

DEC. 27, 2018 ♦ MICHIGAN VS. FLORIDA

## Game Info

**Site:** at Mercedes-Benz Stadium (73,272)

**Kickoff:** 12:00 p.m.

**Television:** ESPN

**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:** Michigan has met Florida four times previously — all of which have been wins, including two under Jim Harbaugh ... The Wolverines have previously played SEC schools 14 times in bowls (8-6 record) and 35 times overall (25-9-1) ... U-M is ranked No. 7 nationally in the College Football Playoff rankings and No. 8 by the Associated Press and coaches; Florida checks in at No. 10 in all three listings.

## Michigan Wolverines Football: Previewing Florida With A Gator Insider

Austin Fox • TheWolverine.com

Michigan will face Florida in the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl on Saturday, looking to cap off its season with an 11-2 record.

### PROJECTED STARTERS ON OFFENSE

• QB Feleipe Franks (redshirt sophomore) — His 23 touchdown passes were tied for the fifth most in the SEC, but his 58.5 completion percentage checked in at 10th in the conference. After tossing at least one pick in six of the team's first eight games, Franks finished the regular-season with a 7-0 touchdown-to-interception ratio in the club's final four contests.

• RB Jordan Scarlett (redshirt junior) — His 717 rushing yards were the second most on the roster, behind junior Lamical Perine's 750. Scarlett averaged 5.9 yards per carry, but only eclipsed the century mark twice this year.

• WR Van Jefferson (redshirt junior) — He was the Gators' top wideout, leading the club in both receiving yards (439) and TD grabs (six). Jefferson surpassed 35 receiving yards just once in the team's final five games, however.

• WR Josh Hammond (junior) — His 308 yards were the third most on the team, along with his four touchdown receptions. Hammond ended the regular season with a bang, hauling in at least one TD catch in three of his last four contests.

• WR Tyrie Cleveland (junior) — After reeling in 410 yards in 2017, Cleveland regressed in a big way this season by only compiling 212 yards on 18 catches. He is a

large physical target at 6-2, 205 and his three touchdown receptions were tied for the fourth most on the team.

• TE C'yontai Lewis (fifth-year senior) — He wasn't much of a factor in the passing game in 2018, only accumulating 100 yards on eight catches with no touchdowns. Although he served as Florida's primary tight end, Lewis only played more than 39 snaps just four times.

• LT Martez Ivey (senior) — According to Pro Football Focus (PFF), he has graded out with just a 59.1 overall mark (64 is considered average), which is the second lowest of any of the team's five starting offensive linemen. The publication actually tabbed him as a superb pass blocker (66.1), but a subpar run blocker (58.1).

• LG Tyler Jordan (senior) — Like Ivey, PFF also graded Jordan out below average on the year, with a 59.9 overall tally. They slapped him with an even lower run-blocking grade than Ivey, though, at 56.

• C Nick Buchanan (redshirt junior) — His 57.9 grade is the lowest of any of the team's starting offensive linemen. Despite the apparent subpar play, Buchanan started all 12 games this year and played at least 44 snaps in each of them.

• RG Fred Johnson (senior) — PFF had high praise for him, rewarding him with a 77.2 grade as a pass blocker and a 71.5 tally in the run blocking department. One negative for him was that he committed five penalties this season, which were the third most of any of Florida's offensive players.

• RT Jawaan Taylor (junior) — PFF declared him as the Gators' best offensive lineman, tagging him with a 79.9 mark. The outlet also rated him as Florida's third best overall offensive player, and gave him an 81 tally as a pass blocker and an 81.8 grade as a run blocker.

### PROJECTED STARTERS ON DEFENSE

• DL Kyree Campbell (sophomore) — His numbers don't necessarily jump off the page — half a sack and 2.5 tackles for loss — but PFF has given him an above-average grade of 65.9. The publication revealed that Campbell is at his best when he's stopping the run, giving him a 70.8 tally in that area.

• DL Adam Shuler (fifth-year senior) — After coming off the bench for the first two games of the year, Shuler earned the starting job for the final 10 contests. He only compiled half a sack and 2.5 tackles for loss, but his five quarterback hurries were the second most on the club.

• DL Jabari Zuniga (redshirt junior) — He had a monster year on the Gator defensive line, racking up 11 tackles for loss and 6.5 sacks. His durability was also one of the most impressive aspects of his game, with his 561 snaps on the year checking in as the fifth most on the entire defense.

- LB Vosean Joseph (junior) — He was a tackling machine in 2018, leading the club with 87 stops (tied for ninth most in the SEC). On top of that, his nine tackles behind the line of scrimmage were tied for the third most on the roster, while his four sacks were also third most.

- LB Jachai Polite (junior) — He was the star of the Gator defense this season, leading the team in both TFLs (16) and sacks (11). As a result, PFF rewarded Polite with an incredibly high 90.2 overall rating.

- LB David Reese (junior) — His 78 tackles were the second most on the team behind Joseph's 87. PFF actually revealed Reese was better in coverage than against the run, checking in with a 70.4 grade in the former and a 65.1 in the latter.

- CB C.J. Henderson (sophomore) — PFF stated that he was one of the best players on Florida's defense this season, awarding him with an 81.5 overall grade (fifth highest of any Gator defender). His seven pass breakups led the team, while his two forced fumbles were tied for second.

- CB Trey Dean (freshman) — Despite being just a freshman, Dean started eight of Florida's contests, including the final five. He racked up six pass breakups (second most on the team) and was rewarded with a 65.4 mark from PFF.

- CB Chauncey Gardner-Johnson (junior) — He recorded 66 tackles, nine tackles for loss and three sacks from Florida's secondary, resulting in an 82.0 overall mark from PFF (fourth highest of any defensive player on the roster). Gardner-Johnson also tied for the team lead with two interceptions and ended with an incredible 85.2 overall grade in pass coverage.

- S Jeawon Taylor (junior) — He registered 56 tackles from his safety spot and finished with a 74.4 mark from PFF against the run. He also ended the year with a slightly above-average grade in pass coverage, at 64.6.

