

AUG. 31, 2019 ♦ MICHIGAN VS. MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE

Game Info

Site: Michigan Stadium (107,601)

Kickoff: 7:30 p.m.

Television: BTN

Radio: Michigan/IMG Radio Network (950 AM in the Detroit Area; SiriusXM channel 195) with Dan Dierdorf, Jim Brandstatter and sideline reporter Doug Karsch, a regular contributor to TheWolverine.com.

Series Facts: This will mark the first meeting between the two programs ... The Wolverines are 10-2 in non-conference regular-season matchups under head coach Jim Harbaugh; both losses came on the road ... U-M is 113-23-3 in season openers, including 2-2 under Harbaugh ... Michigan enters the contest ranked No. 7 in the Amway Coaches Poll and Associated Press rankings, and finished last season at No. 14 in both.

Previewing Middle Tennessee State With A Blue Raider Insider

Austin Fox • TheWolverine

GoMiddle.com staff writer Matt Dossett swung by TheWolverine.com this week to help explain what the Michigan Wolverines' football team can expect to see from the Middle Tennessee State Blue Raiders in Saturday night's season opener at The Big House.

Dossett revealed what MTSU's strengths and weaknesses are on both sides of the ball, while also providing a final score prediction at the end.

PROJECTED STARTERS ON OFFENSE

• **Redshirt sophomore QB Asher O'Hara** — He played in just two games last year while backing up starter Brent Stockstill, completing 9 of 20 passes for 114 yards and rushing 23 times for 85 yards. "You could make the argument that Asher O'Hara will get the initial green light, but I would not be surprised to see [junior quarterback] Randall Johnson either," Dossett revealed.

• **Redshirt sophomore RB Chaton Mobley** — He served as the team's primary running back last season as a redshirt freshman, carrying 123 times for 613 yards and landing on the Conference USA All-Freshman Team as a result. Mobley also added four scores on the ground and 19 receptions from his running back spot.

• **Senior WR Ty Lee** — The veteran led the Blue Raiders in almost every major statistical receiving category last year, including catches (71), yards (883) and touchdown grabs (seven). Lee was tabbed to the Belitnikoff Award watch list (given to the nation's best receiver) heading into the 2019 campaign, and enters the season as college football's active receptions leader (213).

• **Fifth-year senior WR Jocquez Bruce** — He was held to just six grabs for 85 yards in 2018 after a nagging groin injury limited him to five games. The 5-10, 178-pounder proved his value in 2017, however, when he racked up 206 rushing yards and nine receptions while working primarily as a running back.

• **Redshirt junior WR C.J. Windham** — He only hauled in six catches for 111 yards in 2018 after missing nine contests with injury, but still managed to reel in three touchdown grabs. Windham enjoyed a healthy 2017 campaign that saw him register 25 receptions for 351 yards.

• **Sophomore WR Zack Dobson** — The dangerous 5-8, 164-pounder showed off his versatility last season as a freshman by finishing fourth on the squad with 214 rushing yards, while also recording 15 catches for 171 yards and four scores. Dobson's 11.4 yards per catch average wasn't necessarily off the charts, but his 13.4 yards per carry were 8.1 more than anyone else on the roster.

• **Redshirt junior LT Will Gilchrist** — He only played in four tilts last year while redshirting, though all four contests he saw action in occurred within the final seven affairs of the season. Last year was actually Gilchrist's first in Murfreesboro, after transferring in from Blinn College (a community college in Texas that is best known for winning a NJCAA championship with quarterback Cam Newton at the helm in 2009).

• **Redshirt sophomore LG Eric Seay** — He will be the most inexperienced MTSU starter that takes the field on Saturday night, having never appeared in a game in his collegiate career.

• **Fifth-year senior C Josh Fannin** — He was a stalwart on the Blue Raider offensive line last year, starting all 14 games at center and averaging 70.6 snaps per contest. Fannin earned Conference USA honorable mention recognition at season's end, and has been tabbed to the Rimington Award watch list (given to the game's top center) heading into 2019.

• **Redshirt freshman RG Marcus Greer** — He redshirted after playing in just four contests last year, though three of the four games he participated in were from Oct. 27 on. Greer took home the Newcomer Ironman Award at MTSU's annual year-end banquet.

• **Junior RT Robert Jones** — The 2019 season will be his first in Murfreesboro, after transferring in from Highland Community College in Kansas. Greer earned honorable mention all-conference accolades for the Scotties after starting all 10 games for them in 2018.

PROJECTED STARTERS ON DEFENSE

• **Fifth-year senior DE Tyshun Render** — He started three of the 13 contests he played in last season, and racked up 25 tackles, 7.5 tackles for loss, 2.5 sacks, one fumble recovery and a forced fumble. Render's 7.5 stops behind the line of scrimmage were the seventh most on the team, while his 2.5 quarterback takedowns were the sixth most.

• **Fifth-year senior DT Malik Manciell** — The Detroit native started all 14 tilts last season and tallied 31 tackles, four stops behind the line of scrimmage and two sacks. Manciell's efforts earned him Conference USA honorable mention recognition, along with the club's Ironman Award at their postseason team banquet.

• **Junior DT Jordan Ferguson** — He burst onto the scene as a freshman in 2017, earning Conference USA All-Freshman Team honors after recording 30 tackles, 5.5 stops behind the line of scrimmage and an interception. Ferguson seemingly regressed last year as a sophomore, however, logging just 15 stops and 1.5 tackles for loss in 12 games.

• **Fifth-year senior DE Trae Philpotts** — The 6-3, 242-pounder started nine of the 14 affairs he played in last season, and accumulated 44 tackles, nine stops behind the line of scrimmage and four sacks. Philpotts' nine tackles for loss and four quarterback takedowns were each fourth most on the team in 2018.

