

NOV. 16, 2019 ♦ MICHIGAN VS. MICHIGAN STATE

Game Info

Site: at Michigan Stadium (107,601)

Kickoff: 12:00 p.m.

Television: FOX

Radio: Michigan/IMG Radio Network (950 AM in the Detroit Area; SiriusXM channel 83) with Dan Dierdorf, Jim Brandstatter and sideline reporter Doug Karsch, a regular contributor to TheWolverine.com.

Series Facts: The Wolverines hold a 70-36-5 all-time advantage over the Spartans, and a 34-20-3 edge at The Big House ... U-M has won 11 of its last 16 at home against MSU ... Since 1970, U-M is 33-16 in the series ... The two programs have met every year since 1945, a streak of 74 straight campaigns ... The team with the most rushing yards has won 44 of the last 49 contests in the rivalry ... U-M enters ranked No. 14 in the AP and coaches' poll; it is 32-20-1 when listed among the top 25.

Previewing Michigan State With A Spartan Insider

Austin Fox • TheWolverine

SpartanMag.com's Paul Konyndyk swung by this week to break down Michigan State's football team prior to its trip to Ann Arbor this Saturday to take on the Michigan Wolverines.

Konyndyk analyzed all of MSU's strengths and weaknesses on the field, before revealing his final score prediction and how he sees Saturday's rivalry matchup shaking out.

MICHIGAN STATE'S PROJECTED STARTERS ON OFFENSE

• **Fifth-year senior QB Brian Lewerke** — His 223.6 passing yards per game are the fourth most in the Big Ten and his 12 touchdown passes are tied for fifth most, though he is only connecting on 55.7 percent of his throws. Lewerke is also the Spartans' second-leading rusher with 265 yards, which are the fourth most in the conference among quarterbacks.

• **Redshirt freshman RB Elijah Collins** — The transfers of fellow running backs junior Connor Heyward and sophomore La'Darius Jefferson earlier this season have left Collins as the primary contributor at the position, with the redshirt freshman having racked up 715 yards and five touchdowns while averaging 5.0 yards per carry. His 715 yards are the fifth most in the Big Ten, and he has rushed for at least 170 yards in two different games this year (170 yards against Illinois and 192 versus Western Michigan).

• **Junior WR Cody White** — He is second on the roster in both receptions (37) and receiving yards (527), trailing only fifth-year senior wideout Darrell Stewart's 47 grabs and 694 yards, though Stewart will miss this weekend's game with injury. White's best game of the year occurred in last Saturday's 37-34 loss to Illinois, when he compiled season highs in both catches (seven) and receiving yards (128).

• **Junior WR Laress Nelson** — He has only accumulated four receptions for 48 yards, with 20 of those yards coming last week against Illinois. The 5-8 speedster has taken on a bigger role in MSU's offense by averaging 17 snaps over the team's last two games, after averaging just 6.4 through the club's first seven.

• **Redshirt sophomore WR C.J. Hayes** — His 12 catches and 117 yards are both the fifth most for MSU, though he has missed the last two games with injury. Hayes has reeled in more than 18 yards in an outing on just two separate occasions this season.

• **Fifth-year senior TE Matt Seybert** — His 19 receptions for 222 yards both rank third on the club, while his three scoring grabs are second to Stewart's four. Seybert has been one of Lewerke's favorite targets, hauling in at least two catches in seven of MSU's nine contests.

• **Redshirt junior LT A.J. Arcuri** — Injuries have limited him to just three games, with his lone two starts of the year coming in the club's last two contests against Penn State and Illinois. Arcuri has struggled mightily according to PFF, with his 47 overall grade (64 is considered average) checking in 47th out of the 50 MSU offensive players who have seen the field in 2019.

• **Freshman LG J.D. Duplain** — Injuries have thrust him into the starting lineup, with the freshman starting his first career affair last Saturday in the loss to Illinois. Like Arcuri, Duplain has also had a rough go of it, with his 55.3 mark from PFF ranking 38th out of the Spartans' 50 offensive players who have seen action.

• **Freshman C Nick Samac** — Last weekend's loss to the Illini was the first career start for Samac, who played 90 snaps after never having seen more than eight in a game. Though a small sample size (has appeared in just three contests this season), his 74.2 tally from PFF is the third best on MSU's offense.

• **Redshirt sophomore RG Matt Carrick** — He has been one of the few constants on Michigan State's offensive line, having started all nine clashes in 2019. That consistency hasn't led to quality production, however, with his 56.4 PFF grade ranking 36th on Michigan State's offense.

• **Junior RT Jordan Reid** — Like Carrick, Reid has also started all nine affairs, with his 646 snaps standing as the most of any Spartan offensive player. He is riding a string of 22 consecutive starts after becoming the only MSU offensive lineman to receive the starting nod in all 13 contests last season.

MICHIGAN STATE'S PROJECTED STARTERS ON DEFENSE

• **Junior DE Jacob Panasiuk** — He has racked up an impressive stat line that includes 25 tackles, 6.5 tackles for loss, three sacks, five quarterback hurries and three forced fumbles. Panasiuk's 86.3 mark as a pass rusher from PFF is the best on the team.

• **Fifth-year senior DT Raequan Williams** — He has compiled 5.5 stops behind the line of scrimmage, while his 3.5 sacks and six quarterback hurries both rank second on the squad. Williams' 74.6 overall defensive tally is the sixth highest on club.

