SEPT. 27, 2018 ✦ MICHIGAN AT NORTHWESTERN

Game Info
Date: Sept. 29, 2018
Site: at Ryan Field (47,130)
Kickoff: 4:42 p.m.
Television: FOX
Radio: Michigan/IMG Radio Network (950 AM in the Detroit Area) with Dan Dierdorf, Jim Brandstatter and sideline reporter Doug Karsch, a regular contributor to TheWolverine.com.
Series Facts: Michigan brings a 57-15-2 all-time advantage over the Wildcats into the contest, including victories in 32 of the last 36 matchups ... However, three of the last four contests between the two programs have been decided by less than a score, including a pair of overtime tilts ... In Evanston, the Wolverines boast a 22-7 record (20-7 at Ryan Field) ... U-M has risen to No. 14 in the AP poll, while it checks in at No. 15 according to the coaches.

Michigan Football: Previewing Northwestern With A Wildcat Insider

Austin Fox • TheWolverine.com

Louie Vaccher of WildcatReport was kind enough to swing by and give an in-depth breakdown of Northwestern prior to this weekend's contest against Michigan.

He explained which players are expected to start for the Wildcats on Saturday, along with what the club's biggest strengths and weaknesses are, as well as a final score prediction.

Projected **Starters** on Offense
• QB Clayton Thorson (redshirt senior) — He tore his ACL in the December bowl win over Kentucky and is seemingly still regaining his form, splitting reps with redshirt junior T.J. Green throughout much of the first three games. After throwing for 2,844 yards and 15 touchdowns last year, Thorson has only tossed 753 yards and three scores in three games so far in 2018.

• RB John Moten (redshirt junior) — He instantly becomes the starter with the news of redshirt sophomore running back Jeremy Larkin's retirement from football due to a medical condition on Monday. Larkin had racked up 346 yards on the year, while Moten has been the team's second-leading rusher with just 21 yards.

• WR Flynn Nagel (senior) — He led the team in receptions last year (48), and is leading the club in both catches (20) and yards (226) in the early going. The senior's best performance came in a Sept. 8 loss to Duke, when he hauled in 133 yards on 12 receptions.

• WR Bennett Skowronek (junior) — After reeling in team highs in both yards (644) and scoring grabs (five) last year as a sophomore, Skowronek has seen his numbers dip a bit in 2018. His 14 grabs rank just fourth on the team, while his 172 yards are third.

• WR Ramaud Chiaokhiao-Bowman (redshirt sophomore) — He has made a minimal impact in his first season as a starter, with six catches for 52 yards through the team's first three games. He has not hauled in more than 19 yards in a contest this season, but has the potential to cause mismatch problems at 6-2, 202.

• TE Cameron Green (redshirt junior) — The club's primary "superback" (basically a glorified tight end) has emerged in a big way as a primary weapon in Northwestern's attack, leading the team in touchdown catches (two), while ranking second with 183 receiving yards. He put on a show in the Wildcats' Sept. 15 loss to Akron when he reeled in 11 grabs for 125 yards and two scores.

• LT Blake Hance (redshirt senior) — He missed the Akron contest with injury, but is listed as the team's starter on its official depth chart. Redshirt sophomore Gunnar Vogel filled in during his absence against the Zips, so whether or not Hance is able to go will be something to keep an eye on.

• LG J.B. Butler (redshirt senior) — The veteran has been a staple on one of the most experienced offensive lines in the conference, starting 16 games over the past two years. At 308 pounds, he is the fourth-heaviest player on the entire team.

• C Jared Thomas (redshirt junior) — He is in his first year as the team's starting center, though he opened three games at left tackle a year ago. Unfortunately for Thomas and the rest of the unit, Northwestern's rushing attack has only been able to muster 114 yards per game, which is the worst mark in the conference and ranks 114th nationally.

• RG Tommy Doles (redshirt senior) — Like Hance and Butler, Doles has also been a mainstay on the Wildcat front line, starting all 26 affairs over the past two seasons. The Grand Rapids, Mich., native has been a big part of a Wildcat unit that is only yielding 4.6 tackles for loss per game, which is 30th nationally.

• RT Rashawn Slater (sophomore) — The youngster has received high accolades during his short time in Evanston, grading out as the No. 1 freshman offensive lineman in the country last year by Pro Football Focus after he started 12 games at right tackle. Slater has picked up right where he left off, starting the first three outings of 2018.

Projected Starters on **Defense**

• DE Joe Gaziano (redshirt junior) — The redshirt junior had one of the best years of any lineman in the league last season, leading the Big Ten with nine sacks. He has picked up right where he left off, racking up four tackles for loss and two sacks through three contests.

• DT Jordan Thompson (senior) — The 6-3, 292-pounder is the most experienced player on the Wildcat defensive line, having started 23 tilts over the past two seasons. He has tallied 3.5 tackles for loss and two sacks in the early going.

• DT Alex Miller (junior) — He has missed the Wildcats' last two games with injury, but like Hance above, is listed as the team's starter on its official depth chart. If he is unable to go, look for fifth-year seniors Ben Oxley and Fred Wyatt to fill in.

• DE Samdup Miller (sophomore) — He started all 13 games last year as a freshman, racking up 8.5 tackles for loss and 5.5 sacks. Miller's numbers have dipped slightly in 2018, with 2.5 of the former and zero of the latter so far.

• LB Paddy Fisher (redshirt sophomore) — Fisher was a tackling machine in 2017 as a redshirt freshman, checking in fourth in the conference with 113 stops, en route to second-team All-Big Ten honors from the media. His 28 tackles so far in 2018 once again lead the team.

• LB Nate Hall (redshirt senior) — His 79 stops were second on the team last year, while his 16.5 tackles for loss were the fourth most in the conference. Hall started 2018 with a bang when he compiled 10 tackles in a win at Purdue, but oddly enough, his totals have dropped each game since (seven against Duke and only four against Akron).