• **Junior LB D.Q. Thomas** — The Mississippi native posted huge numbers last year, leading the Blue Raiders in sacks (eight), tying for the team lead in tackles for loss (14.5) and finishing in a third-place deadlock in total stops (70). Thomas also paced the club in fumble recoveries (two) and forced fumbles (two), earning Conference USA honorable mention accolades as a result.

• **Redshirt sophomore LB Cody Smith** — Smith made the move from safety to linebacker prior to last season, and finished with 22 tackles and one stop behind the line of scrimmage in 12 games at his new position. He also hails from same high school as current Michigan freshman wideout George Johnson (Martin County in Stuart, Fla.).

• **Fifth-year senior LB Khalil Brooks** — He was a second-team All-Conference USA performer for the second straight year in 2018 after posting 68 tackles, 14.5 tackles for loss (tied for the team lead), 6.5 sacks (second-most) and 14 quarterback hurries (led the club). Brooks was voted as a preseason All-Conference USA member heading into the 2019 campaign.

• **Redshirt freshman CB Teldrick Ross** — He played in four outings last season as a freshman while redshirting, and racked up all three of his tackles in a 48-32 win over UTEP Nov. 10.

• **Sophomore CB Gregory Grate** — He started twice last year as a freshman, but appeared in 13 of MTSU's 14 contests. Grate racked up 25 tackles on the season, one sack, two passes broken up and a 97-yard interception return for a touchdown in a 61-37 win over UT-Martin Sept. 8.

• **Fifth-year senior S Jovante Moffatt** — After earning Conference USA honorable mention recognition as a junior in 2017, Moffatt redshirted the 2018 campaign while dealing with injuries. Despite only appearing in four games, he still managed to log 36 tackles, five passes broken up and an interception.

• **Junior S Reed Blankenship** — He earned first-team All-Conference USA honors at season's end in 2018 after piling up 107 stops, eight tackles for loss, four

interceptions and seven passes broken up. Blankenship was selected as a preseason All-Conference USA member heading into 2019, and was also tabbed to the Bednarik (nation's best defensive player) and Jim Thorpe (country's best defensive back) Award watch lists.

PROJECTED STARTERS ON SPECIAL TEAMS

• **Redshirt junior K Crews Holt** — He connected on 18 of 24 field goal attempts in 2018, but only recorded a season long of 42 yards. Crews, however, was a perfect 16 of 16 on attempts within 40 yards, and his 18 overall makes were the second most in Conference USA.

• **Redshirt junior P Matthew Stephenson** — He served as the team's backup punter last season, punting five times for a 40-yard average. Four of Stephenson's boots, however, were downed inside the opposing 20-yard line.

Middle Tennessee State's Biggest Offensive Strength

"First and foremost, I think that Middle Tennessee State's offense will be spearheaded by senior wideout Ty Lee," Dossett explained. "He is the proven bell cow of the offense and will be the primary playmaker for the Middle offense.

"In 2018, he had 71 receptions for 883 yards and seven touchdowns. Lee is certainly a game-breaker and gives whoever the quarterback is a viable receiving option."

Lee was — by far — the biggest weapon in MTSU's passing game last year, hauling in 14 more receptions and 318 more yards than anyone else on the team.

His consistency was also an asset, reeling in at least 60 yards in nine of the club's 14 contests.

Lee actually did some of his best work when he squared off against an elite Kentucky secondary that finished 18th nationally in passing yards allowed per game in a 34-23 loss on Nov. 17, hauling in seven receptions for 85 yards (his third-highest output on the year) and a touchdown.

Middle Tennessee State's Biggest Offensive Weakness

"If I had to pinpoint a weakness, I would direct my attention to the continuity concerns when it comes to the offense as a whole," the analyst noted. "There are some returning guys, sure, but there are also moving parts. Defenses will try their hardest to take away the playmaking ability of Ty Lee.

"Then what? Can [junior running back] Brad Anderson, Jocquez Bruce and Chaton Mobley shoulder the load?

"Also, since MT is breaking in a new quarterback, there may be a transition or acclimation period with the signal-caller and his offensive line."

The Blue Raider offense was hit hard with departures following the 2018 campaign, with quarterback Brent Stockstill (3,544 passing yards and 29 touchdowns) and sec-

ond-leading rusher Terrelle West (298 yards and 4.7 yards per carry) both graduating, along with the club's second- and third-leading receivers in Patrick Smith (57 receptions, 565 yards and six scores) and Gatlin Casey (40 catches, 463 yards and three touchdowns), respectively.

Dossett projected Asher O'Hara to take over as the team's new starting signal-caller, but the redshirt sophomore only has 20 career passing attempts at MTSU, while junior Randall Johnson (who could potentially see time as well, per the Blue Raider insider) transferred in from Reedley Community College in California and has never played at the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) level.

Middle Tennessee State's Biggest Defensive Strength

"I think MT's biggest strength defensively is their ability to get takeaways," Dossett noted. "They have some ball hawks in the defensive backfield."

"Reed Blankenship is the main stud in the group. On top of that, Khalil Brooks is a stout player at linebacker."

The Middle Tennessee State defense finished a respectable 50th nationally last year in yards allowed per game (377.9), and returns three of their top five leading tacklers in Blankenship (107), Thomas (70) and Brooks (68).

The Blue Raider defense was outstanding at forcing turnovers in 2018, racking up 24 (tied with Marshall for the Conference USA lead) of them to tie for 20th nationally.

Intercepting passes was where the MTSU defense thrived, with their 16 picks finishing in a deadlock for 16th-most in college football.

Seven different Blue Raider defenders picked off at least one pass last season, with three of them returning in 2019 — Blankenship (four), Moffatt (one) and Grate (one).

Middle Tennessee State's Biggest Defensive Weakness

"My concern is that they could be susceptible if they were to get bit by the injury bug," the writer noted. "Brooks, Blankenship and Moffatt are cornerstones of the defense, and the defense would be greatly impacted if any of them were to go down."