• **Senior DT Mike Panasiuk** — His 7.5 stops behind the line of scrimmage check in fourth most for Michigan State. Panasiuk is rated as the unit's third-best run defender with a 79.5 grade, and the fifth-best defensive player overall with a 75.4 mark.

• **Fifth-year senior DE Kenny Willekes** — His 5.5 sacks lead the team and his nine tackles for loss are second most, while his 55 tackles are deadlocked for third. PFF has him pegged as MSU's third-best defender with a 77.8 overall tally.

• **Junior LB Antjuan Simmons** — His 12 stops behind the line of scrimmage are not only three more than any other Spartan, but are also tied for the third most in the Big Ten. Simmons' 65 tackles, meanwhile, are second only to suspended senior linebacker Joe Bachie's 71.

• **Fifth-year senior LB Tyriq Thompson** — PFF has tabbed him as both an excellent run defender and tackler, awarding him with a 78.8 grade in the former and a 77.8 mark in the latter. Thompson's 49 stops are the fifth most of any MSU defender, and his four quarterback hurries are fourth most.

• **Redshirt sophomore LB Noah Harvey** — He has taken on a starting role in the wake of Bachie's PED suspension, receiving his first career start last week and playing a career-high 46 snaps (had never seen more than 16 in a game before that). Harvey's 75.9 tally from PFF is the fourth best on the team's defense.

• **Junior CB Josiah Scott** — He was named to the Jim Thorpe Award preseason watch list (given annually to the nation's best defensive back), and was tabbed as an All-Big Ten first-team selection by Athlon before the campaign began. Scott's five passes broken up lead the squad, and his 68.8 PFF grade is the second highest of any Spartan defensive back (behind fifth-year senior safety David Dowell's 69.8).

• **Redshirt sophomore CB Shakur Brown** — Though he will likely get the start on Saturday, Brown is expected to split time with fifth-year senior Josh Butler and junior Tre Person, who have each played significant roles this season (429 snaps for the former and 127 for the latter). Injuries have limited to Brown just three games, and PFF has pegged him with a subpar 49.9 mark (27th out of 30 Michigan State defenders who have seen the field).

• **Fifth-year senior S David Dowell** — U-M fans likely remember him best for his performance in the 2017 affair at Michigan Stadium, when he picked off quarterback John O'Korn twice in the Spartans' 14-10 victory. Dowell has been tagged with a 70.9 tally in coverage, which is the highest of any MSU defensive back.

• **Sophomore S Xavier Henderson** — He is in his first season as a starter, and has already logged 55 tackles to tie him with Willekes for the third most among team defenders. PFF has slapped him with a below-average 63.5 grade, however, which ranks 17th out of 30 Spartan defenders.

MICHIGAN STATE'S PROJECTED STARTERS ON SPECIAL TEAMS

• **Redshirt junior K Matt Coghlin** — He has only connected on 13 of 20 field goal tries, with his 65.0 connection percentage checking in ninth in the Big Ten. Two of Coghlin's seven misses have occurred from within 40 yards, and after converting his first seven attempts of the year, he is just 6 of 13 since.

• **Sixth-year senior P Jake Hartbarger** — He is averaging 43.4 yards on 49 punts, which is good for the fourth-best average in the conference. Hartbarger has recorded 15 boots of 50 yards or longer, and has also dropped 15 punts inside the opposing 20-yard line.

MICHIGAN STATE'S BIGGEST OFFENSIVE STRENGTH

"I'm not sure that Michigan State has a strength on offense," Konyndyk said. "The Spartans have done some things well at times on offense, but there isn't one thing that you can point to and say that is something that can be counted on game in and game out.

"Gun to my head, I'd say that [quarterback] Brian Lewerke is the strength of the offense, but I can't really say that because he hasn't been solid on a weekly basis. Some of that has to do with the schedule that Michigan State has played. The Spartans had that brutal three-game stretch where they played the top three scoring defenses in the nation, at that time, in succession and that is going to skew productivity.

"The other thing to consider is the extent to which quarterback play dependent on outside factors. If an O-line can't pass protect, the quarterback doesn't have time to throw, and he's not going to do very well. If receivers are dropping passes, it reflects negatively on the quarterback.

"It's also a whole lot easier to be an effective quarterback when your team is successful running the football. Lewerke has been somewhat inconsistent this season. He's been fairly effective when he's not playing a top-10 defense, and he's gotten regular production in the run game.

"Lewerke had the pick-six last weekend against Illinois, which was a killer for Michigan State, and he also had a couple interceptions before that. Both of those first two interceptions came on tipped balls, so you can't really blame him. The first pick should have been a touchdown for the Spartans, and probably would have if Lewerke had a healthy group of receivers to throw to."

MICHIGAN STATE'S BIGGEST OFFENSIVE WEAKNESS

"As far as weaknesses go, the biggest on offense is the lack of game-breakers at skill positions," the insider revealed. "Cody White is a good receiver. [Fifth-year senior wideout] Darrell Stewart — who is out with an injury — is a good receiver.

"But the Spartans lack multiple NFL-caliber guys that they've had at the wide receiver position during most of the 10-plus win seasons during the Dantonio era. Michigan State has a couple of possession type receivers out there, and the threat of explosive plays is minimized.

"That being the case, the offense is required to put together nine-, 10- or 11-play drives to score touchdowns. Scoring with consistency using long drives is awfully tough to do

against quality defenses, which Michigan State discovered during its brutal three-game stretch against Ohio State, Wisconsin and Penn State.