- S Donovan Stiner (sophomore) — The youngster concluded the regular-season with 47 tackles and two interceptions after starting 11 of the team's 12 contests. PFF tabbed him as an solid pass defender, rewarding him with a 73.4 overall mark.

### PROJECTED STARTERS ON SPECIAL TEAMS

- K Evan McPherson (freshman) — He had a phenomenal freshman campaign, connecting on 15 of his 17 field goal attempts including a perfect 9 of 9 from inside 30 yards. He was 3 of 4 from beyond 40 yards, and made all 45 of his extra point attempts.

- P Tommy Townsend (redshirt junior) — He averaged 44.9 yards on 49 punts, with the former checking in as the fourth-best mark in the SEC. Townsend was especially effective during the second half of the season for the Gators, averaging at least 45.5 yards per punt in five of the last seven games.

Jacque Franciulli of *GatorsTerritory* provided background info on this year's Florida team, while giving her final score prediction.

### Biggest Offensive Strength

"Florida's backfield is loaded with playmakers in Scarlett, Perine and [freshman running back] Dameon Pierce," she explained. "The Gators have faced some physical defenses and still managed to run the ball well, averaging about 210 yards per contest."

"A lot of their success on the ground is due to their run blocking and O-line play — the men in the trenches have only yielded 15 sacks this season. UF has also managed to not hurt themselves much in the way of turnovers, giving the ball away just 14 times."

Unsurprisingly, three of UF's four lowest rushing outputs have occurred in its three losses — 128 yards against Kentucky, 170 yards versus Georgia and 113 yards on Missouri. The Gators tallied 4.6 yards per carry or fewer in all three of those losses, and compiled a clip of 5.0 yards a rush or more in eight of the other nine games.

It should also be noted that both Scarlett and Perine averaged 5.9 yards per carry on the year, while Pierce posted 6.5 — the trio also combined for 12 touchdowns.

Franciulli noted UF's impressive ball security — the Gators' 14 turnovers ranked as the 20th fewest in the nation. Michigan is also one of the best teams nationally at holding onto the football, with its 10 giveaways checking in as the third fewest in college football.

### Biggest Offensive Weakness

"Florida has struggled to take advantage of every scoring opportunity," the analyst noted. "The Gators have struggled to score inside the 20, failing to cash in on nine trips to the red zone this year."

Statistically, UF's red-zone numbers aren't pretty. The Gators have scored a touchdown on just 58.8 percent of its red-zone trips, which is tied for 91st in the FBS.

Michigan's offense is all too familiar with this problem as well, with its 60.0 touchdown percentage in the red zone standing at No. 76 nationally.

Including field goals, UF has only registered points on 82.3 percent of its red-zone trips, which ranks 80th nationally.

As stout as U-M's defense was this season, though, it frequently allowed its foes to find pay dirt once they reached the 20. Opponents scored touchdowns on 68 percent of their red-zone appearances against the Wolverine defense, which ranked 100th in the FBS.

### Biggest Defensive Strength

"Jachai Polite," Franciulli bluntly stated. "The Florida defensive end finished with

43 tackles, 16 tackles for a loss, 11 sacks and five forced fumbles. Simply put, Polite is a game changer for the Gators defense.”

Florida’s defense is one of the best in college football at getting in opposing backfields — its 32 sacks are tied for 33rd nationally and its 79 TFLs rank a respectable 49th.

Michigan, however, did an incredible job at protecting its quarterbacks this season, only yielding 18 sacks (tied for 24th in the land).

UF’s opportunistic defense also led to 24 takeaways, which is tied for 14th nationally and more than any other team in the conference. Florida forced two or more turnovers seven different times this year, including a season-best six against Tennessee on Sept. 22.

### Biggest Defensive Weakness

“The Gators have allowed a few big plays a game, while also struggling to cover tight ends,” the expert noted. “In addition to that, UF has also dealt with some depth issues at defensive back this year after one of their best players, [sophomore defensive back] Marco Wilson, went down with an ACL tear.

“Several young players stepped up and have done very well for the Gators, but sometimes their lack of experience has proved costly.”

UF has surrendered 12 plays of 40 yards or more in 2018, which is tied for ninth in the SEC.

Despite the loss of Wilson, the secondary has performed incredibly well, only surrendering 175.1 passing yards per game (tied for 10th best nationally). On top of that, teams are only completing 53.4 percent of their passes against the Gator defensive backfield, which is tied for 12th best in the nation.

U-M junior quarterback Shea Patterson, meanwhile, has been known for his efficiency in 2018, connecting on 65.1 percent of his throws, while only tossing five picks.

### Franciulli’s Final Score Prediction

“I think this could be a matchup where Florida surprises a few people, especially since it seems like the Gators are eager to play in this game, while Michigan is lamenting how they missed on the College Football Playoff, with several of their stars sitting out from the game,” she explained.

“The only thing that holds me back from picking the upset is I don’t see this as a good matchup for Florida. I think Michigan will not only control the clock, but I think the Wolverines’ defense will force Franks into making mistakes.

“I think Michigan ultimately gets the win. I’m picking the **Wolverines 27-21.**”

## Michigan Wolverines Football Keys To The Game: Peach Bowl vs. Florida

Chris Balas • TheWolverine.com

It’s Michigan vs. Florida — again — and yeah, it feels kind of like ‘been there, done that.’

This will be the third time in head coach Jim Harbaugh’s four years that the Wolverines and Gators have squared off, and U-M dominated the last two. Florida managed only 273 yards of total offense in a 41-7 Citrus Bowl beatdown three years ago, its only score on a two-yard pass in the first quarter, and didn’t manage an offensive touchdown in last year’s meeting during the opener in Arlington, Texas.

The Wolverines won that one, 33-17, despite trailing 17-13 following two Florida pick-sixes.