"One of the calling cards for most solid squads is depth. I question how much depth the Blue Raiders have defensively."

According to Pro Football Focus, MTSU lost four of their top seven defenders who played at least 624 snaps last season, and eight of the 14 who saw 320 or more.

The Blue Raider defensive line is where the departures will be felt the most, with the unit having to break in two new starters on a group that finished just 66th against the run last year (164.6 yards allowed on the ground per contest).

DOSSETT'S FINAL SCORE PREDICTION

"As I type this, the line is minus-34 in favor of the Wolverines," Dossett explained.

"I think the margin of defeat for the Blue Raiders will be around this number.

"Overall, I think Michigan will bludgeon MT at the line of scrimmage. Michigan is bigger, faster, stronger and better, and I think this will become evident, especially in the second half.

"MT has nothing to lose and will be playing house money. I think they will roll the dice here and there and really open up the playbook.

"I actually think the halftime deficit will not be too lopsided. Again, though, as the game goes on, I think MT will wear down."

Prediction: Michigan 45, Middle Tennessee State 13

Michigan Wolverines Football: Keys To The Game — Middle Tennessee State

Chris Balas • TheWolverine

Michigan kicks off the season Saturday night against Middle Tennessee State as a five-touchdown favorite and a near lock to start the season 1-0.

And before folks get up in arms and scream "Appalachian State," etc. ... MTSU is no App. State. Yes, the Blue Raiders won their conference last year, as U-M head coach Jim Harbaugh noted a few times this week, but they simply don't have the athletes to pull the upset in Ann Arbor.

Harbaugh still sung their praises recently during his weekly radio segment on 97.1 The Ticket, Detroit.

"We have a lot of respect for them," Harbaugh said. "They've done a really good job with that program, one of the nine bowl teams that we play this year. Coach [Rick] Stockstill has done a great job there. Scott Shafer, the defensive coordinator who I know well, coached with him at Stanford ... very aggressive play-caller. Changes the fronts, odd and even, and likes pressure ... likes to load a side. That's his nature."

Shafer spent a year in Ann Arbor under Rich Rodriguez before being replaced, essentially before his first season even ended. He'll likely be fired up to face the Wolverines and his ex-boss.

This would be one of the true upsets of the century should Middle Tennessee leave Ann Arbor with a win. Here's what Michigan needs to do to prevent this one from being close:

Contain wide receiver Ty Lee: Michigan defensive coordinator Don Brown is too good to let one player beat him the way Toledo's Nick Moore did Michigan in a 13-10 upset in 2008. U-M's offense was the real culprit that day, but Moore — an outside receiver — was given too much room (and respect) and hauled in 20 receptions for 162 yards in one of the worst losses in program history.

Lee is a much different type of receiver, and he's more dangerous in theory, given he's a slot guy, the position responsible for chunks of yardage against last year's Michigan defense. Lee caught 71 passes for 883 yards and seven scores last season, and is incredibly shifty, capable of making the first guy miss (regularly) and breaking the big play.

It's no secret that Michigan's defense struggled with crossing routes and slot receivers last year, particularly against capable weapons like Lee. Brown has supposedly implemented some new packages this year to combat these mismatches — in the past, overmatched safeties have sometimes been put in position to cover the slots — and they'll need to keep tabs on MTSU's No. 8 at all times.

Stockhill and Co. are looking for a new quarterback — whoever it is, they'll want him to get the ball out quickly to negate U-M's athletic advantage in the pass rush, and Lee will undoubtedly be the primary target.

Own the lines of scrimmage: Many non-Power Five teams have athletes (like Lee) who slipped through the cracks and ended up being guys who could succeed at a higher level of football. It's in the trenches that the gaps are most noticeable, and U-M should not just control, but also dominate, both lines of scrimmage.

On offense, MTSU ranked No. 111 nationally out of 129 teams in sacks allowed last year, giving up three per game. In 'stuff rate,' the measure of a team's rushing yardage at or behind the line of scrimmage, the Blue Raiders were No. 106 nationally.

There are some questions as to how well U-M's interior line will hold up this year against some of the league's better offensive lines. This won't be one of those tests, and it will be at least somewhat of a concern if Middle Tennessee is able to get any push up front.

MTSU returns a pair of linebackers in DQ Thomas and Khalil Brooks who were extremely disruptive last year in notching 28 tackles for loss and 14.5 sacks. Expect the Blue Raiders to be aggressive with their blitz packages. Redshirt freshman right tackle Jalen Mayfield is making his first start, and there have been rumblings fifth-year senior left tackle Jon Runyan Jr. could be slowed, maybe even miss the game, due to injury. That could force redshirt frosh Ryan Hayes into action, too.

Michigan Wolverines football redshirt freshman tackle Jalen Mayfield will be making his first career start Saturday against Middle Tennessee State. (Per Kjeldsen)

Exploit the revamped Middle Tennessee State secondary: The receivers are an obvious strength on this Michigan team, and they'll get ample opportunity to prove themselves against a team replacing three of its top four cornerbacks from a year ago. The safeties are a strength, especially returning star Reed Blankenship, and he's got a fifth-year senior in Jovante Moffatt next to him. The corners, however, will be green and untested.

Juniors Nico Collins and Donovan Peoples-Jones will be mismatches here, and they're not alone. Redshirt sophomore Tarik Black is due for a breakout season, sophomore Ronnie Bell has had as good a camp as any receiver and freshman Mike Sainristil has proven dangerous in the slot in practice. U-M senior quarterback Shea Patterson will be throwing more this season — Saturday is a good time to start with the unleashing against a team with unproven corners.

The Breakdown: Middle Tennessee State wasn't competitive against most of the better teams on its schedule last year with arguably the best quarterback in school history (Brent Stockstill, a four-year starter and the coach's son) and a conference championship team. The only exception — a 34-23 loss to No. 12 Kentucky. This year's squad will likely take a step back, and starting at Michigan is no easy task.