“Aside from lacking skill players, the other glaring weakness on offense is that there isn’t a true strength. If Michigan State was able to run the football with consistency on a game-in, game-out basis, the Spartans could get by with the lack of NFL guys at the skill positions. But that isn’t going to happen at this juncture of the season.

“For the second year in a row, Michigan State has had a ton of injuries on the O-line. Until two weeks ago, the Spartans were playing with a fourth-string left tackle. That situation has improved a bit with the return of AJ Arcuri, but it doesn’t change the fact that the Spartans may be stuck starting two freshmen on the O-line this weekend in left guard JD Duplain and center Nick Samac.

“Both of those guys have bright futures and are talented youngsters, but that level of inexperience isn’t ideal this time of year.”

MICHIGAN STATE’S BIGGEST DEFENSIVE STRENGTH

“The D-line has been the strength of Michigan State’s defense and will continue to be this weekend,” Konyndyk noted. “I expected some of these guys – namely Kenny Willekes – to have better seasons than they’ve had to date. Even so, the D-line remains the strength for the Spartan defense. Those guys have accounted for two-thirds of Michigan State’s sacks. And I think you’ll see those numbers continue to climb during the final month of the season.

“Willekes hasn’t played poorly. He leads the team in sacks, and is up there in tackles for loss. The two inside guys – Raequan Williams and Mike Panasiuk – have started close to three seasons alongside one another and those two guys are really good against the run.

“Jacob Panasiuk, younger brother of Mike, and Michigan State’s fourth D-line starter, is good against the run and has improved as a pass rusher. Michigan State has quality back-ups on the inside in [redshirt junior] Naquan Jones and [redshirt freshman] Jacob Slade. Those guys would probably start at lot of other places.

“But the D-line isn’t as deep as I expected it to be this year. [Redshirt freshman] Zach Slade was lost for the season during training camp and [redshirt sophomore] Jack Camper, who is working his way back into the playing group, missed a lot of time with an early season injury. Camper was supposed to be a guy that beefed up the edge rush coming off the bench.

“Even with the suspension of [senior linebacker] Joe Bachie, Michigan State is fairly solid at linebacker. I thought Antjuan Simmons did a heck of a job filling in for Bachie last weekend after moving over from the slot linebacker position. Tyriq Thompson is solid at Money linebacker, and the combination of Noah Harvey and [redshirt freshman] Jeslord Boateng was pretty good as tag-team contributors over at the slot linebacker position, which Michigan State refers to as the ‘Star.’”

MICHIGAN STATE’S BIGGEST DEFENSIVE WEAKNESS

“The biggest weakness is probably the secondary,” the writer noted. “There are some talented individuals in the back end for Michigan State, most notably Josiah Scott, who is one of the top corners in college football.

“Safeties David Dowell and Xavier Henderson have also been pretty good this season. The weak link in the secondary has been the other corner position, and the Spartans have been burned by both [fifth-year senior] Josh Butler and Shakur Brown.

“Butler is prone to getting beat by the deep ball. Brown is prone to lapses in focus. Brown gave up a 45-yarder for a touchdown to Illinois moments before halftime because he was playing with bad technique and as such he couldn’t see the ball as well as he would have if he were playing the way he was coached.

“Despite his faults, Brown is the better option of the two corners opposite Scott. He is a physical football player that isn’t afraid of mixing it up against the run. He’s also a defensive back that doesn’t typically panic when the ball is in the air. Brown had an interception in the fourth quarter that thwarted an Illinois scoring drive. Overall his play has been solid, but he is prone to lapses in focus and judgement.”

The Spartans’ pass defense as a whole ranks 53rd nationally, yielding 214.9 passing yards per game. They are also allowing opposing quarterbacks to connect on 63.1 percent of their throws, which is tied with Northwestern for 94th in the country.

Three separate opponents (Western Michigan, Indiana and Illinois) have thrown for at least 285 yards against MSU this season, with the Illini compiling a season-high 369 yards through the air against it last weekend.

KONYNDYK’S FINAL SCORE PREDICTION

“You can throw the score out the window in a rivalry game, right?” Konyndyk began. “That may be the case in a lot of instances, but I doubt that will be the case this weekend when Michigan State travels to Michigan.

“If Michigan State had fewer injuries and was riding the momentum of a win into this game, I’d like the Spartans’ chances of leaving The Big House with a victory. This is by no means a great Michigan football team. But this is a good Michigan team playing solid football right now.

“Michigan State, on the other hand, is trending downward fast, and it is also a team that lacks both playmakers and the mental toughness needed to win games like this. For Michigan State to win this game, it will have to get a bunch of breaks that have been few and far between this season. I haven’t seen evidence that Michigan State can run the football effectively against an above-average defense.

“If Michigan State isn’t able to run the football effectively in this game, there is zero chance of winning a one-dimensional game without a deluge of self-inflicted wounds by Michigan. Lewerke could possibly pull off a pass-heavy upset if he had a stable of NFL caliber receivers to throw to — the problem for Michigan State is that he doesn’t have those guys.

“I expect this game to play out a lot like it did last year at Spartan Stadium. Michigan State is going to scrap and claw on defense and probably keep it close for two or three quarters before wearing down. It could get real ugly for the Spartans, however, if Michigan State has a bad break or two early and start to hang its head.”

Prediction: Michigan 28, Michigan State 10

Michigan Football vs. MSU: Keys To The Game

Chris Balas • TheWolverine

Michigan State limps into Ann Arbor on a four-game losing streak, having scored 17 points in the entire month of October and then blowing a 28-3 lead in a 37-34 home loss to Illinois Nov. 9 in its last game.