• Blake Gallagher (sophomore) — The first-year starter has made a huge impact in the Wildcat linebacking unit, checking in second on the team with 26 takedowns. He has been a large part of why the Wildcat rush defense ranks a respectable 42nd nationally (129.6 yards surrendered per game).

• CB Montre Hartage (senior) — He is the most experienced defensive back on the team, having started all 26 contests the past two seasons. However, not even he has been able to save a Wildcat secondary that is allowing opponents to throw for 250.3 yards per game on it (95th nationally).

• CB Greg Newsome (freshman) — Despite being just a freshman, he has grabbed a starting cornerback spot from redshirt junior Trae Williams, though Williams still sees plenty of action. Newsome and the rest of the defensive backfield are allowing foes to complete 66.3 percent of their passes, which ranks 121st in college football.

• S J.R. Pace (sophomore) — He has stepped into a starting role at safety for the departed Kyle Queiro and Godwin Igwebuike at safety after recording two picks last year as a backup. Pace has already racked up three pass breakups and a pick in 2018.

• S Jared McGee (redshirt senior) — He has finally stepped into a starting role after appearing in 25 games the last two years (only three starts). McGee has compiled 19 tackles and three tackles for loss from his safety spot in 2018.

Projected Starters on Special Teams

• K Charlie Kuhbander (sophomore) — He was named honorable mention All-Big Ten after setting the program record last season for most field goals by a rookie kicker (13). Kuhbander has struggled mightily so far in 2018, though, only connecting on one of his three attempts (both misses have come from inside 50 yards).

• P Jake Collins (redshirt senior) — He was a three-year starter at Western Kentucky before transferring to Evanston following the 2017 season. Collins is off to the worst campaign of his career, though, averaging just 37.3 yards on 15 punts.

Biggest Offensive Strength

"The Wildcats' biggest strength on offense just announced his retirement on Monday," Vaccher explained. "Jeremy Larkin was their most consistent and most dynamic weapon.

"No matter what was going on around him, the Wildcats could count on their star running back to run for 100 yards and make plays in the passing game.

"Northwestern still has Clayton Thorson, though, a fifth-year senior with 42 career starts. Given a clean pocket, he can be as productive as any quarterback in the country."

Larkin's retirement is a major blow to the Wildcat offense — he had been averaging 4.8 yards per carry and had scored five touchdowns, which were tied for the second in the Big Ten.

Moten and freshman Isaiah Bowser are the only other two running backs on the entire roster who have even carried the ball this season, but they have only combined for just 21 yards on 13 touches.

Northwestern's rushing attack with Larkin had only been averaging 3.1 yards per carry (121st nationally).

Biggest Offensive Weakness

"The offensive line has been a problem the last couple of games and is a little banged up," Vaccher revealed. "Both starting tackles — Rashawn Slater and Blake Hance — went down with injuries against Duke, and Hance and Tommy Doles, NU's best O-lineman, missed the Akron game.

"They are really going to be under the gun against a defensive line that Pat Fitzgerald said is as good as he's seen since he's been in the Big Ten.

"The other thing they are lacking is a deep threat that can stretch the field. The

Wildcat offense isn't very explosive."

The Wildcat front hasn't done a good job of protecting its quarterbacks this season, yielding two sacks per game, which is eighth in the Big Ten and 71st in college football.

Michigan's front seven, meanwhile, has averaged 2.5 sacks per contest (45th in the country), which is a bit lower than what we're used to seeing — they tallied 3.2 last season, which put them at No. 7 in the FBS.

As for a lack of play makers on offense, Northwestern has racked up just five plays of 30 yards or more, which checks it in at 101st nationally.

Biggest Defensive Strength

"Northwestern's strength is its front seven, which is pretty stout against the run," Vaccher noted. "They have a strong pair of defensive ends in Joe Gaziano and Samdup Miller — though not on the level of [Michigan junior] Rashan Gary and [fifth-year senior] Chase Winovich — and Paddy Fisher is a tackling machine at middle linebacker who seems to be getting better every week.

"Their goal will be to contain Michigan's running attack and make them one-dimensional."

The Wildcat front seven has done a good job stopping opposing rushing attacks this season — especially once they reach the red zone.

They have only surrendered two scores on the ground in 2018, which is tied for the sixth fewest in the country.

Pounding the ball is exactly what Michigan wants to do, though.

Its 10 rushing touchdowns are tied for third in the Big Ten, while its 5.5 yards per carry average is the fourth-best mark in the league.

The Wildcats will likely have to stop U-M's ground game if they hope to have a decent chance of winning on Saturday.

Biggest Defensive Weakness

"Their weakness has been a glaring one through the first three games — giving up big plays," the Wildcat insider said. "Northwestern has allowed a dozen explosion plays, nine of them through the air.

"Akron's Kato Nelson had a field day, beating Northwestern deep for passes of 56, 43, 40, 25 and 24 yards, with the last two going for touchdowns.

"Fitzgerald has talked a lot about the lack of eye discipline in his secondary, and it has showed as just about every starting defensive back has been victimized by the long ball this year."

As a result, the team's pass defense has posted poor statistics in just about every category.

All three of its opponents have thrown for at least 204 yards on them, with Purdue going for 270 and Akron for 277 — though Purdue ranks 16th nationally in passing yards per game (318.3), Akron is not known for its passing attack, checking in at 75th nationally (222.3-yard average).

Northwestern has also surrendered six scores through the air, which is tied for 69th in college football.

That doesn't bode well against a Michigan passing attack that is only gaining confidence behind junior quarterback Shea Patterson. He is connecting on 70.1 percent of his passes, and has tossed seven scores against only two picks.

The Wildcat defensive backfield, meanwhile, has let all three of its foes complete at least 60.7 percent of their throws, including a 75 accuracy mark by Duke.

Vaccher's Final Score Prediction

"Northwestern is coming into Saturday's game off of two straight disappointing home losses and a bye," Vaccher said. "But if there's one thing I've learned covering this team, it's that they are very good at putting bad performances behind them. They have had a lot of practice, too.

