakers have had just one 1,000-yard rusher since 1995. In '04 Jerod Void led the team with 625 (3.9) and Brandon Jones added 477 (4.2). Both returned last year along with rFr Kory Sheets (PS#173), who had the best speed of the RB's. He had a big 88 yard run vs Minnesota. Jones was the Men Of Iron skill

player but surprisingly only got 43 carries (230 yd). Void, who at 212 lbs returned to the track team to make himself faster, led with 696 (5.4) but was slowed by injuries. Sheets added 571 (5.5). This unit must replace Void (10 st) and Jones (2 st). JUCO Jaycen Taylor (4.5 spd) had 1,034 all-purpose yards at JC last year and was enrolled in the spring. Added to the mix are rFr Dray Mason (PS#37), soph Anthony Heygood (PS#57), Joe Williams (5-8 204 So), Frank Halliburton (6-3 245 rFr, PS#136DL), Chris Ayers (5-8 188 Jr) and Ted Miller (6-1 205 rFr). Despite the loss of their top rusher, the group could put up better numbers.

RECEIVERS - In 2004 the Boilermakers had to replace the Big 10's all-time leading receiver in John Standeford, who led the team with 1,150 yards in 2003. Taylor Stubblefield was not the biggest or fastest receiver but he simply set the NCAA record for career rec's. Last year they had to replace Stubblefield (89 rec, 12.3) but had a solid unit returning. Kyle Ingraham (6'9") had 51(12.2) in '04 but was bothered by an ankle injury all year and his numbers dropped. VHT Dorian Bryant (PS#11) had a rough game vs Minnesota with 3 key drops but with his 4.24 speed, led with 80 (12.0). TE Charles Davis also had a key drop vs UM but was #3 with 26 (12.0). Backup TE Dustin Keller, who is one of the team's top

lifters with 4.5 speed, was also bothered by an ankle injury. This season they must replace TE Davis (#5DC PIT, 7 st), WR Ray Williams (2 st then moved to DB), WR Kevin Noel (7 st, 14 rec) and WR Brian Hare (1 st, 12 rec). WR Ingraham (25 st 3Y) was not on the roster in the spring but is expected back in the fall. Despite the losses, this unit could be stronger.

OFFENSIVE LINE - Purdue only averaged 3.5 ypc rushing in 2004 while allowing 31 sacks. They had to replace two starters and a backup and then lost starting LG Uche Nwaneri for the season so it was a lightly experienced group. Running more option, their production increased to 4.9 ypc rush and just 9 sacks allowed (2.1%!). The only loss is C Matt Turner (11 st, 4 yr st'r, HM B10). Not only do 9 of the top 10 return but they get Nwaneri back to fill the open LG slot. This should be one of the best O-lines in the Big 10.

DEFENSIVE LINE - In 2003 the Boilers had 7 of their top 8 DL's returning. They had the best run D in the Tiller era (2.7 ypc) while the D recorded 41 sacks. In 2004 they had to replace 3 starters but the young unit outperformed expectations allowing just 3.1 ypc rushing with 35 sacks. Last year the unit returned intact. Seven DE's under Tiller have played in the NFL and last year looked like one of the best units yet. After 5 games, however, the DE's combined for just 4.5 sacks. Rob Ninkovich, who has a non-stop motor, beat out returning starting DE Ray Edwards for one spot and true frosh DT Alex Magee started two. Ninkovich was the team's MVP despite starting just the last 5. The team allowed 3.5 ypc rush and saw the sack total drop by 7. This year they lose Ninkovich (#5DC NO, 2nd Tm B10, 8 sk, 9 tfl), Edwards (#4DC MIN, 6 st, 28 tkl, 5.5 sk), DT Brandon Villarreal (11 st, 53 tkl, 3.5 sk) and DT Brent Grover (7 st, 18 tkl, 3.5 tfl). Tiller brings in two JUCO's and a true frosh who were in for the spring. Despite being far less experienced than 2005, that unit clearly underperformed.

LINEBACKERS - Purdue had outstanding, speedy LB corps in both 2002 and 2003 and all 3 starters were NFL DC's in 2004. The new starters were bigger but not as fast. Much was expected of true frosh Kyle Williams (PS#5) and Tiller called him the most talented LB but the least experienced. He, along with the entire LB unit, underperformed in 2005 with the 2nd string outplaying the starters on a regular basis. Only George Hall started all 11 and he was suspended for the spring of 2006. This year they lose Bobby Iwuchukwu (7 st, 27 tkl, 4.5 tfl) and Kyle Williams (1 st, 28 tkl). Four players return with starting experience (they were the top 4 LB tacklers LY) and VHT SS Jason Werner moves in as well.