The Spartans are a “wounded animal,” head coach Mark Dantonio said before MSU’s contest with the Illini, and if that latest “thud” they heard didn’t make roadkill out of them, a loss in Ann Arbor certainly would.

But that’s what makes MSU somewhat dangerous. No, this team is not very talented, it is devoid of playmakers at just about every position on offense and beaten up on the offensive line. They’ll get some of their O-linemen back for this one, it appears, but those guys aren’t very good either and should have their hands full with U-M’s fast defense.

Still, the Spartans have been a .500 program since the start of the 2016 season (24-23), and their season now comes down to upsetting a better Michigan team. U-M won’t be winning the Big Ten, but this group is still playing for a bowl game not named after a local credit union or a 10-minute oil change.

In short, the rivalry appears on its way to, well, back to normal — but as we saw two years ago, Michigan State is capable of stealing a game its team has no business winning in Ann Arbor.

Here’s what the Wolverines need to do to prevent that from happening this season:

Don’t let MSU shorten the game: Maryland got off to a horrible start in Michigan’s 38-7 win, but the Terps kept U-M’s offense off the field in long stretches by getting four to six yards on first and second downs and keeping the chains moving. They could have made a game of it with more red-zone success.

Dantonio will have some tricks up his sleeve, no doubt — we’ve seen a throwback screen, a reverse pass to a quarterback and a leak out to a little-used fullback go for touchdowns over the years — but he knows the best way for his team to win is to control the clock and play to his defense.

The best way to do that is to milk the clock and keep the chains moving, win the field position battle and make the U-M offense start from deeper in its own end, where they won’t be able to take as many chances (and probably won’t). Michigan head coach Jim Harbaugh knows turnovers are the one sure way to make this a game — it took five and a number of other miscues to allow the Spartans to pull out a 14-10 win in a monsoon two seasons ago — and he’s likely to play it closer to the vest deep in his own end.

Interior rush defense will be big in this one. Expect MSU to go heavy up front and try to run the ball for success on early downs.

Get a Penn State or Notre Dame type performance from senior quarterback Shea Patterson: Minus the interception at PSU on a screen pass, of course. That game, a 28-21 road loss, showed us what we all expected from Patterson as Michigan’s starting quarterback. He threw the ball with confidence and authority, hit a number of intermediate range

passes and took some deep shots.

It helped, of course, that he had time to throw, and protection up front is also going to be important. But this offensive line group has seen the Spartans’ ‘A’-gap (and other) blitzes and knows what to expect. MSU hasn’t gotten to the quarterback a lot this year and shouldn’t Saturday.

From there, it’s up to Patterson to make the right reads and throws. He’s been hit and miss in that respect this year, but if he plays well, U-M wins going away.

Contain Michigan State quarterback Brian Lewerke: MSU’s senior is a capable runner, and it was his big plays with his feet that led to the Spartans’ scores two years ago in Ann Arbor. He’s shown he’s still capable this season, rushing for 78 yards in a win over Indiana and 96, including a 42-yard touchdown scamper, in Saturday’s loss to Illinois.

Michigan’s defenders spoke this week of how far they’ve come in defending mobile quarterbacks. Defensive coordinator Don Brown has done a stellar job with adjustments both in that area and with teams trying to exploit his man-to-man defense on crossing routes, and we’d bet against Lewerke breaking any big runs this time around.

That, of course, also means maintaining lanes in the pass rush and not letting the quarterback escape. He should be under pressure often when he goes back to pass — they can’t let him out.

THE BREAKDOWN: MICHIGAN WOLVERINES FOOTBALL VS. MICHIGAN STATE

This is a game Michigan would win nine times out of 10, maybe even 14 out of 15, but Dantonio always saves his best for the Wolverines, just like Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel (his “tragic hero” and mentor) did back in the day. There will be wrinkles, risks and trick plays, none of which will work if U-M’s players handle their assignments, trust their eyes and do what they’re taught.

Get lulled to sleep on even a play or two and the Spartans can take advantage ... and then, anything can happen.

As we’ve seen, this Michigan offense is capable of going for long stretches without scoring. The Wolverines seemed to turn a corner in a 45-14 drubbing of Notre Dame, but they weren’t explosive at Maryland; more like methodical.

If they play a clean game, the Wolverines should emerge with a comfortable win.

News And Views: Jim Harbaugh On Last Year's MSU Pregame, More

Chris Balas • TheWolverine

Michigan head coach Jim Harbaugh met the media Monday and was asked about the pregame shenanigans from last year's MSU game and more. We tackle his thoughts in News & Views format:

NEWS: Junior linebacker Josh Ross is recovering from a lower-body injury but has played in only three games this year. He'll play in only one more game and redshirt this season, if possible, while redshirt freshman Cam McGrone and fifth-year senior Jordan Glasgow continue to start.

HARBAUGH: "Cam's starting, but Josh is being prepared to play when we feel like he's most needed ... if one of the two backers inside will not be able to start or finish a game. We're preparing him for when we need him the most.

"We're trying to get that one game to be the game we need him to play in."

VIEWS: What a luxury this is given Ross' stellar play last year and earlier this season. Folks have forgotten he earned unanimous All-Big Ten honorable mention honors last year, only because McGrone and Glasgow have made them forget, but the thought of Ross and McGrone playing next to each other for two years after this one should excite Michigan fans.

They still need depth here, but redshirt frosh Jordan Anthony has played and they like what they've seen from the freshmen, specifically Anthony Solomon and the way he runs. This position group should in very good shape for a while.