"I think the Wildcats defense will hold its own on Saturday. If they play more fundamentally sound in the first half and limit big plays, Northwestern may be able to stay in the game for a while.

"However, I find it hard to believe that the Wildcat offense can score enough to win, especially without Larkin. Michigan is too good defensively and the Wildcats just don't have enough firepower to pull off the upset."

Pick: Michigan 27, Northwestern 17

Keys To The Game: Michigan Wolverines Football at Northwestern

Chris Balas • TheWolverine.com

Northwestern will be without top running back Jeremy Larkin now and in the future, his career ended by injury. It's the passing game, however, that will continue to determine the team's success this year.

The Wildcats like to air it out, and they've had mixed success this year. Quar-

terback Clayton Thorson seems to have lost a gear due to his own injury, though he can still sling it, and losses to Duke and Akron have sullied what was a nice season-opening win at Purdue.

Here's the thing about the Wildcats, though — they play extremely hard for head coach Pat Fitzgerald, and they always seem to play very disciplined on defense against the Wolverines. This is a program with a lot of pride, and though it will always have its ups and downs they do things the right way, and it's tough to win in their stadium's environment — that makes it dangerous on any given week.

Michigan, meanwhile, continues to improve in a number of areas, and this defense has championship potential. It's about the offensive line, now and in every week to come.

Here's what the Wolverines need to do to win Saturday's game in Evanston:

Communicate on the back end: Northwestern is second in the country in pass attempts, airing it out 50 times a game, and 20th nationally in passing yards per game (307.3). At the same time, the Wildcats only manage 6.1 yards per passing attempt, which ranks 110th in the land.

In short, this is a team that uses a short passing game as its running game, and that will probably be the case even more so now with Larkin out. Rub routes, slants … name it and you'll see it Saturday, and that's why it's so important that the linebackers and defensive backs are on the same page. There was a defensive miscommunication on the first passing play against Notre Dame, for example, that changed the course of that game … those are things that will get you beat.

Coverage is going to have to be tightened Saturday — teams have thrown the slant successfully against U-M this year — but Michigan has better athletes than the Wildcats' receivers and should be able to stick with them. But it can get confusing when a quarterback is slinging it all over the yard, so they need to talk and make sure they're where they need to be.

Use play action and exploit the Northwestern secondary: We know Michigan head coach Jim Harbaugh wants to run the ball, and so does everybody else. First-down play action worked particularly well a week ago, however — the Wolverines threw successfully on six first-down throws in the first half and ran eight times. Per former U-M All-Big Ten offensive lineman Doug Skene, who breaks down the film for us each week on TheWolverine.com, this line is at its best when pass blocking out of play action.

One of the more overused clichés in sports is "pass to set up the run." It's way more complicated than that, folks. It's about what the defense is giving, tendencies, strengths and weaknesses, and more. There was a third-and-eight play last week, for example, in which junior running back Tru Wilson picked up a first down on a big gain on a run/pass option — fans loved it because it worked.

But this is a game we'd like to see junior Shea Patterson air it out 30-plus times. The Wildcats are vulnerable on the back end and U- M has an advantage here … as long as the line does its job and protects like it needs to.

Own third down: Michigan continues to climb in the national rankings, 29th in third downs converted on offense and 35th on conversions allowed. The Wildcats are 70th and 51st in those categories, respectively, one of the reasons for their struggles this year.

The Wolverines should be able to keep drives alive against this group and get off the field. At the very least, they need to do enough to win the field position battles throughout the game ... outstanding special teams coverage and the play of punter Will Hart and kickoff specialist Jake Moody will also play a part.

The Breakdown: Michigan has better athletes on both sides of the ball and seems to be going deeper into the playbook. The Wildcats, meanwhile, will be playing with a hobbled quarterback and minus their best running back against one of the nation's top defenses — not a good combination.

This is a road game in that it's not being played at Michigan Stadium, but half the crowd (at least) will be wearing maize and blue. U-M is a decided favorite for a reason.

THEWOLVERINE.COM STAFF PICKS

TheWolverine.com Senior Editor Chris Balas: Michigan 34, Northwestern 13

Michigan is starting to hit its stride, it seems ... but Northwestern has had a week off, and the Wildcats are no patsy like Nebraska. U-M pulls away in the second half.

The Wolverine Senior Editor John Borton: Michigan 42, Northwestern 13

Northwestern's a road game, but the savages reside elsewhere, and Michigan makes itself at home.

TheWolverine.com Recruiting Editor Brandon Brown: Michigan 31, Northwestern 10

Northwestern's offense isn't very good, so if Michigan's defense is clicking again it could be a rout. Still, Northwestern always seems to find a way to hang in there, so it probably won't get away from the Fighting Fitzgeralds too bad.

TheWolverine.com Staff Writer Austin Fox: Michigan 31, Northwestern 14

This isn't a game Michigan is likely to dominate from start to finish (the way it did against Nebraska), but it is a contest the Wolverines should control and come out on top by double digits.

TheWolverine.com columnist Drew Hallett: Michigan 31, Northwestern 7

Unlike the last two Michigan-Northwestern contests in Evanston, there won't be any sliding field goal holders, #M00Ns or late-game drama this Saturday.

TheWolverine.com Analyst Doug Skene: Michigan 38, Northwestern 10

This is not a red letter game that gives me reasons to be concerned.

Michigan Wolverines Football News & Views: Dissecting Jim Harbaugh's Words

Chris Balas • TheWolverine.com

Michigan head coach Jim Harbaugh met the media Monday. Here is our take on his comments about playing freshmen and much more:

NEWS: Michigan has only a handful of freshmen expected to avoid the redshirt this year, compared to 15 or 16 who played immediately in 2016.

HARBAUGH: "[Defensive end] Aidan Hutchinson is playing at a really upper-class level right now, a true freshman doing extremely well. We got a look at [running back] Christian Turner for the first time this past week. He's really going to be doing well. The freshmen that are going to be able to play are playing.