This game figures to be closer. For one, Gators head coach Dan Mullen has his team playing well offensively. They’ve posted 63 and 41 points in their last two games, the latter a rivalry win at Florida State. And while U-M is still No. 1 in the nation in total defense, only allowing 262.5 yards per game and a little over four yards per play, two of its standouts — juniors Devin Bush and Rashan Gary — aren’t playing.

Here are Michigan’s keys to a fifth win in five tries against Florida:

Pressure quarterback Felipe Franks and defend the quick throws and crossing routes: The Michigan defense did neither at Ohio State, and it resulted in a bludgeoning behind quarterback Dwayne Haskins and his six touchdown throws. Many of them came at fifth-year senior cornerback Brandon Watson’s expense, but the Wolverines’ front didn’t help him (or anyone else in the secondary), giving Haskins plenty of time to set up and throw.

Granted, defensive ends Gary and Chase Winovich weren’t 100 percent, but blitzes didn’t get home, there was no pressure from anywhere up front ... and when Michigan tried to adjust and play zone, it was more of the same.

This game will always start up front. It will be interesting to see how defensive coordinator Don Brown adjusts given U-M’s vulnerability against the Buckeyes. The Gators don’t have OSU’s talent and overall speed, but they’re plenty athletic. They attacked Mississippi State’s outstanding front with receiver screens, quick passes and the occasional medium to deep ball, and it worked in a 13-6 win.

The Florida offensive line also finished the regular season 17th nationally in sacks allowed at 1.25 per game, so the U-M pass rushers have their work cut out.

Establish a solid running game: This one’s not going to sit well with the “turn Shea Patterson and his outstanding receivers loose” crowd, but it also makes sense, even with senior running back Karan Higdon out.

Florida's defense ranks 10th in the nation for passing defense, allowing only 175.1 passing yards per game. The Gators have only given up 75 plays of 10 yards or more through the air — that's seventh in the country — and they get to the quarterback for 2.67 sacks per game (30th nationally).

Nobody's calling for two runs and a pass on every series, but Michigan is going to have to run the ball to have success. Maybe that means mixing in more read-option with Patterson or breaking tendency, but the offense would be playing to Florida's strength if Patterson dropped back to throw 45 times.

Play like it's a championship game: Michigan has four players sitting out; Florida has none. On the surface, fair or not, that makes it appear the Gators have more players that really want this one. That certainly wasn't the case three years ago when U-M tight end Jake Butt ran to the sideline in the second quarter imploring his team to "finish them!" because he could see in their eyes that the Florida players had quit.

There are several guys on this team who care — guys who played through injury, took losses extremely hard. It only take a few who don't have that urgency to change a game. As Detroit Pistons head coach Dwayne Casey said after a disheartening loss to a poor team in December, the "give a crap" factor wasn't there for his team — and as trite as it seems, it matters.

The Breakdown: The College Football Playoff has made games like these seem irrelevant, which is why it's probably going to expand to eight teams in the near future. Regardless, 11 wins and a potential top-five finish are accomplishments, and that's what's on the line (at least the former ... the latter is out of Michigan's control, though a win obviously helps their case).

Bowl wins help perception when it comes to recruiting, program trajectory, etc. While nothing can erase the stain of the blowout loss in Columbus, a Peach Bowl victory could at least start the healing.

## STAFF PREDICTIONS

**TheWolverine.com Senior Editor Chris Balas: Michigan 27, Florida 23**

Michigan has plenty of talent outside the four guys not playing, but make no mistake — Florida has plenty of athletes of their own. This one's going to be a test. Expect a fourth-quarter game.

**TheWolverine.com Senior Editor John Borton: Michigan 34, Florida 17**

The 2019 season features a nice combo of defensive grit and Shea butter.

**TheWolverine.com Recruiting Editor Brandon Brown: Michigan 30, Florida 17**

In order to get the taste of the massacre in Columbus out of everyone's mouth, Michigan needs a win badly and Jim Harbaugh knows it. A win would also help with recruiting momentum heading into the offseason and spring. Several key guys are sitting out for U-M, but Harbaugh and his staff are going to take this game very seriously.

**TheWolverine.com Staff Writer Austin Fox: Florida 24, Michigan 17**

Michigan will either come out determined to prove the Ohio State loss was a bit of a fluke, or it will come out and play uninspired and unmotivated football. The players are saying all the right things this week, but the latter almost seems more likely at this point.

**TheWolverine.com Staff Writer Andrew Hussey: Michigan 24, Florida 17**

While Michigan will be without many key players, the Wolverines are the superior team to the Gators. Michigan will close the season with 11 wins for just the 10th time in program history.

**TheWolverine.com Columnist Drew Hallett: Florida 21, Michigan 17**

Three years ago in Jim Harbaugh's first season, Michigan feasted on Florida in a bowl game after being blown out by Ohio State. The Wolverines were in the honeymoon phase, and with nearly everyone returning the following season, they were eager to give a preview of what was to come.

Though Michigan was blown out again by Ohio State this year, it's Florida, not Michigan, who's in the honeymoon phase, and with multiple starters sitting out to understandably focus on their professional careers, U-M will be shorthanded and not have that same eagerness. The Gators, who are efficient on both sides of the line of scrimmage, will capitalize and eke out a win.

**TheWolverine.com Analyst Doug Skene: Michigan 38, Florida 31**

Michigan's offense needs to open up a bit to push their points over 30. The U-M wideouts should have a big day, while the defense will be looking to prove themselves without the guys sitting out.

## Defensive Coordinator Don Brown Likes The Future, Talks Young Talent

Chris Balas • TheWolverine.com

Michigan defensive coordinator Don Brown will lose some outstanding players next season, but he's got a lot of good ones returning, too.

Junior linebacker Devin Bush Jr. will be the toughest to replace, and it starts in the Peach Bowl, which Bush noted he was not cleared to participate in when he announced he'd be leaving early for the NFL Draft. A few have already stepped up in his absence.

“Next man up,” Brown said Thursday. “This kid [sophomore linebacker] Josh Ross has been playing all year. We’ve lost guys, including Devin, for a period of time in games, so he’s got to play. I have a lot of confidence in the young man moving forward.