NEWS: Michigan's defensive line has been playing at a high level since the loss at Wisconsin.

HARBAUGH: "I think our defensive line is playing very well, excelling. Going through some of the players, [junior end] Kwity Paye is having an excellent season. [Sophomore end] Aidan Hutchinson is having a really great season, and [senior tackle] Carlo Kemp is playing extremely well. [Redshirt junior tackle] Mike Dwumfour is ascending, and [graduate transfer end] Mike Danna played a great game this past game. He's been consistently good as well.

"I feel like the front-line defensive players have done a really good job."

VIEWS: And this is without redshirt sophomore Donovan Jeter making an impact. He's the one who earned a lot of praise this spring for his play, a guy many believed needed to step up if the Wolverines were going to have a solid line. Dwumfour has emerged as a potential difference maker on the inside due to his quickness, while the ends — all three of them — have been outstanding.

The concern is about next year, especially along the interior. There's no guarantee

Dwumfour will be back for a fifth year, and Kemp would have to petition for one if he wanted it, having played in two games his first season, including one in October. There's still hope for Jeter, though it's clear he needs a lot of improvement, and the freshmen — Mazi Smith and Chris Hinton — need to grow up in a hurry.

There are some big tests to come this year, including the finale against Ohio State's physical offensive line, but Harbaugh is right that this group has exceeded expectations. This was one of the big question marks coming into the season, and they've been really good.

NEWS: Last year's pregame shenanigans in which Mark Dantonio led his team out of the tunnel for the pregame walkthrough — in their helmets, and while U-M players were already on the field — hasn't been forgotten.

HARBAUGH: "It's been addressed pretty thoroughly. There's a rule that two hours before the game, players cannot be on the field before two hours. If there are any pregame traditions then those take place before the two-hour mark when both teams are allowed to be on the field, share the field. One team cannot supersede that, so that's been addressed."

VIEWS: It's been spun that Harbaugh was somehow responsible for it, but again, Dantonio was caught in a lie in explaining how it went down. In fact, he was on the field and did have a wicked grin on his face when it went down.

It backfired on him. Not only did he rile up the Michigan team in a 21-7 loss last year, he finally got Harbaugh's attention as to what kind of "leader" Dantonio really is.

The Spartans will come to play Saturday and can make this a game with some help from U-M (which the Wolverines have provided all too frequently over the last decade).

If Michigan has a chance to bury them, though, expect the foot to remain on the pedal.

Wolverine Watch: Pride Goes Before The Brawl

John Borton • TheWolverine

Jim Harbaugh mouthed all the right words, at the start of a week oozing with more disrespect than Thanksgiving dinner featuring the Trumps and the Pelosis.

Harbaugh insisted MSU head coach Mark Dantonio is a "master motivator."

That, of course, ignores the fact that Dantonio hasn't motivated the Spartans to a win since Sept. 28, couldn't inspire his best linebacker away from performance-enhancing drugs (if he so desired) and failed to fire his offense up to score more than 17 points — total, for the month of October.

Harbaugh vowed that the Wolverines are “on high alert for everything” from the Spartans.

That one makes sense. After all, a Michigan quarterback nearly experienced his head getting twisted off by a Spartan operating under a former defensive coordinator who clearly spelled out the objective: “That’s what we tried to do — 60 minutes of unnecessary roughness.”

Harbaugh actually referred to MSU’s penchant for trick plays. One of those involved inducing a Michigan punter to mishandle a snap and perfectly pitch it to a Spartan for a game-winning score. That one, and the reactions to it, delivered a bile-building welcome to the series for Michigan’s new head coach back in 2015.

It also ushered Michigan State into the only College Football Playoff appearance to date between these two bitter rivals. (It should be noted, both programs have scored the identical number of points in playoff action).

But we digress.

The point is, Harbaugh looked to inject a modicum of respect and decorum into a rivalry that hasn’t produced much of either the past few decades.

Then junior cornerback Ambry Thomas spoke up. Thomas played the disrespect card, unprompted, out of competitive fire or merely honoring tradition.

“Right now, it’s the most important game on our schedule,” Thomas said. “It’s about who’s the big brother and who’s the little sister in the state. That’s what it’s really about. We plan to give them our all, just like they plan to give us their all.”

Moments later — when efforts at a follow-up were attempted — Thomas got whisked away from the cameras like he was spreading ebola and not pregame palaver.

As if the cease fire was going to hold anyway.

Michigan and Michigan State don’t like each other. Period. The Spartans still cry foul over Michigan advocating for keeping them out of the Big Ten — and that was more than seven decades ago.

A Lansing sports broadcaster once told Bo Schembechler he “ruined the series” between Michigan and Michigan State by smacking down the Spartans in 17 of 21 tries. After MSU tricked Schembechler’s staff by completely changing its offense and winning, 23-12, in 1969, Schembechler owned MSU like the Harlem Globetrotters did the Washington Generals.

From 1970-2007 — covering the tenures of Schembechler, Gary Moeller and Lloyd Carr — Michigan went 30-8 against MSU

And then came Dantonio.

Spartan fans fell in love with him, not only for winning as much as he has, but for pushing back hard against Michigan’s perceived “arrogance.”

Dantonio advocated, on-air, for a “moment of silence” after Michigan lost to Appalachian State in 2007. In response to Mike Hart’s “Little Brother” comment after Michigan’s 2007 win in East Lansing — Dantonio went on a still-quoted tirade.