The Blue Raiders have some pieces on defense, a capable running back in Chaton Mobley (613 yards in 2018, 5.0 yards per rush) and Lee, but they're overmatched in all facets. It would be disappointing if this were still a game at halftime.

Michigan Football News & Views: O-Line Injuries, The 'Other' CB, more

Chris Balas • TheWolverine

Michigan head coach Jim Harbaugh met the media this week to talk about the opener with Middle Tennessee State and more. We tackle his comments in News & Views format:

NEWS: Several Michigan defenders have improved to the point that Harbaugh and defensive coordinator Don Brown couldn't pick just one as having made the biggest strides since last year.

HARBAUGH: "I was mentioning that to Don Brown yesterday, and we really couldn't pinpoint one guy. [Senior tackle] Carlo Kemp stood out to me in being in that category. [Junior end] Kwity Paye and [senior linebacker/defensive end hybrid] Josh Uche.

“Also, the linebackers, [junior] Josh Ross and [redshirt freshman] Cam McGrone. I see him coming on, really ascending, coming on like a freight train. There are multiple.”

VIEWS: Ross literally laughed at us when we suggested many expected the defense to take a step backward this year.

“One of the biggest things is we’ve been around each other three to four years. We know each other, we know how we play,” he said. “There’s not going to be a drop-off. We’ve got great guys ... Kwity Paye, [senior cornerback] Lavert Hill, myself.

“We’ve got guys on the defense where we’re going to come get it, no matter what.”

There won’t be a Devin Bush in the linebacker corps, but there doesn’t have to be. Brown’s defense at Boston College led the nation one year with much less talent because guys were in a similar situation, having spent so much time together they knew each other’s next moves.

And for all the talk about who they lost ... how about considering what’s returning?

There’s a preseason All-American cover corner in Hill, a senior in Kemp who was the team’s Most Improved Defensive Player Award winner last year and who’s only gotten bigger and stronger, U-M’s reigning rookie of the year in sophomore Aidan Hutchinson at end (he’ll be All-Big Ten this year if he’s healthy ... book it), and a number of returning all-conference (on at least one team) talents in Ross, Paye, senior safety Josh Metellus and Uche.

They’re complemented by guys like junior safety Brad Hawkins, who has been as good as anyone in camp, and a graduate transfer end in Mike Danna, who was a Pro Football Focus All-American last year.

In addition, the offense figures to be better, and that will help alleviate some of the pressure. Ohio State gave up buckets of points in a number of games last season, but still won the Big Ten.

As Lloyd Carr always used to say, “It’s not a game of perfect.” So ... consider the glass more than half full.

NEWS: Junior cornerback Ambry Thomas appears to be ahead of schedule in returning from colitis. Redshirt freshman Vincent Gray and junior Jaylen Kelly-Powell have been getting a lot of work in his absence.

HARBAUGH: “Vince Gray has had a good camp. He’s had a good spring and a good camp. He’s ready to play ball. I’m excited for him. Jalen Kelly-Powell also. We’ve got good options there. Ambry as well ... he’s a heck of a good football player.”

VIEWS: Yes, this is the big unknown on the defense ... how will the ‘other’ corner hold up? At the same time, you’ve got one of the best in the country on the other side, which allows Brown and Co. to provide some help (if needed) in various ways, and

they’ve spent a good portion of spring and fall implementing many new looks.

This group will be tested. We think back to 2015, for example, when one of MSU’s best offensive plays was to throw the ball deep to Aaron Burbridge and hope he won the 50-50 battles with Jourdan Lewis. He finished with 100-plus yards and was a big reason the Spartans were able to move the ball.

But there are good players there, and we expect Thomas back close to full strength by October, hopefully sooner. It’s not like they’re bereft of talent there as too many have insinuated, and again, there’s a lot of talent around whoever lines up in that spot.

NEWS: Redshirt freshman Jalen Mayfield is slated to start Saturday night in place of Andrew Stueber (out for the year with an ACL injury) ... but at which position?

HARBAUGH: “He’s ready. He was right there [in the competition]. Neither was giving an inch at any time. You feel for Andrew Stueber because of that [injury]. It’s so important to both of them. He’ll be back.

“Jalen Mayfield was right there the whole time. We didn’t know which way it was going to go. Every bit of what he could be doing was what he was doing.”

VIEWS: He’ll be fine, and he’ll only get better with experience. However, there’s been talk that another lineman is banged up and won’t be ready for the opener, which could lead to some shuffling. Harbaugh said redshirt freshman Ryan Hayes would be the backup at both tackle positions, so it’s possible we’ll see him get his first start Saturday night.

This is why scheduling a team like Middle Tennessee State rather than, say, a road game at Notre Dame really, really seems to make a lot of sense. And we do expect the starting line (with Mayfield back at right tackle) to be back near full strength by Big Ten season.

NEWS: The running back position remains a three-man race between freshman Zach Charbonnet, redshirt freshman Christian Turner and senior Tru Wilson, the former walk-on.

HARBAUGH: “I haven’t decided yet.”

VIEWS: “The battle is still ongoing — Zach is pushing the envelope forward and bringing out the best in everybody.”

So said offensive coordinator Josh Gattis, echoing what we’ve been hearing from just about everyone:

Charbonnet is the future.

Turner is still rushing things a bit and Wilson is who he is, a great third option on a good team and probably the team’s best pass blocker at his position. However, Charbonnet is a championship level back (or will be). We expect him to be No. 1 by October.

Wolverine Watch: Ringing In A New Opportunity

John Borton • TheWolverine

The 2019 season stands unblemished, stretching out ahead of those in winged helmets with unlimited possibilities. It will be what the Wolverines make it through blood, sweat and tears, fate putting a finger on the scale.

The preliminaries are ended, all the analysis delivered. Every player, every coach, and every staffer in Schembechler Hall knows what they want to make of a chance they'll never see again.