“The good thing is I knew pretty early in the process Devin was hurt, so at least I’ve been able to prepare him for the challenges ahead.”

Freshman Cam McGrone has turned heads for the last several weeks.

“I think [he’s] doing a good job,” Brown said of the rookie. “[Redshirt freshman] Jordan Anthony is certainly reliable. He’s really put himself in a good situation. Those two guys in particular.

“On the back end, this [freshman cornerback] Vincent Gray is really impressing me. Obviously, [sophomore cornerback] Ambry Thomas kind of gets left out there. I think he’s playing really, really well. I have no fear about what his ceiling is or how good a player he is, all those things. I think he’s going to be a really good player.”

Michigan’s young safeties have also made a move. Freshman Sammy Faustin has “gotten a little bit of run,” Brown said, but one in particular has stood out.

“[Sophomore safety] J’Marick Woods really [is going upward],” Brown said. “This bowl period has been really good for him. [Sophomore safety] Brad Hawkins ... really good for him. With [junior safety Josh] Metellus, J’Marick, Hawkins and our incoming recruits, I feel really good about that back end.

“I feel really good about what we were able to do at linebacker. We’ve really got everybody back with the exception of [fifth-year senior Noah] Furbush [and Devin Bush]. That’s a positive. We’ve got a couple holes we’ve got to plug in the defensive line, which is an ongoing process, but we feel good about what we were able to do in the early signing period.”

One defensive tackle in particular is making a move.

“I think [Donovan] Jeter is going to be really good,” Brown said of the redshirt frosh. “He’s another guy this bowl practice period has been a benefit for him. He now knows the defense, has a good handle on what we’re trying to get done and he’s strong as an ox now. Moving him is an issue.”

Replacing junior end Rashaan Gary, meanwhile, is a by-committee endeavor. But, again, Michigan gets a head start on that task in the bowl game with Gary sitting out.

“The key is with the growth of [sophomore] Kwity Paye and [junior] Josh Uche, we’re able to manufacture production out of that position pretty solidly between those two guys,” Brown said. “That just needs to continue this weekend.”

## Michigan Football News & Views: Jim Harbaugh And The Jets, Peach Bowl And More

Chris Balas • TheWolverine.com

Thoughts on Michigan head coach Jim Harbaugh’s comments from Atlanta, where the Wolverines are preparing for the Peach Bowl.

**NEWS:** One recent report claims the New York Jets are interested in Harbaugh for their soon-to-be-vacant head coaching position.

**HARBAUGH (To ESPN.com):** “This is a choreographed message that comes up at this time every year before signing day. It’s people spreading messages to further their own personal agenda. But I’m on record right here, right now: I’m not going anywhere. I’m staying at Michigan. We have big plans here, and there’s a lot we want to accomplish.”

**VIEWS:** That still hasn’t stopped the rumors, but we’ll say it again — Harbaugh’s not going anywhere. If you don’t believe us, consider this: Miami Dolphins owner and Michigan alum/donor Stephen Ross told the Miami Herald recently he wouldn’t be pursuing Harbaugh, either.

Why’s that important? Because several years ago, before Harbaugh took the San Francisco 49ers job (when he was at Stanford), he was also interested in the Michigan job. We reached out to Ross after a report surfaced that the Dolphins would offer Harbaugh \$8 million a year, and he emphatically denied that report.

Ross was interested, though, because, as he told us: “Jim has made it clear he wants to coach in the NFL.”

That was then. This is now, and you can be sure that if Harbaugh were flirting with the NFL, Ross would be involved, and Harbaugh would very likely be interested. Ross loves U-M, but if a Harbaugh jump to the pros were inevitable, he’d be in the mix.

Just more evidence that Harbaugh will be Michigan’s coach for the foreseeable future.

**NEWS:** Several Michigan players will sit out the Peach Bowl, including captains Karan Higdon, a senior RB, and Devin Bush Jr., a junior LB. Junior end Rashaan Gary and fifth-year senior offensive tackle Juwann Bushell-Beatty will also sit.

**HARBAUGH:** “It was their decision, and we respect it. I have respect for them, and that’s the decision for them to make.”

**VIEWS:** That doesn’t mean he agrees with it. In fact, it’s hard to believe he would.

Yes, times have changed, but Harbaugh grew up playing for Bo Schembechler, whose ‘The Team, The Team, The Team’ speech still resonates in Ann Arbor and is plastered many places in Schembechler Hall.

We've looked around a bit, and we haven't found another program that has four guys sitting out their bowl game. We have seen a number of players talk about how they'd never miss the opportunity to "play with their brothers" one more time, including several Ohio State Buckeyes playing in the Rose Bowl.

And for the "Rose Bowl means more" crowd ... maybe for you, but not in this day and age, folks. Both the Rose and the Peach are New Year's Six games and won't have an impact on the national championship.

Fair or not, there's the perception that their program means more to the players in Ohio than it does to some of the Wolverines ... and we've heard some openly wonder if that had something to do with 62-39.

**NEWS:** Michigan traveled to Atlanta before Christmas and spent the holiday together.

**HARBAUGH:** "We love football. This will be our first Christmas together as a team. We've done [other holidays together], but this, of course, is the big, major holiday. Christmas is as big as it gets, it's the big one. It's a chance to spend time with our team family ... that's how we look at each other — we're a family."

**VIEWS:** Despite the fact that some opted not to play in the bowl, this has been a tight-knit group much of the year. Harbaugh has mentioned that a number of times, and it's been pretty clear.

That's why there's hope that U-M will take this game seriously. We know several still aspire to win 11 games — for just the 10th time in school history — and guys like junior quarterback Shea Patterson and fifth-year senior defensive end Chase Winovich are among them. They'll slide in and fill the void of leadership created by Higdon and Bush's absences and be de-facto captains.

There's still enough talent left to handle a good, but not great, Florida squad ... but they'd better come to play.

**NEWS:** Redshirt freshman quarterback Dylan McCaffrey has started throwing and is nearly recovered from a broken collarbone suffered late in the year.

