

Ohio State Heavy Favorite In Big Ten

BY JAY COHEN
AP Sports Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — By every measure, Urban Meyer's first season at Ohio State was a smashing success. The Buckeyes won all 12 games, and Braxton Miller developed into a superstar quarterback along the way.

That's all gone now, practically ancient history in football-mad Columbus. The pressure is on for a blockbuster sequel, even if Meyer himself is preoccupied with the opening scenes. "Our job is to compete for championships in November. That's all I want them to think about," Meyer said. "A team is a complex animal that you got to be really careful how you approach things. Start talking about things that are way beyond even, I don't want to say expectations, but we don't talk about those things. We talk about we have to get to November to compete for a championship and that's complicated enough."

It sure is. While Miller and Ohio State begin the year as the

Predicted Finish
LEGENDS: Michigan, Nebraska, Michigan State, Northwestern, Iowa, Minnesota.
LEADERS: Ohio State, Wisconsin, Penn State, Indiana, Purdue, Illinois.
TITLE GAME WINNER: Ohio State.

Big Ten favorite, there are plenty of potential challengers.

Dynamic quarterback Devin Gardner thinks he's ready to lead Michigan back to the top of the conference. Taylor Martinez wants to put together another great year in his final season at Nebraska. Then there's Wisconsin, coming off a Rose Bowl trip and looking to make a smooth transition to new coach Gary Andersen, and Michigan State and more.

"I like our football team," Michigan coach Brady Hoke said. "I usually don't say that. I said it after the spring. I will continue to say it because I like how they've handled themselves on the field and off the field so far this summer. I like their work ethic, and I like how they've represented Michigan in a lot of ways."

Denard Robinson is gone after a stellar career, but Gardner is back to provide the same sort of sizzle in Michigan's backfield. The 6-foot-4 junior began last season at wide receiver, and then played quarterback for the last five games. He threw for 1,219 yards and 11 touchdowns against five interceptions, and also had 101 yards and seven TDs on the ground.

Gardner is a work in progress — "I have to start to checking the ball down. Always want the big play," he said — but his teammates have noticed a change in the former Detroit prep star since he became the starter behind center.

"He's grown right into it," senior safety Thomas Gordon said. "He's a lot more comfortable. You can see that."

While Gardner is the toast of Ann Arbor, he has a ways to go to match the celebrity that Martinez enjoys in Nebraska. The senior star, who accounted for a school-record 3,890 yards of offense and 33 touchdowns last season, spent more than an hour signing autographs during one recent trip to the mall.

Martinez has started 39 consecutive games for the Cornhuskers and will leave the school with several offensive records. While he will go down as one of the best players ever at the powerhouse program, he doesn't seem too concerned with his legacy headed into his final year.

"I've done a lot so far in my career, so I've just got to take this season for what it's worth and just enjoy it and just remember everything that happens," Martinez said.

Five Things To Watch In The Big Ten:

1. **TOUGH UP FRONT:** If you love the big guys up front, check out the offensive linemen of the Big Ten. Senior Jack Mewhort leads an experienced group for Ohio State, and Martinez raves about the unit at Nebraska. Michigan left tackle Taylor Lewan flirted with the NFL draft before deciding to return for one more season. He prepared for his final year by

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SCOTT STRAZZANTE/CHICAGO TRIBUNE/MCT

The New York Yankees' Alex Rodriguez speaks during press conference at US Cellular Field in Chicago, Ill., Monday. Major League Baseball announced on Monday that Rodriguez would be suspended for 211 games — Thursday through the end of the 2014 season — but that the Yankees third baseman could play while his appeal was being heard. Twelve other MLB players were issued 50-game suspensions on Monday, all of which will not appeal them.

'A Day Of Infamy' Baseball Players React To Drug Bans

BY MIKE FITZPATRICK
AP Sports Writer

Jim Leyland was just a minute into his pregame interview when the first — and only — question about Jhonny Peralta was asked.

That was it. Detroit's crusty manager booted all the reporters out of his office, saying they'd been told he wouldn't talk about losing his All-Star shortstop to a 50-game suspension Monday.

But while Leyland was determined to keep his thoughts to himself, other major leaguers had plenty to say after 13 penalties in the Biogenesis drug scandal were finally handed down.

"Although today will be a day of infamy for MLB, it is a tremendous step in the right direction," Tampa Bay third baseman Evan Longoria posted on Twitter. Alex Rodriguez received the stiffest discipline when he was banned through the 2014 season by Major League Baseball. But the three-time MVP said he'll appeal, with support from the players' union.

That keeps him eligible to play until a ruling by the arbitrator, which isn't expected until at least November or December.

"This is a saga, and that's the way it's always been with him," Los Angeles Angels pitcher C.J. Wilson said. "He just has one of those polarizing personalities that people are going to be drawn to. I guess people are going to find him as a villain and stuff like that no matter what he does."

"This latest chapter just gives further fuel to the fire that he's made bad decisions," the left-hander added. "It's good for the game that they're finally getting him for something. This whole thing has been going on for too long — press conferences, 'Good Morning America', '20/20' or whatever. I mean, come on. Enough of that. Let's just play some baseball and stop trying to be a role model. All those quotes (from Rodriguez), they're hilarious for everybody in our clubhouse."