For sophomore defensive end Aidan Hutchinson, a quick trip home to nearby Plymouth provides all the reminder he needs.

On opposing walls in his bedroom rest a pair of uncompromising incentive providers. There's a framed Rose Bowl jersey, worn by Aidan's father, Michigan All-American defensive lineman Chris Hutchinson. On the other wall, five Big Ten championship rings.

Those were different times, obviously. The younger Hutchinson and his teammates refuse to believe they're gone forever.

"My dad tells me every day he's never lost to Ohio State," Aidan said, smiling. "I envy that. I have all his Big Ten championship rings in my room, so I have to look at them every time I come home.

"I want one more than anybody. Ohio State is always there at the end of the calendar, and you can't really forget about that — we're coming this year."

There's a long road ahead, before the Buckeyes even come into view, or olfactory offense. If a team reaches The Game without a shot at The Championship, something's missing.

That's why — from Jim Harbaugh to his coaches to Chris Hutchinson and his savvy sophomore son — the Wolverines look to keep their eyes on the road. That starts Saturday night against Middle Tennessee State.

Questions abound regarding offensive coordinator Josh Gattis' gleaming new attack and defensive coordinator Don Brown's reordered troops. Michigan has plenty to prove. The Wolverines won't become Buckeye beaters by taking out MTSU. But they'll dodge the first pothole.

Even when they reach the end of the regular-season road, nothing's guaranteed. That's the reminder Dr. Chris Hutchinson — an emergency room physician at Beaumont Hospital — offers up.

"Those are hard things," he said, regarding projecting a matchup. "What your opponent is, and what you are, those are very different every year. Everybody thinks Ohio State is going to have a down year because they've got a new head coach. I don't know that that's the case.

"Ohio State is still the team to beat. Our defense is going to be completely different. Our offensive is going to be completely different. There are a lot of differences in our system."

The elder Hutchinson's teams went 4-0-1 against the Buckeyes, from a 34-31 shootout in Columbus in 1988 to a 31-3 pummeling of a No. 4-ranked OSU squad in 1991. They finished with a 13-13 tie in '92, ensuring the fifth-year seniors would never know the sting of losing the ultimate rivalry contest.

Michigan wants — no, the Wolverines desperately need — a single win in that showdown, to begin turning the tide. They won't get it, though, by fixating on Ohio State in late August. There's a way, the aforementioned principles agree, and it's not glamorous.

"You've got to just keep getting better," Chris Hutchinson insisted. "This offense isn't going to be hitting its stride [immediately]. They haven't played a game together. It's going to need some time, need a few games to get going.

"This defense, with so many new starters, it's going to need the same thing. Obviously, we're at Michigan, and this is our expectation. But you can't just think that because you're at Michigan, that's what you've got to do.

"There's a way to get there. You've got to keep getting better. Everybody has to keep getting better. People are going to get injured. People are going to have to step up. You have to keep fighting and getting better every week."

Harbaugh says it all the time. Ask him to project a week down the road, and he turns the discussion to winning a team meeting an hour hence. That emphasis has taken root, Aidan Hutchinson assured.

"There are expectations all over social media, but we're just putting our heads down and working."

— Sophomore defensive end Aidan Hutchinson

"We're all starting to adopt the mindset of process over outcome, and that we take everything day by day and don't look into the future," the sophomore said. "There are expectations all over social media, but we're just putting our heads down and working."

His dad quipped about reviewing Aidan's press appearance on Monday, so his son can continue honing his interview technique. Chris also delivered a coach's take on Aidan talking at all right now.

"We, in the Hutchinson household, are still not really talking about Aidan being a starter," Chris pointed out. "I've never seen it. We're sort of waiting for that first game to say, Aidan actually started a game.

"My wife and I joke frequently, because for a freshman ... he played in 13 games, great, but sometimes he played a snap, sometimes he played a half. From our perspective, he gets a lot of press for a kid who hasn't done anything.

“And that’s not anything I haven’t told him. I go, ‘You get a lot of press for doing nothing, man!’”

In terms of championships, Michigan has done nothing for far too long. That’s not all on Harbaugh, starting his fifth year, and certainly not on a sophomore defensive end.

But they’d love to do something about it. Someone who has been there relishes looking on. Despite never losing to the Buckeyes, the All-American waves off any notion of ever being convinced his teams would take down OSU.

“Convinced may be a little strong,” Chris Hutchinson said. “I knew we could win, but I knew if we didn’t take care of business, or the football gods were against us, we could absolutely lose.

“I remember Lloyd [Carr] saying something to us one time. We were doing everything we were supposed to do, but it just wasn’t quite enough. He’s like, ‘Somebody has to make a play, within the framework of the defense. You just have to make a play.’

“That’s how it is sometimes. Maybe it’s a small thing — you trip them up on third down and they have to punt. It just takes a possession away from them. It’s these little, small things that tend to add up, if you keep doing them. Sometimes they don’t look pretty, and sometimes they don’t even show up in the stat sheet. You’ve just got to keep doing them.”

They started doing them in winter conditioning. That led to spring ball, summer workouts and the ever-grueling fall camp. Now everyone gets a look at where they stand, and the Wolverines themselves can create their own glory.

“He’s obviously lived through these rivalries before he got there,” Chris Hutchinson said of his son. “His appreciation for what it really takes is evolving. It’s going to be one of these collective processes. Things just have to come together right.

“Stay healthy in the right positions, and sometimes it’s a little bit of luck.”

Former Michigan baseball coach and major league legend Branch Rickey once opined: “Luck is the residue of design.”

Harbaugh put the design in place. It’s time to reach for the next generation’s rings.

By The Numbers: How U-M Has Fared In Its Last 20 Season Openers

Austin Fox • TheWolverine

While many colleges around the country annually play “cupcake” opponents in their season openers, the Michigan Wolverines’ football program has faced a solid mixture of both lighter and formidable foes in game one over the past 20 years.