"The difference is in 2016 we had to get young guys playing because we had so much graduation in the senior class, we really made it a point of emphasis to get as many freshmen playing [as possible]. We knew they'd have to be playing the following year."

VIEWS: They've very conscious of the four-game redshirt limit, but it's pretty clear the guys who are going to avoid the redshirt.

Hutchinson, offensive tackle Jalen Mayfield, wide receiver Ronnie Bell, kicker Jake Moody and possibly Turner are those guys right now.

And that's the way it should be. Guys with experience, mixed in with very good freshmen, make up championship teams. This squad still has work to do, but Harbaugh's program is on solid footing in that respect. The depth is much better, and the pups don't need to play right away any more.

NEWS: Redshirt freshman wide receiver Tarik Black is off crutches and will see his specialist the weekend of Oct. 5.

HARBAUGH: "He's rehabbing good, and his doctor will be coming into town when the Packers play the Lions. He's scheduled to take a look at it and could have some good news at that point. Things look really good the way he's progressing."

VIEWS: Black is the best of a talented sophomore class, and his addition to the lineup — if he's completely healthy — would give the Wolverines a receiving corps reminiscent of years past. They could really use him for the meat of the schedule, starting with Wisconsin Oct. 13.

Word is out now that he's expected to return this season, and that could be huge for an offense that's just starting to put things together.

NEWS: Junior defensive end Rashan Gary dominated the first half of Saturday's game with Nebraska before sitting in the second half.

HARBAUGH: "During the week, his intensity in practice, every day … he's such a great example for the rest of the players on the team — 'If I want to play like Rashan Gary, how do I go about that?' Study Rashan, see how he approaches his workouts, his practice, his meetings. It's at the highest level.

"It's a great position to be in as a coach … look at your best player, see how he prepares, do like Rashan."

VIEWS: Fans have been looking for more performances from the former consensus No. 1 overall recruit like the one we saw against Nebraska in a 56-10 drubbing, and that is understandable. He was the nation's top recruit, and he is an absolute freak of an athlete.

Gary needs to play like that against the Wisconsins, Michigan States and Ohio States now, and he is capable.

NEWS: Michigan's special teams have become a team strength.

HARBAUGH: "Consistently good, plus they've made the big play in every phase … tackles inside the 20, turnovers on the punt, scoring on the kickoff return and the punt return. We've been really good at making the big plays."

VIEWS: Special teams are often the difference between winning and losing in tightly contested games, and who would have guessed that this year's squad would be so good in an area in which many were so concerned?

Punter Will Hart and kickoff specialist Jake Moody are absolute weapons. Redshirt sophomore kicker Quinn Nordin, too, can make the really long ones … but can he be consistent on the short ones and the extra points?

But this team is really, really good in at least two phases of the special teams game.

NEWS: The offensive line looked good Saturday, but it's still a work in progress.

HARBAUGH: "It was a good opportunity to play the offensive linemen … a lot of sophomore linemen redshirted last year but are now getting their opportunity. It's nice to see their progress."

VIEWS: There's still a long way to go. Some of the bigger plays Saturday came against some horrible defense (effort, especially) and would have been stoned by better teams.

The true tests for this team come starting two weeks from now against Wisconsin. The good news — the skill positions have improved dramatically. With better quarterback play last year, for example, the Wolverines would have won at least three more games.

Now that quarterback play is very, very good. We're still waiting for the day that the offensive line play matches it.

Michigan Wolverines Football: Mattison Sees Lots Of Dad In Aidan Hutchinson

Chris Balas • TheWolverine.com

Michigan defensive line coach Greg Mattison hasn't coached many sons of his former players — in fact, he said freshman defensive end Aidan Hutchinson might be the first. The 6-7 Hutchinson is much bigger than his father, Chris — an early 1992 All-American and co-captain at U-M — but Mattison learned long ago that size isn't everything.

Mattison had just arrived at Michigan from Texas A&M in 1992 when he first got a look at Chris Hutchinson.

"I know one thing, his father was one heck of a football player," Mattison said of Aidan. "It's kind of ironic, I had just come from A&M where we had some great big first-round guys, a wrecking crew defense.

"I got to Michigan here and I was looking at the defensive line saying, 'Where are all these guys?' I was looking for 6-6 guys, there's all of a sudden Chris."

He left several years later thinking the 6-2 standout might have been the best lineman he'd ever coached.

"He had intelligence, technique, strength, desire, all the things that make a great defensive lineman," Mattison remembered.

The mannerisms between father and son are extremely similar, down to the look of determination on their faces in the trenches. Mattison wasn't ready to elevate Aidan to dad's level just yet or say he's ahead of schedule — which several teammates have said — but he knows he has a lot to work with in the youngster.

"I don't know that he was recruited to be ahead of schedule," the coach said. "I know one thing, though, when we recruited him, he signed with us and we knew he was coming here, we were very, very excited about it. He's very mature, very intelligent, obviously comes from unbelievable stock. That family is off the charts, and not just the father who I had the fortune to have a chance to coach, but the mom, the sisters … they're off the charts.

"He's part of that. I think that's one thing that's helped him … we always talk about that bar. I think you'll find that bar in his home was very high, academically and athletically. He agreed a long time ago to that, and that's why he's doing what he's doing."

In short, he's his dad … only taller.

"Aidan has a lot of that in him. That's the other part," Mattison said. "The good thing is he has six more inches. He's got a great future."

NOTES

• Junior Carlo Kemp's move inside has been great for both the line and for Kemp. Mattison said he wasn't surprised by Kemp's success given how hard he's worked.

"I was expecting that," he said. "You don't work as hard as he has since he's been here, don't make the gains he's made in the weight room and invest as much as he has, and not have good things happen. I'm really happy he's been playing the way he's been playing."

• Sophomore tackle Aubrey Solomon continues to work to get back after undergoing surgery for a meniscus injury in his knee.

"He's doing everything he's supposed to be doing. I'll be excited when he is cleared, but he's doing very well," Mattison said. "He's working hard, and our strength staff is doing a great job with him, our trainers are doing a great job with him. He's just going along with the process.