**HARBAUGH:** "He's starting to do some things. He's about seven weeks now into healing. He can throw the ball now, is starting to do some other things in practice as well."

**VIEWS:** McCaffrey looked great in backup duty this year, but keep in mind he did so in limited action. He rushed for 99 yards and a touchdown on 10 carries and completed 8 of 15 passes for 126 yards and two touchdowns in six appearances.

That's for the "man, I wish we could see more of him" crowd and those expressing some disappointment that Patterson is returning for his senior year. Patterson wasn't perfect, but he was very, very good, and he's all in, and still learning and growing.

Having more than one good quarterback isn't a luxury anymore. It's a necessity, and U-M finally has it.

"The guys we have at quarterback on our team are really good," Harbaugh said. "I think all of them will be NFL players, and I love coaching them. I love the way they compete and improve."

They're making each other better, too. There's no entitlement as there has been in the recent past, and that bodes well for next year.

## Wolverine Watch: Yes, It Matters

John Borton • TheWolverine.com

Michigan heads to the New World Bowl without its team captain 1,000-yard running back, team captain leading-tackler middle linebacker and a former five-star defensive lineman.

All are choosing not to participate, although one — junior linebacker Devin Bush Jr. — legitimately mentions a hip injury incurred in the Ohio State game impacting his decision.

There's obviously a perception danger regarding the NWB (also known as the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl). A Michigan fan might (not unreasonably) think, well, if some of the team's best players don't care much about the Wolverines' final game this season, why should I?

Here's why.

They're going to play football in The Big House in 2019, regardless of who deigns to perform. Michigan should be strong, too, a top-10 team coming in with a returning quarterback and a skilled and seasoned group of wide receivers, a veteran offensive line, plenty of talent on defense and strong special teams.

That season starts Saturday, for all practical purposes. There is no lack of Wolverines excited to show what that might look like.

Start with junior quarterback Shea Patterson. He doubled down, in no uncertain terms, regarding the continued effort to climb to the top of the Big Ten and beyond. That includes taking down Ohio State, which humiliated the Wolverines in the final regular-season game.

In his announcement regarding coming back to Michigan in 2019, Patterson said this: "I've been thinking about it for the past month, ever since after that game. I just thought to myself there's no way in hell I'm leaving this place on that note. Regardless of a draft grade, whatever the case may be, I would never end my career with an

opportunity to come back with a loss to that team. That’s the one thing that has ignited me. I think one of the biggest things that impacted me coming back – one of them — was that last game in Columbus.

“I just felt we worked so hard and had such a good season leading up to that game. I was more upset that I couldn’t do enough to get us a win. I love the guys so much and let down the Michigan fan base, and I just felt like we all did that day. That just brought a lot of emotions. Anger. I think anger was the biggest one. I hated to lose and even more, I hated to lose to them, especially with what we had in front of us.”

He can unleash a whole lot of anger on Florida’s Gators, channeled into pinpoint passing to the likes of second-year wideouts Donovan Peoples-Jones, Nico Collins and Tarik Black. And he should be given every opportunity to do so.

Think Michigan-Florida, the last time the Wolverines took down Urban Meyer. There’s a nice blueprint to get the most juice out of these peaches, and maybe out of 2019.

Lloyd Carr’s last team out-gunned the Gators, 41-35, with Chad Henne throwing for 373 yards and three touchdowns. Now, Carr enjoyed running the football as much as his former boss, Bo Schembechler, and every bit as much as Michigan’s present head coach.

But on that day, it was bombs away. It needed to be, and the Wolverines held nothing back. It should be that way again, which obviously doesn’t preclude a rushing attack (Mike Hart went for 129 yards and two TDs on the ground in that triumph).

Patterson and his wideouts can, and should, make a statement in Atlanta. But so should many more.

Sophomore linebacker Josh Ross posted 50 tackles (fourth on the team) as a backup linebacker this year. On Saturday, he could post his intentions to take over up the middle for the Wolverines in 2019.

A host of other defenders could make their own declarations. Junior linebacker/defensive end Josh Uche can blitz the notion that the Wolverines might lack a pass rush in ’19. Sophomore defensive end Kwity Paye can build on his already strong contributions, while rookie lineman Aidan Hutchinson can further demonstrate his potential impact.

Junior tailback Chris Evans gets a crack at another start, and showing he’s ready to step up against the Gators and when the gates open next fall. If he doesn’t, nobody’s waiting. Freshman Christian Turner made a push in bowl practices. Four-star recruit Zach Charbonnet can likely see the hole from California and intends to hit it hard as an early enrollee.

All over the field, there will be Wolverines with a point to prove. There’s an 11th win up for grabs and massive pain from the last time out to assuage.

It’s not going to heal itself. There’s no better salve in football than passing the pain on to someone else, and reason to watch closely what happens.

## By The Numbers: U-M Has An 8-6 Record Against The SEC In Bowl Games

Austin Fox • TheWolverine.com

The Wolverines have been matched up with a team from the SEC in six of their last nine postseason contests, including this Saturday’s showdown with Florida in the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl.

The Gators are an especially familiar opponent for the Maize and Blue, with this weekend’s outing marking the third time in four years the two programs will have faced each other (though it’s worth noting the 2017 matchup came in the season opener).

The series has been owned by Michigan, which holds a 4-0 all-time record against the squad from Gainesville, with the first meeting occurring in the Outback Bowl on Jan. 1, 2003 (a 38-30 U-M win).