Saturday’s opener against Middle Tennessee State falls into the former category, following debut showdowns with ranked clubs in each of the last two years (a loss versus No. 12 Notre Dame last year and a victory over No. 17 Florida in 2017).

The Maize and Blue have compiled a 15-5 record in season openers dating back to 1999, including a 2-2 mark under current head man Jim Harbaugh.

Both of Harbaugh’s losses were on the road by identical 24-17 scores, with the first coming at the hands of a Utah team that finished 10-3 in 2015, and the second to a Notre Dame squad who went 12-1 and made the College Football Playoff last season.

U-M registered a combined 5-2 record in campaign-opening contests under Harbaugh’s predecessors, Brady Hoke (2011-14) and Rich Rodriguez (2008-10), but enjoyed a long string of success in such affairs under former head man Lloyd Carr (1995-2007).

In fact, from 1999-2006, U-M went a perfect 8-0 in season-opening tilts, including notable triumphs over No. 16 Notre Dame in 1999 and No. 11 Washington in 2002.

Carr’s victorious stretch was snapped in his final year of 2007, however, with the infamous 34-32 loss to then-Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) foe Appalachian State.

The Wolverine administration showed a tendency to schedule Mid-American Conference (MAC) opponents for U-M’s annual first game throughout the initial half of the 2000s, with the Maize and Blue opening up against a MAC club four out of five years from 2000-05 (Washington in 2002 was the lone exception).

Dave Brandon then scheduled a wider range of opponents when he took over as Michigan’s director of athletics in 2010, with the Wolverines kicking off their campaigns against teams from four different conferences (Big East, MAC, SEC and Sun Belt) during his five years on the job.

The following is a breakdown of the leagues that U-M has opened up against since 1999:

- MAC — 8 times (Bowling Green in 2000, Miami (Ohio) in 2001 and 2004, Central Michigan in 2003 and 2013, Northern Illinois in 2005, and Western Michigan in 2009 and 2011).

- SEC — 3 (Vanderbilt in 2006, Alabama in 2012, Florida in 2017)

- Independent — 2 (Notre Dame in 1999 and 2018)

- Mountain West — 2 (Utah in 2008, Hawaii in 2016)
- Pac-10/Pac-12 — 2 (Washington in 2002, Utah in 2015)
- Big East — 1 (Connecticut in 2010)
- Conference USA — 1 (Middle Tennessee State in 2019)
- FCS — 1 (Appalachian State in 2007)
- Sun Belt — 1 (Appalachian State in 2014)

By the Numbers: Middle Tennessee State at Michigan

0 Quarterbacks in Michigan history who have thrown for at least 2,600 yards and 22 touchdowns in two separate seasons. Those are the exact numbers senior quarterback Shea Patterson posted last year, and Saturday will be his first opportunity to try and become the first U-M signal-caller to ever register those statistics in two different years.

5-1 Is Michigan's all-time record in home night games, with the lone loss occurring to Michigan State (14-10) in 2017. The five victories, meanwhile, were over Notre Dame in 2011 (35-31) and 2013 (41-30), Penn State in 2014 (18-13), Minnesota in 2017 (33-10) and Wisconsin in 2018 (38-13). The Maize and Blue have played 57 night contests all time, and have posted a 32-25 record in those affairs. U-M's first-ever showdown under the lights was a 14-0 victory over Marquette in 1944.

7 Is where Michigan is ranked in the AP poll entering the 2019 campaign, marking its highest preseason mark since also landing at No. 7 in Harbaugh's second year of 2016. The last time the Maize and Blue came into a season ranked higher was when they debuted at No. 5 in 2007.

10-1-1 Is U-M's all-time record against teams from the state of Tennessee: 10-0-1 against Vanderbilt and 0-1 versus Tennessee.

10-2 Mark for Harbaugh against regular-season non-conference opponents during his time at Michigan, with the two setbacks occurring at Utah (24-17) in 2015 and at Notre Dame (also 24-17) last season.

50 Percent chance of precipitation Saturday night in Ann Arbor (according to weather.com), along with a projected low of 55 degrees and maximum wind gusts of just eight miles-per-hour.

113-23-3 Is U-M's record in season-opening contests, including a 96-15-2 mark in openers that have occurred in Ann Arbor.

140th Season of Michigan football in 2019, making it the sixth-oldest program in the nation. The Wolverines played their first game on May 30, 1879, and defeated Racine 1-0 in Chicago. The only five schools who have been playing football longer than U-M are Princeton (150 years), Rutgers (150), Yale (147), Harvard (145) and Pennsylvania (143).

2003 Was the last time the Maize and Blue squared off with an opponent from Conference USA (which is where MTSU currently resides), when they took down Houston, 50-3, on Sept. 6 in The Big House.

Michigan's Last 20 Season-Openers		
Date	Game	Result
Sept. 1, 2018	at (No. 12) Notre Dame	L, 24-17
Sept. 2, 2017	vs. (No. 17) Florida*	W, 33-17
Sept. 3, 2016	Hawaii	W, 63-3
Sept. 3, 2015	at Utah	L, 24-17
Aug. 30, 2014	Appalachian State	W, 52-14
Aug. 31, 2013	Central Michigan	W, 59-9
Sept. 1, 2012	vs. (No. 2) Alabama*	L, 41-14
Sept. 3, 2011	Western Michigan	W, 34-10
Sept. 4, 2010	Connecticut	W, 30-10
Sept. 5, 2009	Western Michigan	W, 31-7
Aug. 30, 2008	Utah	L, 25-23
Sept. 1, 2007	Appalachian State	L, 34-32
Sept. 2, 2006	Vanderbilt	W, 27-7
Sept. 3, 2005	Northern Illinois	W, 33-17
Sept. 4, 2004	Miami (Ohio)	W, 43-10
Aug. 30, 2003	Central Michigan	W, 45-7
Aug. 31, 2002	(No. 11) Washington	W, 31-29
Sept. 1, 2001	Miami (Ohio)	W, 31-13
Sept. 2, 2000	Bowling Green	W, 42-7
Sept. 4, 1999	(No. 16) Notre Dame	W, 26-22

* — neutral location

Michigan Wolverines Football: Special Teams Spots, Including Kicker, Open

Chris Balas • TheWolverine

It's rare that a team is three days out for its opener and still doesn't know its starting kicker. For Jim Harbaugh's Michigan Wolverines, though, this is a luxury, not a predicament.