"I don't know what the timeline is … I never question what that is. Just seeing him in my meetings, to see him working out, he's done well. He's good. That's part of football. He's done everything he's supposed to be doing, and that's all you can ask of him."

• Sophomore end Kwity Paye, injured in last week's game, is fine and has been practicing, Mattison said. He took "30 or 40 reps" Tuesday.

Wolverine Watch: Harbaugh's Crew Stands A Far Cry From 2017

John Borton • TheWolverine.com

"We're in somebody else's house. I love it. That's when the fans get the craziest. That's the environment everybody wants to perform in. It's cool. We'll step away from here and cause some havoc in somebody else's house."

— Junior defensive end Rashan Gary

Michigan put itself in position to once again cause havoc, by getting its own house in order. Just ask Scott Frost. He can attest better than anyone to the resurgence of Jim Harbaugh's team.

"The game was over at halftime," the Nebraska head coach said of Michigan's 56-10 pummeling of his crew on Saturday.

"Our whole team needs to see right now what it takes to play at that level. We weren't ready to play at that level today."

Twelve months earlier, neither was Michigan.

Again, beating 2018 Nebraska isn't beating Ohio State. The 'Huskers haven't experienced their last game this year in which the red of their jerseys seeps into their faces.

But this is about Michigan and obvious progress made. Dial it back to the four-games-in point from 2017, and there's simply no doubt.

This team is 3-1, that team was 4-0. The advantage for the latter ends there, like a sprinter winning the opening 30 yards of a marathon.

On Sept. 23, 2017, quarterback Wilton Speight lay on the Ross-Ade Stadium turf, his back fractured. He'd never play another snap of the football for the Wolverines.

When they carted him out, they also carried away any chance for his team to compete for the Big Ten title. Speight led a 40-points-per-game offense a year earlier, and took the Wolverines within a scarlet-tinted call in Ohio Stadium of the Big Ten championship game and the playoff.

His successors in 2017 took Michigan to 25.2 points per game and more interceptions (10) than touchdown passes (nine). They connected on 53.2 percent of their passes, in an offense that scored 10, 13, 10, 20 and 19 in the losses that were to follow.

Four games in this year, junior transfer QB Shea Patterson is completing 70.1

percent of his throws, 18th best in the nation. He's guiding an offense averaging 41.8 per game, yet bearing the humbling reminder of its 17-point production in Michigan's only loss. His backup, redshirt freshman Dylan McCaffrey, is better now than any option in 2017.

Patterson is enjoying his own renaissance, transported from a 2017 injury and the NCAA-clouded mess that was Ole Miss to an opportunity to win big in The Big House.

"For Shea to end up where he is, running out of that tunnel, from where he was — with a knee brace and no communication with his former offensive coordinator — it's almost a miracle," noted Sean Patterson, Shea's dad.

There's way more than a new quarterback, to be sure. There's a new offensive line coach, overseeing a group growing by the week. There's a former Alabama offensive coordinator, coaching wide receivers who grew up immensely from their freshman to their sophomore seasons.

There's a first-year tight ends boss who has his charges not only catching the ball, but blocking at a high level to clear the way for a so-far effective run game.

There's a defense stingy as expected (14.2 points surrendered on average), and special teams that have returned a punt and a kickoff for touchdowns, average more than 50 yards per punt and are capable of connecting from 50 yards or more on field goals.

"All three phases of the game, I feel like we're improving," Gary said. "It's a great feeling, sitting back and watching the game, playing in the game. It's a feeling I haven't had in a while."

Gary seemed almost taken aback when asked about Michigan's ability to adjust to what teams are doing offensively. He'd rather dictate, like the Wolverines did in making Nebraska quarterback Adrian Martinez run for his life.

"Our defensive model is, we have to go out and play our ball, to the point that the offense needs to adjust to what we're doing," Gary said. "It's having that type of mindset, going out there and forcing the offense to have to check down plays, because they see what we're in.

"That's what we want. If we keep playing like we're playing, it's going to be a great year, no matter who we go against."

The biggest tests remain ahead, although the triple threat of Wisconsin, Michigan State and Penn State doesn't look nearly as daunting on the field as it did on paper coming into the season. Meanwhile, the Wolverines simply feature more weapons to fire than they did a year ago, once the tough games arrive.

"The leadership they have, with Coach Harbaugh, Coach [Don] Brown, Coach [Greg] Mattison has been there forever … you just see something different in

their eyes," the elder Patterson pointed out. "It's like, okay, we'll build. I think the sky is the limit for this team.

"They're a team that you're not going to want to play in November. They've got a great opportunity ahead of them."

By The Numbers: U-M Has Been Dominant Against Unranked Road Opponents

Austin Fox • TheWolverine.com

Much has been made about Michigan's 17-game losing streak to ranked opponents on the road, a stretch that dates all the way back to 2006 (a victory at No. 2 Notre Dame that year was the last triumph).

However, U-M has fared incredibly well against unranked foes on the road during the Jim Harbaugh era, going 9-2. He is 9-6 in all his road games at U-M.

Northwestern comes into Saturday's contest with a 1-2 record and is nowhere near the AP top 25, and the Wolverines will look to continue their success over inferior opponents in their home stadium.

Every Road Game of the Harbaugh era		
Year	**Game**	**Result**
2018	at Northwestern	?
2018	at No. 12 Notre Dame	L, 24-17
2017	at No. 5 Wisconsin	L, 24-10
2017	at Maryland	W, 35-10
2017	at No. 2 Penn State	L, 42-13
2017	at Indiana	W, 27-20
2017	at Purdue	W, 28-10
2016	at No. 2 Ohio State	L, 30-27
2016	at Iowa	L, 14-13
2016	at Michigan State	W, 32-23
2016	at Rutgers	W, 78-0
2015	at Penn State	W, 28-16
2015	at Indiana	W, 48-41
2015	at Minnesota	W, 29-26
2015	at Maryland	W, 28-0
2015	at Utah	L, 24-17

It should be noted that the two losses (at Utah in 2015 and at Iowa in 2016) came by a total of eight points, with the former coming at the hands of a Utes team that wound up going 10-3.