In addition to mocking Hart’s height, Dantonio insisted that “pride comes before the fall,” and “this is not over — it will never be over.” Mostly, he’s won more than he’s lost against the hated Wolverines, opening the door for a decade-long reversal regarding neighbor-on-neighbor mockery.

The pride train might be coming full circle. Michigan State’s season is in tatters, and a figurative Devin Bush-like scuff by the Wolverines would shred it even further.

Watch out, warns East Lansing resident Tom Crawford, a Michigan alum, media member and one of the few who sat in the stands and watched the ’69 Michigan-Michigan State game.

“This game is dripping with disrespect, going both directions,” Crawford insisted. “That’s what my concern is on Saturday — if the game gets out of hand and Michigan State gets into a let’s-get-our-licks-in mentality.

“Michigan players will tell you, you don’t want to hang around the pile in the Michigan State game. Right before the whistle, there’s some crazy stuff going on.”

And often after the whistle. Heck, sometimes it starts two hours before the game, like last year in East Lansing. MSU’s arms-locked roughing and Bush’s subsequent field scuffling set the tone — or merely carried it on.

“You can’t let them get their hairs up,” Thomas said. “We’re going to step on their throat and stay ready all game. We know that they’re going to treat this like their Super Bowl, and we just have to be prepared and attack them like they’re going to attack us.”

Mostly, anyway. Headhunting remains illegal in Michigan and is generally frowned upon in Ann Arbor.

By The Numbers: U-M's Significant Defensive Advantage Over MSU's Offense

Austin Fox • TheWolverine

The Michigan Wolverines' football team will host Michigan State this weekend, holding a substantial defensive advantage over the Spartans' offensive attack.

The Maize and Blue's defense got off to a bit of a rough start this season — it allowed 343.6 yards per game through the first three outings — but has turned into a lockdown unit ever since, yielding just 229.5 yards per contest in the six games since.

Michigan State's offense, meanwhile, has taken the opposite trajectory.

After the Spartans averaged 31.4 points and 414.8 yards through their first five games, they saw those numbers dip to just 12.7 points and 307.7 yards over their last four.

Prior to Saturday's 37-34 loss to Illinois, MSU posted 10 or fewer points in three straight games, spanning October setbacks to Ohio State, Wisconsin and Penn State.

Michigan's defense, on the other hand, has limited four of its last six opponents to 14 points or fewer, highlighted by a 52-0 shutout of Rutgers Sept. 28 and a 10-3 victorious defensive battle against Iowa Oct. 5.

A Statistical Comparison Of Michigan's Defense And MSU's Offense In National Rankings

Category	Michigan's Defense	MSU's Offense
Yards per game	7th (266.2)	96th (365.9)
Rushing yards per game	21st (112.6)	106th (130.8)
Passing yards per game	5th (153.6)	65th (235)
Points per game	11th (17.1)	106th (23.1)
Turnovers	42nd (15)	103rd (17)
Tackles for loss	52nd (59)	40th (47)
Sacks	14th (29)	17th (12)
Third-down conversion percentage	10th (29.5%)	98th (36%)
Red-zone touchdown percentage	101st (66.6%)	75th (59.3%)
First downs per game	13th (15.9)	81st (20.4)

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Michigan's defense has the statistical advantage in eight of the 10 categories listed above, with tackles for loss and red-zone touchdown percentage being the two exceptions.

The Spartans' offense ranks a respectable 40th nationally in tackles for loss allowed (47), while the U-M defense uncharacteristically checks in at just 52nd in stops behind the line of scrimmage, with 59 (Michigan has finished third, first and 32nd in the country in tackles for loss, respectively, during defensive coordinator Don Brown's three years on the job).

After those two categories is where the positives end for Michigan State.

It stands 106th in college football in both rushing yards per game and points scored per outing, tallying just 130.8 of the former and 23.1 of the latter.

MSU's running back depth took a severe hit when junior Connor Heyward and sophomore La'Darius Jefferson both departed the team just one week apart, with the former leaving Sept. 30 and the latter Oct. 8.

Redshirt freshman Elijah Collins has served as the team's lone running back producer as a result, accumulating 715 yards and five touchdowns this season, while averaging 5.0 yards per carry.

No other Spartan running back on the current roster has more than 76 yards on the season.

The Wolverine front seven, on the flip side, has been extra stingy as of late, allowing just 66.6 yards per game over its last six outings. Five of the six foes during that span have been held to 2.8 yards per carry or fewer, and four of the six to 1.7 or less.

Last Saturday's 37-34 loss to Illinois was a resurgence for Michigan State's offense in some ways, with their 526 yards checking in as the club's most since it compiled 582 in a victory over Western Michigan Sept. 7.

The performance also stood as just the third time this season Michigan State tallied more than 404 yards in a game, with the aforementioned WMU win and the victory over Indiana Sept. 28 (445) being the other two.

In comparison, Michigan's defense has only allowed one opponent to rack up more than 404 yards on it this season (Wisconsin's 487 Sept. 21), holding the other eight to 293 or fewer.

BY THE NUMBERS: MICHIGAN STATE AT MICHIGAN

1 Turnover for Michigan's offense in its last three games, including none in its last two (wins over Notre Dame and Maryland). This comes after the Wolverines committed nine through their first three affairs and 13 through the first six.

4 Straight road wins for the visitor in this series, with MSU's 35-11 home victory in 2014 marking the last time the hosting team came out on top. Michigan grabbed triumphs in East Lansing in both 2016 (32-23) and 2018 (21-7), while MSU tallied wins in

Ann Arbor in 2015 (27-23) and 2017 (14-10).