Peralta was one of three 2013 All-Stars who accepted 50-game suspensions and admitted using prohibited substances. The others were Texas right fielder Nelson Cruz, also on a pennant contender, and San Diego shortstop Everth Cabrera.

"If all the allegations are true, then I'm glad they got caught and I'm glad baseball is doing something about it," Royals reliever Aaron Crow said. "It shocks me that people try to get away with it. I guess some people think the risk is worth it. It's just unfortunate that it's still going on. Hopefully this helps."

Rodriguez, Cruz, Peralta and Cabrera had all been linked for months in media reports to Biogenesis of America, a Florida anti-aging clinic accused of distributing banned performance-enhancing drugs.

But there were a couple of surprises, too, including Philadelphia pitcher Antonio Bastardo and New York Mets second baseman Jordany Valdespin, who was demoted to the minors last month.

Washington reliever Tyler Clippard recalled a blown save in July 2012 when he gave up a tying homer to Valdespin in the ninth inning.

"That's the kind of stuff you think about. You're like, those guys are doing stuff that's affecting my career and they're not playing the game the right way," Clippard said. "So that's frustrating. I think anybody can relate to that. If they're not doing things the right way, and they're beating you, then it leaves a sour taste in your mouth. So that's why this is so important. Because nobody — players, ownership — nobody wants to see guys cheat."

Several fed-up players were openly critical of Ryan Braun last month when the 2011 NL MVP agreed to a 65-game suspension, the first signifi-

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USD's 'Brothers' Begin Camp



USD defensive line coach Marquice Williams, center, runs through a drill Monday at the team's first fall practice at the DakotaDome in Vermillion. The University of South Dakota began its fall camp on Monday in preparations for its season opener, Aug. 31 against former Great West rival UC Davis.

USD Hopes Experience Pays Off As Preseason Practices Begin

BY JEREMY HOECK
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VERMILLION — To say experience matters for the University of South Dakota football team might not be doing it justice.

"Oh yeah, a lot more experience now," joked junior wide receiver Terrance Terry.

A year ago, the Coyotes struggled in part because of their inexperience, including one returning starter on the offensive line — "we paid for it," said head coach Joe Glenn.

Now, with a 1-10 season in the rearview mirrors, USD is banking on its 13 returning starters to bridge part of those gaps in the Missouri Valley Football Conference.

Improvement in, virtually every area, was the focus on day one Monday afternoon of fall practices in Vermillion. A total of 89 guys, according to Glenn, took to the DakotaDome turf with no pads, but the intensity was still there.

It helps when you bring back so many starters, said Terry, the team's top returning receiver.

"Pretty much everyone who's going to be a starter this year has played in a college football game," he said. "That obviously wasn't the case last year."

During their struggles last season, the Coyotes were at the same building experience with new starters and trying to compete in the Missouri Valley — ultimately finishing 0-8 in league play.

With six guys back who started a game on the offensive line in 2012, USD learned from those rough times, according to senior lineman Marc Murtha. The other players with starting



USD defensive coordinator Jason Petrino, left, instructs his players Monday during the team's first fall practice at the DakotaDome in Vermillion.

experience are Derek Chancellor, Andrew Schofield, Cody O'Neill, Matt Huffer and Steve Nelson.

"It takes time to learn the plays; learn how to put things together," Murtha said. "It doesn't even matter how young we were, that was last year."

He later added, "It'll take some time, but I don't see us being one and whatever. That's for dang sure."

Part of those improvements have dealt over the off-season as much with mental focus as with schemes. The 'Band of Brothers' theme has been prevalent in every facet of USD athletics over the summer, and that tagline extends also to ac-

countability, Murtha said.

"A lot of it last year was discipline, penalties and not being assignment sharp," he said. "Everyone has the excitement and are keyed in, so we can win those close games. I think this is going to be a big year for us, especially from us seniors."

"This is it; we won't have the next level."

The defensive line is just as experienced coming into the 2013 season, which begins at home Aug. 31 against UC Davis. Up front, the Coyotes return four players who started in the 3-4 system — Nick Jacobs, Drew Iddings, Emilius Davis and Kenny Greer.

Also on defense, USD brings

back Tyler Starr, Keyen Lage, Kyle Guziec and Ryan Hillier to the linebacking corp (which will also see production from transfers Kyle Staples and Auston Johnson), while Dyllon Knox, Devin Taverna and Aaron Swift return to the secondary.

The team has already tried to incorporate that experience into the 19 freshmen this fall, according to Davis, a senior lineman.

"With the new guys coming in, we have to teach them," he said. "If one person messes up, we all mess up. For us being experienced, we have to help the next guy."

Will it pay off come Saturdays this fall?

"Oh yeah, definitely," Davis said. "Most of the games we lost were by only a few points, and that was by us beating ourselves."

"Once we fix the small mistakes, we'll win."

The matter of when that happens is another story, Glenn said, referencing the "progression" of the program.

"We have a long way to go. You saw where we finished," Glenn said. "We have to get better, and get better faster than other teams are getting better."

"That's the message that I'm sending to the team, and that's the message they need to bring to practice every day."

And again, experience plays a big role in helping that message really hit home, Terry said.

"The speed and intensity, you can't practice that," he said. "We had 11 opportunities to go out and compete, and we'll have 12 this year. So we'll see what happens."

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