DEFENSIVE BACKS - Purdue ranked #18 in my pass D rankings in 2002 and #23 in 2003. In 2004 they had to replace a pair of DC's and dropped to #56. Last year was a veteran secondary. They did suffer a blow over the summer losing SS Torri Williams for the year. The unit struggled early and moved WR Ray Williams to one CB spot and he started the last 7. CB Brian Hickman dislocated his elbow and missed 4. PU's pass D finished #59. This year they lose Williams (22 tkl, 4 pbu), Hickman (7 st, 28 tkl), SS Bernard Pollard (#2DC KC, 11 st, #1 tkl'r, 3 int), FS Kyle Smith (5 st, 24 tkl) and CB Sean Petty (3 tkl). Three players return with starting experience. Despite being less experienced, this unit could move up in my pass D rankings.

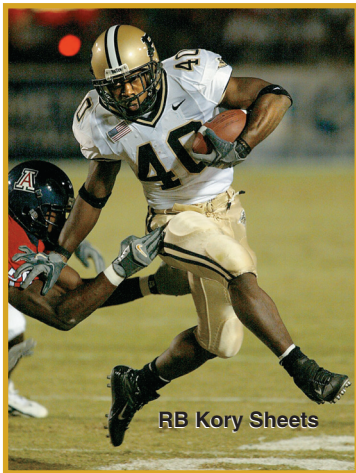
SPECIAL TEAMS - Special teams were a disaster in 2002 with a #106 rating and cost Purdue at least 3 games. DT coach Mark Hagen took over as the primary coordinator in 2003 and with Butler transfer Ben Jones hitting 25 of 30 FG's, the unit improved to #16. They were

#52 in 2004 and had to replace the returnmen last year. P Dave Brytus (PS#3) did not have the prettiest punts, as many were short directional kicks that rolled but only had an excellent net of 36.7. Unfortunately he opted to transfer to Pitt. Jones struggled on the turf at Ross-Ade Stadium. He hit 4 of 9 FG's at home but on the road hit 4 of 5 and with improved turf, so you can expect better FG production. They add super JUCO P Jared Armstrong. Overall Purdue finished an excellent #30 in my ST rankings but with the losses (PR Melvin, K & P), figure to drop a few notches.

COACHES - Joe Tiller enters his 10th year here and had a streak of 8 straight bowl appearances snapped last season. OC Jim Chaney was the OC the last 9 years but left for the NFL's St Louis Rams. The new OC is OL coach Bill Legg who was the OC/OL coach at W Virginia in 2000. DC Brock Spack enters his 10th year. Including Chaney, 5 assistants from last year departed in the offseason.

PHIL'S FORECAST

Purdue's last outright Big 10 Title was in 1929 but they have shared it 6 times since. In 2002 they were much better than their final 7-6 record. They were #1 in the Big 10 in both total offense and defense and their 6 losses came by a combined 26 points. Four of their losses came vs Top 10 teams and they outgained league foes by 144.5 ypg, but were -10 in turnovers and 4-4 in the Big 10. They had 2 OT losses in 2003 and could have easily finished higher than their final #19 ranking. In 2004 they had QB Orton back but also a very young D that had 8 new starters. They still managed to jump out to a 5-0 start and were ranked #5 when a fumble was returned 40 yards for a TD by Wisconsin with 2:36 left. They also blew late leads vs Michigan, N'wstrn, Iowa and once again in their bowl. Their 5 losses were by 2.8 ppg! Despite a 7-5 record, they outscored foes by a 14.6 ppg margin. Last year all the pieces were in place for a huge year as they had all 11 starters back from a defense that allowed just 17.2 ppg. They also did not have to play Ohio St or Michigan and had most of their toughest games at home. The team sold a school record 45,581 season tickets. They were #13 in the preseason AP poll, their highest since 1980 (#9). They got their first win on a Pac 10 home field since 1970 (they beat #3 Stanford) when they got past Arizona 31-24. They led Minnesota 28-20 after staging a terrific 2H comeback before giving up a TD and 2 pt conversion with 1:34 left. A lot of dropped passes cost them and still led by 7 in OT when Minny converted on a 4th & 8 for a TD and won in two OT's. Heading to the lockerroom, Kirsch commented that their season was basically over as they expected an undefeated campaign. That turned out to be the case as Purdue did not recover from that double OT loss. Despite having all 11 starters back, Purdue allowed 10.9 more ppg than in 2005. At the end of the season some disgruntled players left the program and Tiller took verbal swipes at the players performances. After 8 straight bowl games, the longest streak in school history, they stayed home for the holidays. This year's squad does have THIRTY seniors including 15 5th year seniors. The Boiler offense averaged 429 ypg and 30 ppg. Despite the loss of their QB and top RB, with 7 starters back and some solid additions, they should be more potent. Purdue's defense overachieved in 2004 allowing just 17.2 ppg despite only 3 returning starters. Last year the unit greatly underachieved with all 11 starters back yielding 28.1 ppg, their most since 1996. Despite only having five returning starters, the defense should be stronger in 2006. This is a less experienced team with only 12 starters back but once again they avoid Ohio St and Michigan and hope to be like the 2004 Auburn team and 2005 W Virginia team, which were off extremely disappointing years but rebounded. Now with lower expectations, I give Purdue an excellent chance of matching their high win total of the Tiller era (9).



RB Kory Sheets