Here’s a look at the Maize and Blue’s 14 all-time bowl matchups with SEC foes:

Michigan Against The SEC In Bowl Games			
Date	Opponent	Bowl	Result
Jan. 2, 1984	Auburn	Sugar Bowl	L, 9-7
Jan. 2, 1988	Alabama	Hall of Fame Bowl	W, 28-24
Jan. 1, 1991	Ole Miss	Gator Bowl	W, 35-3
Jan. 1, 1997	Alabama	Outback Bowl	L, 17-14
Jan. 1, 1999	Arkansas	Citrus Bowl	W, 45-31
Jan. 1, 2000	Alabama	Orange Bowl	W, 35-34
Jan. 1, 2001	Auburn	Citrus Bowl	W, 31-28
Jan. 1, 2002	Tennessee	Citrus Bowl	L, 45-17
Jan. 1, 2003	Florida	Outback Bowl	W, 38-30
Jan. 1, 2008	Florida	Capital One Bowl	W, 41-35
Jan. 1, 2011	Mississippi State	Gator Bowl	L, 52-14
Jan. 1, 2013	Outback Bowl	South Carolina	L, 33-28
Jan. 1, 2016	Florida	Citrus Bowl	W, 41-7
Jan. 1, 2018	South Carolina	Outback Bowl	L, 26-19

U-M first postseason clash with an SEC club didn't occur until Jan. 2, 1984, when it fell to Auburn in the Sugar Bowl.

Michigan had been to 14 bowl games prior to its showdown with the Tigers in 1984, but 11 of the 14 were Rose Bowls, and the other three included appearances in the Orange, Gator and Bluebonnet Bowls.

Michigan regularly began facing clubs from the SEC in the '90s and early 2000s, and enjoyed plenty of success against them during that era.

From the Jan. 2, 1988 win over Alabama until the Jan. 1, 2008 victory over Florida, the Wolverines put together a fabulous 7-2 record against the SEC, with the only two losses coming to a 10-3 Alabama squad in 1997 and an 11-2 Tennessee club in 2002.

Since Lloyd Carr's 41-35 defeat of the Gators in his final game as a collegiate head coach on Jan. 1, 2008, however, the tides have turned a bit.

Michigan is just 1-3 in its last four postseason outings against the SEC (all since Jan. 1, 2011), with Rich Rodriguez, Brady Hoke and Jim Harbaugh each having picked up a loss.

The one win in that span, however, belongs to Harbaugh, when his debut 2015 Maize and Blue squad annihilated the Gators, 41-7, in the Buffalo Wild Wings Citrus Bowl on Jan. 1, 2016.

Harbaugh reached the 10-win plateau at Michigan this season for the third time in his four years at the helm, but has yet to cross the 11-victory barrier. He will have a chance to do so on Saturday.

It should be noted, however, that the Wolverines have won at least 10 games three times in a four-year span for the first time since 1997-99, when it went 12-0, 10-3 and 10-2, respectively.

## BY THE NUMBERS: FLORIDA VS. MICHIGAN

**4** Potential starters for Michigan who will miss the game — senior running back Karan Higdon, fifth-year senior right tackle Juwann Bushell-Beatty, junior defensive end Rashan Gary and junior linebacker Devin Bush Jr. Higdon, Gary and Bush are choosing to sit out and get a head start on their NFL preparation (although Bush is still dealing with an injury he suffered in the Ohio State loss), while Bushell-Beatty will miss the contest with a turf toe ailment.

**9** Times in school history that U-M has won 11 or more games in a single season (the program began playing football in 1879). A victory over the Gators would give the Wolverines their 11th triumph for the just the 10th time, with the previous nine occurrences being 1901, 1902, 1903, 1905, 1971, 1986, 1997, 2006 and 2011.

**11** Sacks and 16 tackles for loss for Florida junior defensive end Jachai Polite. His 11 quarterback takedowns are tied for the second most in the SEC, and his 16 TFLs rank third. Michigan's sack leader, meanwhile, is junior linebacker Josh Uche (seven)

and its tackle for loss leader is fifth-year senior defensive end Chase Winovich (14.5).

**47th** Bowl game for U-M. The Wolverines have an all-time record of 21-25 in postseason affairs, and went to their first one on Jan. 1, 1902, when they defeated Stanford, 49-0, in the first-ever Rose Bowl. However, they didn't go to another bowl game until Jan. 1, 1948, and only attended two more prior to the 1970s. From 1921-45, the Big Ten did not allow its programs to go to the postseason, and from 1946-74 only the conference champion was allowed to go (and no team was permitted to go two years in a row).

**58.5** Completion percentage for Florida redshirt sophomore quarterback Feleipe Franks, which ranks 10th in the SEC. Michigan's secondary, on the other hand, is allowing a 48.9 completion percentage to opponents, which is the second-best mark in college football.

**72nd** Is where Florida's rush defense ranks nationally, allowing 169.6 yards per game. It also checks in at 11th in the SEC and will be going up against a Michigan rushing attack that is 25th in the FBS, accumulating 214.3 yards per outing.

**2011** Was the last time U-M won one of college football's major bowl games. The Wolverines defeated Virginia Tech, 23-20, in the Sugar Bowl that season (which was considered a BCS contest at the time) and have only played in one since — the Orange Bowl following the 2016 campaign, where they lost to Florida State, 33-32.

**2017** Is when the Mercedes-Benz Stadium opened in Atlanta, which is where Michigan and Florida will square off. Its construction cost was \$1.6 billion, and it is home to the Atlanta Falcons and the Atlanta United FC soccer team of the MLS. Its capacity is 75,000 for football games.

## Three Former Wolverines Earn First Starts Of The Season In NFL's Week 16

Austin Fox • TheWolverine.com

Sixteen weeks of NFL action are now in the books, and only one weekend remains before the regular season draws to a close.

Here's the complete breakdown of how every former Wolverine performed during the holiday games:

- Ben Braden (Played at U-M from 2012-16), OG, New York Jets: Made his first appearance of the 2018 campaign as a reserve in Sunday's 44-38 loss to the Packers.