Then-redshirt sophomore Quinn Nordin gave way to true freshman Jake Moody last year, and Moody responded by making 10 of 11 field goals. The two have been neck-and-neck since spring, and special teams coordinator Chris Partridge wasn't in position to name one a starter for Saturday's game with Middle Tennessee State.

"That's ongoing. It's awesome when you've got two guys that are phenomenal and duking it out," Partridge said Wednesday.

"We're just keeping it rolling. They've both been really good through spring, though camp. I don't think we're pressed to make an immediate decision. I think we just let those guys keep kicking, keep working."

Partridge added to the intrigue when asked when they'd make a decision on a starter.

"Maybe we don't have to," he said, raising an eyebrow. "Maybe we just play them both. I don't know. We'll see. We'll discuss that."

"Both have had great attitudes, and it's easy right now. They're getting equal kicks in practice. That's what it would be like anyway with a one or two; we get them reps. We'll kind of sit down as a staff with Coach [Harbaugh] and see what we want to do."

Both are great kickers, among the best in the country coming out of high school, and both have great leg strength. The've each taken the competition very seriously this fall, Partridge added, and want to be great.

"They're similar in the regard that they both can kick pretty deep field goals, and they both can be really, really accurate, too," he said. "They're not really separated by much. I think we have maybe the best kicker room in the country when you put both of them together."

"It's really good; it's fun. It's exciting to coach them."

He'd love to see them both play, he added. And give Nordin credit. In a day and age in which many guys bolt if they lose their starting jobs, he stayed to fight and put himself in position to win the job back, at least part time.

"Quinn's been awesome. He's had a heck of an offseason," Partridge said. "He's the hardest guy when it comes to his work ethic in the weight room and all that. He's been a good leader in the room. He's doing what he should do and what you expect a guy to do, even though it's not common nowadays. Most guys will run."

"But back in the day, there was no running. You man up and you fight through and be a good teammate, try to get that job back, and that's what he's done."

Michigan's Starting Kick Returner Position Still Up For Grabs

Junior Ambry Thomas' battle with colitis has opened the door for others to get a look at kick return, and several have stepped up.

"Going into football camp you had 66 spots on special teams that people are fighting for in all phases," Partridge said. "We have a lot of them ironed out and ready to rock. There are still some open. Returner is one I would say is open for the most part, and again, you don't have to use one guy if you have some really good guys."

"I like [sophomore wideout] Ronnie Bell, [freshman receiver] Mikey Sainristil, [freshman receiver] Giles Jackson, [redshirt freshman linebacker] Mike Barrett, [rookie safety] Daxton Hill, [redshirt freshman running back] Christian Turner. All those guys are rotating back there and doing a really good job. Ambry Thomas is now coming back at some point and will get in the mix there. There are a bunch of guys that could help us there."

Junior wideout Donovan Peoples-Jones will remain **the** punt returner.

"He's done it for two years. Mikey, Ronnie Bell are working back there, and Lavert Hill," Partridge said. "Those four are the guys working as punt returners."

Notes

- Redshirt junior Will Hart has solidified his hold as the starting punter and continues to impress.

"He's a really dialed in guy, strong leg," Partridge said. "His recruiting was funny; he was going to Colgate. I was like, 'Holy ... this guy can really kick it.' He came, had a learning curve early. We directionally punt those guys. It's not easy to come in here from high school and just be a really good punter."

"How did he get there? He just worked, trusted in the coaching, worked through it. His ability was there, and when he figured out exactly how to do it and what we were asking, he took off."

- Redshirt junior long snapper Camaron Cheeseman has continued to progress and will likely keep his job for another year.

"He practices hard, has really continued to take the next step as a long snapper," Partridge said. "He's continued to get stronger and more fit. He's a three-year starter coming back, so he's taken a leadership role there."

"... We're excited. He's a really good player for us."

Michigan Football: Wolverines In The NFL Update - Jake Butt Surgery, More

Chris Balas • TheWolverine

Former Michigan tight end Jake Butt is facing another knee surgery, but rookie end Chase Winovich is dominating heading into the final preseason games, which will all be played tonight ... that and more in this U-M in the NFL report.

The Denver Broncos tight end's lingering knee issues will result in another knee surgery, per NBCSports.com. Butt has undergone three ACL surgeries; this one will be a "minor procedure" on his left knee, James Palmer of NFL Network reported.

Butt, a fifth-round draft pick in 2017 after tearing up his knee in the Orange Bowl, has played in only three games in his first two years in the NFL.

NBCSports.com reports his roster spot is in jeopardy, but one possibility could be keeping him on the initial 53-player roster and then placing him on injured reserve, which would allow him to return after eight weeks.

Winovich, the rookie defensive end in New England, continues to tear it up. According to Pro Football Focus, he is the No. 3 rookie overall in the preseason so far based on productivity with a 92.0 grade.

"Coming into the draft process, Winovich was the 29th overall prospect on the PFF draft board," they wrote. "The Patriots got him in the third round. Nonetheless, Winovich has dominated from day one for Bill Belichick and the Patriots dynasty with three run-stops, 12 total pressures and a pass-rush win rate of 36.7 percent."