Four of those nine victories occurred against bowl opponents — Minnesota, Indiana and Penn State in 2015, and Purdue in 2017. In addition, two of those four came by double digits — a 28-16 victory at Penn State in 2015 and a 28-10 triumph at Purdue last year.

Five of the nine wins on the table above have been by 10 or more points — 28-0 at Maryland in 2015, 28-16 at Penn State in 2015, 78-0 at Rutgers in 2016, 28-10 at Purdue in 2017 and 35-10 at Maryland in 2-17.

Here is a quick look at what Michigan did on the road against unranked teams in the two years prior to Harbaugh's arrival in Ann Arbor:

Michigan on the Road Against Unranked Foes From 2013-14		
Year	Game	Result
2014	at Northwestern	W, 10-9
2014	at Rutgers	L, 26-24
2013	at Iowa	L, 24-21
2013	at Northwestern	W, 27-19
2013	at Penn State	L, 43-40
2013	at Connecticut	W, 24-21

The Wolverines went just 3-3 from 2013-14 against unranked opponents on the road.

Although all three setbacks were narrow defeats, the victories, on the other hand, did not come in convincing fashion.

Michigan won the three affairs by a total of 12 points, or an average of four points per contest.

At 1-2, the Wildcats fill the bill perfectly as a club that Harbaugh's crew should handle (if the last three years are any indication) this weekend, something that couldn't be said during the Brady Hoke era.

BY THE NUMBERS: MICHIGAN AT NORTHWESTERN

3rd Is where Michigan ranks nationally in total defense, yielding just 240.3 yards per game. The Wolverines finished third last season as well, surrendering 271 per contest.

4 Runs of 40 yards or more this season for senior running back Karan Higdon, which is the second most in all of college football (behind Memphis running back Darrell Henderson's six). Higdon had four such runs all of last year. As a team, U-M is tied for sixth nationally with four such ground gains.

7.9 Yards per carry for Higdon in 2018, which is second best in the Big Ten (behind Maryland redshirt freshman running back Anthony McFarland's 10.7). His 121.3 yards per game, meanwhile, stands as the third-highest mark in the league.

9 Touchdown passes U-M has tossed this season — seven by junior quarterback Shea Patterson and two by redshirt freshman Dylan McCaffrey. U-M threw nine in 13 games last year.

10-9 Was the final score of Michigan's last trip to Evanston on Nov. 8, 2014. The score was 0-0 at halftime, and the Wildcats went for a potential game-winning two-point conversion with just three seconds left that failed.

32 Of the last 36 matchups between the two schools have been won by the Wolverines. Against Northwestern, U-M boasts a 57-15-2 all-time advantage and a 22-7 mark in Evanston.

38-0 Was the final score the last time the two programs met, on Oct. 10, 2015, inside The Big House. Northwestern was ranked No. 13 nationally at the time, and the shutout was the third of three consecutive for the Maize and Blue (a 31-0 domination of BYU and a 28-0 shellacking of Maryland preceded it).

60 Degrees for a projected high on Saturday in Evanston, with nothing but sunshine. The late September weather is finally starting to bring in autumn temperatures.

66.3 Completion percentage Northwestern's defense is allowing to opposing passers, which ranks 121st nationally. On the flip side, U-M signal-callers are completing 67 percent of their throws this year, which is the 26th-best mark in college football.

346 Rushing yards this year for Northwestern redshirt sophomore running back Jeremy Larkin, who retired from football on Monday due to a medical condition. The Wildcats' next-leading rusher is redshirt junior running back John Moten, with 21 yards.

Updating How Every Former U-M Player Performed During Week 3 Of The NFL

Austin Fox • TheWolverine.com

Three weeks of the NFL season have come and gone, and plenty of former Wolverines are making their presence felt throughout the league.

Here is a look at how they all performed during week three, along with their stats as a whole on the year:

• **Ben Braden (Played at U-M from 2012-16), OG, New York Jets:** Resides on the 1-2 Jets' practice squad and has not appeared in a game this season.

• **Tom Brady (1996-99), QB, New England Patriots:** Connected on 14 of 26 passes (53.8 percent) for a season-low 133 yards with one touchdown and one interception in a 26-10 loss at Detroit on Sunday night ... He is, however, completing 64.0 percent of his throws on the year, with 644 passing yards, six scores and two interceptions ... Despite the Patriots' 1-2 start, Brady isn't panicking ... "We're three games into the season, so we're not throwing in the towel," he said, per Zack Cox of NESN.com. "I would never do that. That's not what this team has been about. That's not what this organization's all about. We've got to work harder and be smarter."

• **Jake Butt (2013-16), TE, Denver Broncos:** Started his third straight game in Sunday's 27-14 loss at Baltimore, bringing in two catches for eight yards ... Has eight receptions for 85 yards in 2018, with a long of 22, for 2-1 Denver.

• **Taco Charlton (2013-16), DE, Dallas Cowboys:** Started in Dallas' 24-13 defeat at Seattle over the weekend, tallying three tackles ... Has begun all three of the 1-2 Cowboys' contests this season, and has racked up nine stops, a sack and a pass defended.

• **Jehu Chesson (2012-16), WR, Washington Redskins:** Was waived by the 2-1 Redskins on Sept. 17 and returned to the practice squad the following day, which is where he now sits ... The wideout has appeared in one game this campaign, but has not recorded any statistics.

• **Frank Clark (2011-14), DE, Seattle Seahawks:** Continued his torrid pace in a 24-13 win over Dallas, recording two tackles and a sack ... Has now racked up six tackles and three sacks in three starts for 1-2 Seattle ... Todd Milles of The Dallas News had high praise for the defensive end after the game, noting how he was the "Seahawks' most disruptive force, opening lanes for other pass rushers."

• **Jeremy Clark (2012-16), CB, New York Jets:** Resides on the 1-2 Jets' practice squad and has not seen game action this year.