17 Points for MSU's offense in the entire month of October, in three losses to Ohio State (34-10), Wisconsin (38-0) and Penn State (28-7).

No. 24 Is what Michigan State was ranked last year on Oct. 20 when U-M beat it in Spartan Stadium, which at the time snapped the Maize and Blue's 17-game road losing streak to Associated Press top-25 opponents. The victory stood as Michigan's first road win against a ranked foe since it crushed No. 2 Notre Dame 47-21 in South Bend in 2006.

38-Yard field goal for kicker Brendan Gibbons with just five seconds left to give Michigan a 12-10 victory over MSU in 2012, marking the last time U-M took down the Spartans in Ann Arbor. The Wolverines won that day despite not scoring a touchdown, with all of their points coming on four field goals (three by Gibbons and one by Matt Wile).

2002 Was the last time Michigan hosted MSU for a noon kickoff, with the Wolverines winning 49-3 that day. The start times for the seven meetings in The Big House ever since have been as follows: 3:30 for the 2004, 2008, 2010, 2012 and 2015 matchups, 4:30 for the 2006 victory, and 7:30 for the 2017 ordeal.

2006 & 2007 Was the last time the Maize and Blue defeated MSU in consecutive years, with Lloyd Carr's crew grabbing a 31-13 victory in Ann Arbor in '06 and a 28-24 triumph in East Lansing in '07. Carr concluded his U-M tenure riding a six-game winning streak against Michigan State, and posted a 10-3 overall record against the in-state rival during his 13 years on the job.

Updates On Every Former Michigan Wolverine In The NFL: Week 10

Ryan Tice • TheWolverine

A full breakdown of how former Wolverines did in the NFL's week 10 is below:

OG Ben Braden, Free Agent

Has spent time on the practice squads of the New York Jets and, more recently, the Green Bay Packers, but the latter released him Nov. 7.

QB Tom Brady, New England Patriots

The 8-1 Patriots were off this week ... On the season, he has started every game and completed 230 of 355 passes (64.8 percent) for 2,536 yards with 14 touchdowns and five interceptions for 8-1 New England ... Has a quarterback rating of 93.1 and has also run for three scores ... Ranks eighth in the league in passing yards and is tied for 13th in passing scores ... Among passers with at least 300 attempts, he ranks fifth in completion percentage and sixth in passer rating.

TE Ian Bunting, Indianapolis Colts

After being released by the Jets, he was signed to the 5-4 Colts' practice squad, where he still resides.

LB Devin Bush Jr., Pittsburgh Steelers

Started and recorded three tackles in the 5-4 Steelers' 17-12 win over the Rams ... It marked his lowest tackle total of his professional career (by four) ... On the year, he has started eight of nine appearances and logged 69 tackles (44 solo) with one sack, four passes broken up, two interceptions and four fumble recoveries, one of which he returned for a score ... Is tied for 24th in the league for tackles and is first in fumble recoveries ... Only five players have made more tackles and boast more than his six passes defended ... He has 11 more tackles than any other rookie, and also leads all first-year players in fumble recoveries (by three), is tied for the lead in interceptions (only one other first-year player has more than one) and ranks third in passes defended.

TE Jake Butt, Denver Broncos

On injured reserve with the 3-6 Broncos after a setback in his quest to return from a torn ACL early in the year ... Has yet to return to practice according to The Denver Post, who he told he is running routes and "doing everything I need to do with the trainers. If my number is called [to return from injured reserve] I'll be ready."

DE Taco Charlton, Miami Dolphins

Started at defensive end and posted one tackle with a quarterback hit in the 2-7 Dolphins' 16-12 win over the Colts ... Has started five times and appeared in seven games with Miami, and totaled 18 tackles with one forced fumble and a career-high 4.0 sacks.

WR Jehu Chesson, Washington Redskins

Is on injured reserve for 1-8 Washington.

DE Frank Clark, Kansas City Chiefs

Returned after missing two games due to a neck injury and came off the bench to post four tackles (all solo), one sack and one pass broken up in the 6-4 Chiefs' 35-32 loss to the Titans ... Has started seven times and appeared in eight games while logging 21 tackles (16 solo) with 4.0 sacks, an interception, two forced fumbles and a fumble recovery.

OL Mason Cole, Arizona Cardinals

One week after making his first start of the year (at left guard), he was in the starting lineup for the second straight game — but this time at right tackle for the 3-6-1 Cardinals in their 30-27 loss to the Buccaneers ... Has appeared in all 10 games this year with two starts.

CB Blake Countess, New York Jets

Was not active in the 2-7 Jets' 34-27 win over the Giants ... Has appeared in three games this year, but has not recorded any statistics.

WR Amara Darboh, Free Agent

Has been on Tampa Bay's roster, but was released Nov. 5.

WR Devin Funchess, Indianapolis Colts

Started for the 5-4 Colts and broke his collarbone in week one, after hauling in three passes for 32 yards, and is now on injured reserve ... He is reportedly nearing a return to practice.

LB Rashan Gary, Green Bay Packers

Played as a reserve in the 8-2 Packers' 24-16 win over the Panthers, but did not record any statistics ... Has seen action in every game off the bench and logged 12 tackles with one sack and one fumble recovery.

LB Ben Gedeon, Minnesota Vikings

Started and posted a tackle in the 7-3 Vikings' 28-24 win over the Cowboys ... Has made 13 stops while starting four times and appearing in seven games.