Other notes on former Michigan football players in the NFL

- In Seattle, the Seahawks waved 2016 third-round pick and receiver Amara Darboh. Darboh was injured all of last season. He was targeted twice in 16 snaps in a preseason game with San Diego last week but did not catch a pass.

- Former receiver Jehu Chesson is now in Washington and expected to make the roster. The Washington Post reports that Chesson's ability to excel on special teams has made him valuable to head coach Jay Gruden.

- Former offensive tackle and first-round pick Taylor Lewan will miss the first four games of the season for PED use. TitansOnline.com reported that his appeal was denied.

- Former Michigan guard Ben Braden is fighting for a roster spot with the New York Jets and needs a very good performance tonight against the New Orleans Saints, NJ.com reports, to make the team.

"The trade for Alex Lewis bumped him down the depth chart," they wrote. "Now, he's on the outside looking in. But Lewis isn't guaranteed a roster spot by any stretch; the Jets only traded a conditional seventh-round pick for him. So, if Braden can prove he's a better fit or better player than Lewis, he can still win this battle."

- The Pittsburgh Steelers love what they've seen from rookie linebacker Devin Bush. He'll play in tonight's last preseason game to get more reps in prep for the season.

"He's only done it twice," head coach Mike Tomlin said in explaining why they want to see more of him.

- Former first-round pick and defensive end Taco Charlton has had a very good preseason with two sacks, two forced fumbles and a fumble recovery in parts of three games, yet he still might get traded or released in Dallas.

From 105.3 The Fan Radio: "Oddly, Taco is in position to almost claim a starting defensive end spot here, as the former first-round pick from Michigan has experienced a fine preseason with two sacks, two forced fumbles and a fumble recovery through three games,

"And yet ... sources tell me he's on the bubble in Dallas, not only because Pro Bowl defensive end DeMarcus Lawrence and captain Tyrone Crawford are the starters, but also because there is depth here and coming, with Robert Quinn ready after he serves a two-game suspension, with young vet newcomer Kerry Hyder ready to help, and with the coaching staff pleased with kids Dorance Armstrong and maybe even rookie Joe Jackson."

- Fifth-round rookie tight end Zach Gentry needs a big week to avoid being cut by the Pittsburgh Steelers.

"Not enough," coach Mike Tomlin said when asked what he has seen from his tight ends in training camp. "Some of that has been due to lack of availability. Zach Gentry has missed time. Time missed is critical in terms of opportunity. A lot of those guys are getting an opportunity to lean on it here at the end, so there is big-time urgency there."

- Green Bay rookie linebacker Rashan Gary is "back at it" after being sidelined with injury. He has one tackle in two preseason games and missed some time due to injury.

The screenshot shows the website 'THE WOLVERINE' with a navigation bar including Home, Forums, Football, FB Recruiting, Basketball, BB Recruiting, More, News Ticker, Prospect Search, and Teams. Below the navigation bar is a grid of article thumbnails. The main article is 'Michigan Wolverines Football Superlatives: Fall Camp MVP, Top Group, More' by Chris Balas. Other thumbnails include 'Under The Lights: Previewing Big Games For Michigan Commits', 'Michigan Football Wolverines In The NFL Update - Jake Butt Surgery, More', 'Michigan Wolverines Football: Keys To The Game - Middle Tennessee State', 'Get \$75 in FREE GEAR AND 25% OFF to TheWolverine.com!', 'Start Your FREE 30-DAY TRIAL Today! Use Code: blue30', and 'Previewing Tennessee's Raider Insider'. A large yellow starburst graphic is overlaid on the bottom right of the page, containing the text 'Start Your FREE 30-DAY TRIAL Today! Use Code: blue30'. At the bottom of the page, there is a dark blue banner with the text 'Get a FREE 30-day trial - use promo code Blue30'.

He's still getting used to linebacker.

"It's getting to the time where you start cutting your moves down, understanding what works for you, what type of player you are," he said.

- In Chicago, Ian Bunting has caught the ball well but has struggled as a blocker. He is expected to be released but make the team's practice squad.

- Running back Karan Higdon's chances of making the team in Houston have risen, given starter Lamar Miller's torn ACL, but he still has work to do. He rushed for 28 yards on 13 carries in his last preseason game.

- Baltimore defensive tackle Willie Henry has been plagued by injury in his first few NFL seasons, but he's ready to break out with the Ravens.

- Dallas cornerback Jourdan Lewis is having a great camp and making plays all over the field.

"It's amazing because every time I'm asked about Jourdan, you hear '[he isn't] the prototype, the prototype. There's an exception to every rule. ... There's a profile, but the profile at the end of the day is 'Do you got dog in you?'" DBs coach Kris Richard said. "That's ultimately what it comes down to. Jourdan has every bit of that. There's no poodle in this guy, he's all pit bull. ... He's got it."

- In Seattle, rookie DT Bryan Mone is still on track to make the Seahawks' roster. Head coach Pete Carroll loves him.

"Bryan Mone has also shown that he can contribute there, too," Carroll said. "We need some more games from him to see what happens, but at 350 [pounds] or whatever he is, he's a monster in there. The thing I like about him, he played for a really good college team and played great run defense, he was right in the middle of all that. He's shown why he was a factor there. We're excited to see if he can contribute."

- Quarterback Jake Rudock is trying to stick with the Miami Dolphins as their third-string QB.

- Matt Wile is hoping to be Minnesota's punter and/or field goal holder, but he hurt his thumb in practice recently.

"I've always had competition. I've been punting well, and I'm going to keep punting well and just do my job," he said.

- Finally, DT Maurice Hurst is considered an NFL breakout candidate in Oakland. Touchdown Wire wrote the following:

"Hurst made it through his rookie campaign for the Raiders without any attendant health concerns, and played well everywhere from nose-shade tackle to five-tech end, racking up four sacks and 11 total pressures in just 252 pass-rushing snaps. If Hurst stays healthy, he has the speed through gaps and strong hand movement to dominate offensive linemen throughout the league."

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