• **Mason Cole (2014-17), C, Arizona Cardinals:** Started at center in the 0-3 Cardinals' 16-14 loss to Chicago ... Has now started all three outings of his NFL career.

• **Blake Countess (2011-14/finished at Auburn), CB, Los Angeles Rams:** Made a huge impact in a 35-23 win over the Los Angeles Chargers, recovering a blocked punt in the end zone for a touchdown, while also returning two kicks for a 25.5-yard average ... Has appeared in all three tilts for the 3-0 Rams in 2018, but the only defensive stat he's recorded has been a lone tackle ... Head coach Sean McVay revealed that return specialist JoJo Natson will miss time after having surgery on his broken left hand, and Countess will now return kicks as a result.

• **Amara Darboh (2012-16), WR, Seattle Seahawks:** Sits on the 1-2 Seahawks' injured reserve list and will miss the rest of the season after undergoing successful shoulder surgery Sept. 4.

• **Devin Funchess (2012-14), WR, Carolina Panthers:** Had a solid showing in Carolina's 31-21 victory over Cincinnati, bringing in four catches for 67 yards and a score ... The 6-4, 225-pounder has racked up 14 catches for a team-best 185 receiving yards and one touchdown for the 2-1 Panthers.

• **Ben Gedeon (2013-16), LB, Minnesota Vikings:** Racked up two tackles in the Vikings' 27-6 loss to Buffalo ... Started the season opener for 1-1-1 Minnesota, but has not begun a game since ... He has compiled seven stops on the year.

• **Graham Glasgow (2012-15), OG, Detroit Lions:** Made his third straight start at center in the 1-2 Lions' surprisingly dominant 26-10 win over the Patriots on Sunday night.

• **Ryan Glasgow (2013-16), DT, Cincinnati Bengals:** Compiled four tackles in a 31-21 setback at Carolina, but was carted off the field in the fourth quarter with a torn ACL and will miss the rest of the season ... In just three contests for 2-1 Cincinnati, he tallied 11 tackles ... "I just felt a pop and a burn and I knew it wasn't good," he said after the game. "The first thing I said to [the trainer] Paul when he came over was, 'I know I tore something in my knee.' It just didn't feel good, so I knew my season was probably done at that point."

• **Brandon Graham (2006-09), DE, Philadelphia Eagles:** Made two tackles in the Eagles' 20-16 victory over the Colts ... Has started all three games, and has recorded nine tackles for the 2-1 Eagles ... "Brandon Graham was the team's leader in snaps through two weeks at defensive end, but against the Colts he was last," Zack Rosenblatt of NJ.com wrote. "This is likely just more of a week to give Graham a breather more than a sign of any other issue. This defensive end group remains stellar."

• **Leon Hall (2003-06), CB, Oakland Raiders:** Started for the Raiders and accumulated three tackles and a pass defended ... The 33-year-old has started two of 0-3 Oakland's three contests this year, and has tallied 14 tackles and three passes defended.

• **Chad Henne (2004-07), QB, Kansas City Chiefs:** Hasn't seen action in 2018, serving as Pat Mahomes' backup for 3-0 Kansas City.

• **Willie Henry (2013-15), DT, Baltimore Ravens:** Missed the 2-1 Ravens' first three contests while recovering from umbilical hernia surgery he underwent in late August.

• **Delano Hill (2013-16), S, Seattle Seahawks:** Sat out his second straight affair with a hamstring injury ... The only game he has seen action in this season was 1-2 Seattle's opener, where he registered one tackle.

• **Khalid Hill (2013-17), FB, Seattle Seahawks:** Resides on the 1-2 Seahawks' injured reserve list and has not played in 2018.

• **Mo Hurst (2013-17), DT, Oakland Raiders:** Started and tallied one tackle in a 28-20 setback to Miami ... The rookie has now begun 0-3 Oakland's past two games and has compiled five tackles and a sack.

• **Kyle Kalis (2012-16), OG, Cleveland Browns:** Remains on the 1-1-1 Browns' practice squad and has not participated in a game this year.

• **Joe Kerridge (2011-15), FB, Green Bay Packers:** Is a member of 1-1-1 Green Bay's 10-man practice squad and has not been activated for any of the first three outings.

• **Taylor Lewan (2009-13), OT, Tennessee Titans:** Started at left tackle in the Titans' victory over Jacksonville after missing the team's Sept. 16 contest with a concussion ... Has started two of 2-1 Tennessee's three affairs in 2018.

• **Jourdan Lewis (2010-13), CB, Dallas Cowboys:** Did not play in Sunday's 24-13 loss to the Seahawks and appears to be buried on the bench ... Saw action in 1-2 Dallas' first two contests of the year, but has not tallied any stats.

• **Erik Magnuson (2012-16), OL, San Francisco 49ers:** Made his 2018 debut in the 49ers' loss to Kansas City on Sunday after missing the season's first two games with a hamstring injury ... He could be in store for a bigger role for the 1-2 49ers soon, according to David Fucillo of NinersNation.com ... "If Mike Person is unable to go against the Los Angeles Chargers and Joshua Garnett probably won't be available, I think we would see Erik Magnuson get the start," Fucillo wrote. "He was active for the first time this season, and was in place over Najee Toran. Magnuson replaced Person when the latter injured his knee, which suggests he is next man up at right guard."

• **Patrick Omameh (2008-12), OG, New York Giants:** Received the starting nod for a third consecutive contest at right guard in the 1-2 Giants' 27-22 win over Houston.

• **Jabrill Peppers (2014-16), S, Cleveland Browns:** Began Thursday's 21-17 victory over the New York Jets at safety and racked up four tackles, while also returning three punts for a total of 10 yards ... Peppers has started all three contests for the 1-1-1 Browns and has compiled 15 tackles, with a 26.5-yard average on four kick returns and a five-yard clip on five punt returns.

• **Thomas Rawls (2011-2013/finished at Central Michigan), RB, Cincinnati Bengals:** Signed to the 2-1 Bengals' active roster Sept. 19, but did not appear in their 31-21 loss to the Panthers.