- Tom Brady (1996-99), QB, New England Patriots: Connected on 13 of his 24 passes for 126 yards with a touchdown and two picks in this weekend's 24-12 triumph over the Bills ... On the year, Brady has completed 65.4 percent of his throws for 4,105 yards, 25 TDs and 11 interceptions, to go along with two rushing touchdowns ... His 4,105 yards are the ninth most in the NFL, while his 25 scores are tied for 11th, and his 65.4 completion percentage is good for 19th ... "An issue for New England is Brady's knee," Kevin Patra of NFL.com revealed on Christmas Eve. "The quarterback clearly doesn't look right as he deals with a left knee injury. Despite evidence to the contrary, Brady insisted Monday he feels 'great.' He wouldn't discuss the knee injury when asked specifically if he's dealing with an MCL sprain. 'I am not getting into specifics with injuries,' he said, via Ryan Hannable of WEEI. 'It just doesn't make any sense — it's football. There are a lot of guys dealing with a lot of things.'"

- Jake Butt (2013-16), TE, Denver Broncos: Tore his ACL during a Sept. 25 practice and will miss the remainder of the season ... Started the first three tilts for Denver, accumulating eight catches for 85 yards with a long of 22.

- Taco Charlton (2013-16), DE, Dallas Cowboys: Compiled a career-high five tackles in a 27-20 victory over the Buccaneers ... Charlton has started seven of the 10 clashes he has played in (missed three with a shoulder injury), and has logged 21 tackles, one sack and a pass defended.

- Jehu Chesson (2012-16), WR, Washington Redskins: Played but did not notch any stats in the Redskins' 25-16 setback to the Titans ... Chesson has seen time in 11 contests this year (no starts), but the only statistic he has posted has been a rushing attempt that lost four yards ... "Chesson didn't play on offense for the fifth time in the last six weeks and he only made it onto the field for one offensive snap in that span (Week 14 vs. Giants)," James Dorsett of HogsHaven wrote on Christmas Eve. "If you can't get playing time ahead of an [undrafted free agent] in his first career game [Darvin Kidy], then it's just not going to happen for you, at least not on this team, in this season."

- Frank Clark (2011-14), DE, Seattle Seahawks: Racked up four tackles in Seattle's 38-31 win over the Chiefs on Sunday night ... In 2018, Clark has recorded 40 tackles, 12 sacks, two passes defended, three forced fumbles and an interception he returned 26 yards in 15 starts for the 9-6 Seahawks ... His 12 quarterback takedowns are tied for the eighth most in the NFL, while his three forced fumbles are deadlocked for 10th most ... "If you've been worried about the Seahawks being able to keep Frank Clark during a season in which he has proven without a shadow of a doubt that he is one of the best pass-rushers in the NFL, don't be," Bob Condotta of Seattle Times explained on Monday. "That was the message Monday from Seattle coach Pete Carroll, who said the team is 'working' to keep Clark, whose four-year, \$3.7-million rookie contract runs out after this season. That would allow him to become an unrestricted free agent."

- Jeremy Clark (2012-16), CB, New York Jets: Did not play in the Jets' 44-38 loss to Green Bay ... Clark has only been on New York's active roster for four games and has not seen playing time.

- Mason Cole (2014-17), C, Arizona Cardinals: Has started all 15 outings at center for 3-12 Arizona, including this weekend's 31-9 loss to the Rams.

- Blake Countess (2011-14/finished at Auburn), S, Los Angeles Rams: Received playing time but did not register any statistics in his team's 31-9 blowout of the Cardinals ... Countess has participated in all 15 showdowns (no starts), and has tallied six tackles, one pass defended and a 24.6-yard average on 17 kick returns ... He also recovered a blocked punt in the end zone for a touchdown in a Sept. 23 win over the Chargers ... "[Linebacker] Cory Littleton and [safety] John Johnson usually play every defensive snap, but they were given a much-needed breather on Sunday," Cameron DaSilva of RamsWire noted on Tuesday. "Blake Countess played 14 snaps in place of Johnson and [safety] Lamarcus Joyner, who left with an ankle injury."

- Amara Darboh (2012-16), WR, Seattle Seahawks: Listed on the 9-6 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: Caught two passes for 23 yards in the Panthers' 24-10 loss to Atlanta ... Funchess has begun 12 of the 14 tilts he has played in this season, and has totaled 44 receptions for 549 yards and four touchdowns ... "Funchess was an afterthought in the passing game, finishing sixth on the team in targets and fifth in receiving yardage," the RotoWire staff at CBS Sports revealed on Sunday. "Oddly enough, this was actually a step up for Funchess, who hadn't caught a pass since Week 13 and has just two grabs over his last three games."

- Ben Gedeon (2013-16), LB, Minnesota Vikings: Started Sunday's 27-9 victory at Detroit, and accumulated eight tackles and a pass defended ... Gedeon has started seven of 14 affairs this year, and has compiled 47 stops and two passes defended.

- Graham Glasgow (2011-15), OG, Detroit Lions: Has earned the starting nod at center in all 15 clashes for 5-10 Detroit, including Sunday's 27-9 setback to the Vikings.

- Ryan Glasgow (2012-16), DT, Cincinnati Bengals: Tore his ACL in a Sept. 23 loss to the Panthers and will miss the remainder of the season ... Finished the 2018 campaign with three appearances (no starts) and 11 tackles for the 6-9 Bengals.

- Brandon Graham (2006-09), DE, Philadelphia Eagles: Started his 15th consecutive contest in this weekend's 32-30 win over Houston, but only logged one tackle ... On the year, Graham has notched 37 stops, four sacks, a pass defended and a forced fumble.

- Leon Hall (2003-06), CB, Oakland Raiders: His season came to an end on Nov. 30 when the 4-11 Raiders put him on the injured reserve list with a back injury ... Hall's final stat line included 10 appearances (four starts), 25 tackles and three passes defended.

- Chad Henne (2004-07), QB, Kansas City Chiefs: Has not seen action in 2018, serving as Pat Mahomes' backup for the 11-4 Chiefs.

- Willie Henry (2012-15), DT, Baltimore Ravens: Was placed on the team's injured reserve list Oct. 23 with a herniated disk ... Henry only played in three games this year (no starts), posting three tackles and one sack.

• Delano Hill (2013-16), S, Seattle Seahawks: Made his first start of 2018 in Sunday night's 38-31 victory over the 11-4 Chiefs, racking up two stops and a fumble recovery ... The Detroit native has begun one of the 12 outings he has played in (missed three with injury), recording 19 tackles, one pass defended and a fumble recovery.