• **Jake Rudock (2015), QB, Detroit Lions:** Has found a home on the 1-2 Lions' practice squad and hasn't been activated in 2018.

• **Jake Ryan (2010-14), LB, Green Bay Packers:** On the 1-1-1 Packers' injured reserve and will miss the entire 2018 season after tearing his ACL Aug. 1.

• **Michael Schofield (2009-13), OG, Los Angeles Chargers:** Started his third straight contest at right guard in the 1-2 Chargers' 35-23 loss to the Rams on Sunday.

• **Dymonte Thomas (2013-16), S, Denver Broncos:** Missed a 27-14 loss to the Ravens over the weekend with an abdomen injury ... Hasn't started any games this year, but has seen action in two of 2-1 Denver's contests and compiled one tackle.

• **Matt Wile (2011-14), P, Minnesota Vikings:** Had an incredible afternoon in a loss to the Bills, averaging 51.8 yards on five punts, including a long of 70 ... Has played in all three of 1-1-1 Minnesota's affairs and is averaging 46.2 yards on 15 punts this season, including seven he has landed inside the 20.

• **Jarrod Wilson (2012-15), S, Jacksonville Jaguars:** Played in Jacksonville's 9-6 loss to the Titans, but did not record any stats ... Has seen action in three affairs for the 2-1 Jaguars, but has only racked up one tackle.

• **Chris Wormley (2012-16), DL, Baltimore Ravens:** Started his second straight outing in place of the injured Michael Pierce (foot), accumulating one tackle ... Has taken part in all three games for 2-1 Baltimore (two starts), and racked up four tackles and two passes defended ... "Worm has really improved, and has gotten better," head coach John Harbaugh said after Sunday's game. "He always had it in him and he's still just scratching the surface of his potential. He and I talk pretty much every week and he's a smart guy, very mature and knows exactly what he needs to do from one week to the next to improve."

The Week In Michigan Football Recruiting: Sept. 26

Brandon Brown • TheWolverine.com
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Here is a look back at the last week of action involving the Maize and Blue's recruiting efforts:

• With the class filling up, Hot Boards are being updated bi-weekly now. The defense is the latest side of the ball to be reviewed and a few big targets still remain. The latest offensive Hot Board can be found linked here.

• Michigan now has 23 commits in the 2019 class (ranked No. 8 nationally) and five in 2020 (No. 9), and all of their 2018 seasons are underway. Some of them are already stuffing the stat sheet and helping their respective teams get off to fast starts. Here's a look back at who has done what so far on the gridiron.

• West Bloomfield (Mich.) High three-star inside linebacker Cornell Wheeler committed to Michigan earlier this week, giving U-M its fifth pledge in the 2020 class. Here is more on his commitment to the Wolverines:

• Michigan picked up a commitment from Oakley (Calif.) Freedom three-star all-purpose back Giles Jackson a couple of weeks ago and landed an extremely versatile offensive weapon in the process. Take a look at how Jackson compares to Michigan legend Desmond Howard, a member of the 1988 recruiting class out of Cleveland St. Joseph. It's also interesting to look at how Jackson fits in at Michigan as a player, member of the 2019 class and cog in future U-M offenses.

• Junior athlete prospect Ian Stewart, out of Gibraltar (Mich.) Carlson, was back at Michigan last weekend for the first time since his summer experience at the barbecue and he loved everything about the stay.

• Fort Wayne (Ind.) Culver Academies 2020 defensive end Deontae Craig was in Ann Arbor for the first time this past weekend. The 6-3, 225-pound prospect already has four offers, from Indiana, Indiana State, Tennessee and Michigan State, and his recruitment is on an upward swing. The people at the University of Michigan played a key role in his first visit with the program this past weekend.

• The last time at The Big House for Mars (Pa.) High 2020 four-star offensive tackle prospect Michael Carmody was in July for the barbecue. And though he has never been to Michigan for a game, that all changed this past weekend when he saw the Wolverines blowout Nebraska during the "Maize Out."

• Michigan hosted sophomore athlete Jamari Buddin on Saturday and, while he has been to Michigan a few times before, this time he was afforded new opportunities. Teammates with 2020 Michigan commit Andre Seldon, the two of them star for Belleville (Mich.) High.

• Michigan is nothing new to 2021 Cass Tech cornerback Kalen King. With an offer from Iowa State already in hand, the recruiting process is still young for the 5-10, 160-pound Detroit prospect, though he's now taken in a game at The Big House for the second week in a row.

• Michigan is still looking to finish out their 2019 class, and with only one cornerback currently committed, anything can happen. The Wolverines hosted Grand Blanc (Mich.) High 2019 cornerback Kortez Toles for the first time last weekend and he was impressed with his findings in Ann Arbor.

• Dublin (Ohio) Coffman linebacker Devon Williams holds an early offer from Boston College, but other schools are paying attention. Just a sophomore, he already stands at 6-2, 205 pounds and plays with an aggressive nature on the field. Thus, he has taken a liking to what he has learned about Don Brown's defensive system at Michigan and got a chance to check it out last weekend when he visited for the Nebraska game.

• Michigan's game against Nebraska wasn't used as a huge recruiting event, but it sure ended up looking good for the prospects that were in attendance. The 56-10 blowout impressed prospects from across the country and from all classes. Here is what some of them had to say after Michigan's huge win over the Huskers.

• San Antonio Christian three-star tight end and Michigan commit Nick Patterson has been at a couple of different high schools during his prep career and that has allowed a few different Rivals.com analysts to see him, including Woody Wommack. As the younger brother of former five-star Shea Patterson, Nick has been watched closely throughout his recruitment and is starting to carve out his own place on the trail.

• West Bloomfield (Mich.) High sophomore athlete Donovan Edwards scored two touchdowns in a 42-21 win over Lake Orion on Friday night and looked explosive all game long. The 5-11, 193-pounder is on a team full of future college players and might be the one who jumps off the tape the most.