• Khalid Hill (2013-17), FB, Seattle Seahawks: Resides on the 9-6 Seahawks' injured reserve list and has not played in 2018.

• Mo Hurst (2013-17), DT, Oakland Raiders: Did not play in a 27-14 win over the Broncos due to an ankle injury ... Hurst has begun 10 of 13 showdowns (missed two with injury) this season, registering 31 tackles, four sacks, three passes defended and a forced fumble.

• Kyle Kalis (2012-16), OG, Cleveland Browns: Did not participate in Cleveland's 26-18 triumph over the Bengals ... Kalis was promoted to the 7-7-1 Browns' active roster on Dec. 1, and has received playing time in three of the four tilts since.

• Taylor Lewan (2009-13), OT, Tennessee Titans: Has begun 13 affairs at left tackle for the 9-6 Titans (missed the Sept. 16 victory over Houston with a concussion), including Saturday's 25-16 win over the Redskins ... "Before the players enjoy the holiday themselves, the Tennessee Titans take time out of their busy schedule every year to help make Christmas a little brighter for kids in Nashville," Crissy Froyd of TitansWire explained on Tuesday. "2018 was no different, as the team hosted its annual Christmas gathering for children of staff members at St. Thomas Sports Park. This year, the team had Pro Bowl left tackle Taylor Lewan dress as Santa Claus, while some of the other players dressed as elves. Unfortunately for Lewan, he wasn't exactly well received by all the children, bringing more tears than smiles."

• Jourdan Lewis (2013-16), CB, Dallas Cowboys: Made his first start of 2018 in the Cowboys' 27-20 triumph over Tampa Bay, tallying a season-high seven tackles, which tied his career best ... On the year, Lewis has received playing time in 14 clashes, and has accumulated 12 stops, a pass defended, an interception he returned seven yards, two fumble recoveries, two rushing attempts that have totaled 12 yards and a 19-yard average on two kick returns.

• Erik Magnuson (2012-16), OL, San Francisco 49ers: Has only seen action in four contests in 2018, with his lone start coming at center in an Oct. 28 loss at Arizona.

• Patrick Omahneh (2008-12), OG, Jacksonville Jaguars: Started at right tackle in the Jaguars' 17-7 win at Miami ... Omahneh was released by the Giants on Nov. 10 after starting the first six games with them, but was then signed by Jacksonville on Nov. 13 and has begun four of the six outings he has appeared in with the club ... "The Jaguars lost Josh Wells to a concussion during Sunday's game, forcing left guard Patrick Omahneh to move to right tackle and Chris Reed to be inserted at left guard," Cole Pepper of News4JAX observed on Sunday.

• Jabrill Peppers (2014-16), S, Cleveland Browns: Compiled four tackles in the Browns' 26-18 win over the Bengals, while also returning one kick for 22 yards and two punts for 12 yards ... In 2018, the second-year pro has earned the starting nod in all 15 showdowns and has logged 72 stops, one sack, five passes defended, one interception, an 8.8-yard av-

erage on 25 punt returns and a 21.1-yard average on 18 kicks brought back ... "The former first-round prospect has become a key part in the Browns' defense," Sam Gold of The Athletic noted on Monday. "He can cover, play in the box as a third linebacker and can blitz as well. His role is multiple, and it really helps disguise the coverages and play calls that [interim head coach] Gregg Williams wants to run."

• Jake Rudock (2015), QB, Detroit Lions: Has found a home on the 5-10 Lions' practice squad, but has not been activated in 2018.

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

• Michael Schofield (2009-13), OG, Los Angeles Chargers: Been given the starting nod at right guard in each of the Chargers' first 15 tilts, including Saturday's 22-10 loss to the Ravens.

• Dymonte Thomas (2013-16), S, Denver Broncos: Participated in his team's 27-14 loss to the Raiders on Christmas Eve but didn't notch any stats ... Thomas has seen time in 11 affairs (missed four with injury) this year, and has posted 10 tackles, a sack, one pass defended, an interception and a fumble recovery.

• Matt Wile (2011-14), P, Minnesota Vikings: Averaged 48 yards on six punts in Sunday's 27-9 victory at Detroit, including one he pinned inside the 20-yard line ... Wile has booted 67 balls for a 44.7 average (tied for 21st in the NFL) in 2018, while dropping 25 of them (13th most) inside the opposition's 20-yard line.

• Jarrod Wilson (2012-15), S, Jacksonville Jaguars: Was given his first starting assignment of the year in a 17-7 triumph at Miami and racked up three tackles ... Wilson has competed in all 15 clashes in 2018, and has recorded 15 stops, one pass defended and a forced fumble.

• Chris Wormley (2012-16), DL, Baltimore Ravens: Played but didn't register any stats in the Ravens' 22-10 win over the Chargers ... Wormley has begun six of 15 contests this season, and has tallied 15 tackles, one sack and five passes defended.

The screenshot shows the homepage of 'THE WOLVERINE' website. The header includes the site name, a navigation menu with 'All', 'Football', 'Basketball', and 'Other', and utility links for 'Join the Rivals community', 'Subscribe', 'Sign in', and a search icon. The main content area features several article thumbnails: 'Michigan Wolverines Football: Thursday Peach Bowl Practice Video' (2h Chris Balas), 'Michigan Wolverines Football: Thursday Peach Bowl Practice Video' (4h Chris Balas), 'Michigan Wolverines Football: Thursday Peach Bowl Practice Video' (4h Chris Balas), 'Michigan Wolverines Football: Thursday Peach Bowl Practice Video' (4h Chris Balas), and 'Michigan Wolverines Football: Thursday Peach Bowl Practice Video' (4h Chris Balas). A large yellow banner on the right side of the page reads 'Start Your FREE 30-DAY TRIAL Today! Use Code: blue30'. At the bottom, there are links for 'Go To The Fort' and 'TheWolverine on Facebook', and a 'News' icon.