TE Zach Gentry, Pittsburgh Steelers

Was inactive in the 5-4 Steelers' 17-12 win over the Rams ... Has appeared in three games, but has not recorded any statistics outside of a fumble recovery.

OL Graham Glasgow, Detroit Lions

Returned to the starting lineup at right guard after missing last week with a back injury in the Lions' 20-13 loss to the Bears ... The fourth-year pro has started all eight appearances this year for the 3-5-1 Lions.

DT Ryan Glasgow, Cincinnati Bengals

Is on injured reserve, but had appeared in five games with two starts for Cincinnati and totaled seven tackles.

DE Brandon Graham, Philadelphia Eagles

The 5-4 Eagles were off this week ... Has started each outing for Philadelphia and racked up 33 tackles (23 solo) with 6.0 sacks, one forced fumble and two fumble recoveries ... Is tied for 14th in the league in sacks.

QB Chad Henne, Kansas City Chiefs

Returned from injured reserve last week, but was not active in the 6-4 Chiefs' 35-32 loss to the Titans.

RB Karan Higdon, Houston Texans

Is on the 6-3 Texans' practice squad.

S Lano Hill, Seattle Seahawks

Inactive for the fourth straight week due to an elbow injury ... Has played in six of 10 games with two starts for the Seahawks and made eight tackles (five solo).

DT Maurice Hurst, Oakland Raiders

Notched a pair of tackles, including half a sack, in the 5-4 Raiders' 26-24 win over the Chargers ... Has started twice and appeared in all nine games while making 12 tackles with 2.5 sacks and one pass broken up.

OL Kyle Kalis, Oakland Raiders

Was picked up for the 5-4 Raiders' practice squad in late October.

FB Joe Kerridge, Cleveland Browns

On injured reserve with the 3-6 Browns.

OT Taylor Lewan, Tennessee Titans

Started and played every snap in the 5-5 Titans' 35-32 win over the Chiefs ... Has started all six games since returning from a four-game suspension and has only missed two snaps.

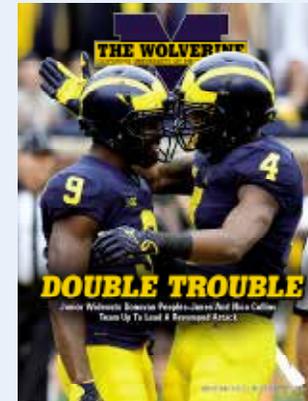
CB Jourdan Lewis, Dallas Cowboys

Came off the bench to log a tackle with one pass broken up in the 5-4 Cowboys' 28-24 loss to the Vikings ... On the year, he has recorded 20 tackles (15 solo), one sack, an interception that he returned 20 yards and a fumble recovery that he ran back 63 yards for a touchdown in nine games (one start).

CB David Long, Los Angeles Rams

Was active for his third game of the year and notched a tackle in the 5-4 Rams' 17-12 loss to the Steelers ... Was also targeted on a fake punt, but it was picked off ... Has two tackles on the season.

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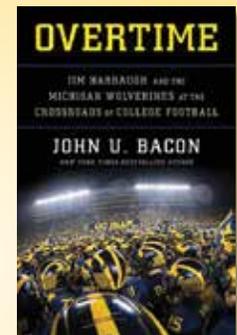
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OL Erik Magnuson, Oakland Raiders

Was not active in the 5-4 Raiders' 26-24 win over the Chargers ... Has appeared in one game since being signed off the Bills practice squad.

DT Bryan Mone, Seattle Seahawks

Is on the Seahawks' practice squad once again ... Has appeared in three games and made three tackles.

OL Patrick Omameh, New Orleans Saints

Played as a reserve in the 7-2 Saints' 26-9 loss to the Falcons ... Has appeared in seven contests this year.

S Jabrill Peppers, New York Giants

Started at strong safety and posted six stops with one pass broken up in the 2-8 Giants' 34-27 loss to the Jets ... His tackle total ranked third on the squad and one stop came behind the line of scrimmage ... On the year, he has started every game and posted 71 tackles (47 solo) and five passes broken up with one interception (a pick-six) and three forced fumbles ... Is tied for 18th in the league in tackles; only five players have at least 70 tackles and six passes defended ... His three forced fumbles are tied for seventh in the league.

QB Jake Rudock, Miami Dolphins

Is on the 2-7 Dolphins' practice squad.

LB Jake Ryan, Jacksonville Jaguars

On the reserve/non-football injury list for the 4-5 Jaguars after suffering an offseason setback during his rehab from a torn ACL.

OL Michael Schofield, Los Angeles Chargers

Started at right guard and played every offensive snap in the 4-6 Chargers' 26-24 loss to the Raiders ... Has not missed a snap yet this year while starting all 10 contests.

CB Brandon Watson, Jacksonville Jaguars

Watson and the 4-5 Jaguars were off this week ... Was called up from the practice squad last week and made his NFL debut, but did not record any statistics.

S Jarrod Wilson, Jacksonville Jaguars

The 4-5 Jaguars were off this week ... Has started each game this year and racked up 42 tackles (31 solo) with one pass broken up and a forced fumble.

DE Chase Winovich, New England Patriots

The 8-1 Patriots were off this week ... On the year, he has logged 11 tackles (seven solo) with 4.5 sacks, plus a touchdown after a blocked punt.

DE Chris Wormley, Baltimore Ravens

Started in the 7-2 Ravens' 49-13 win over the Bengals and recorded four tackles, including a sack and additional tackle for loss ... The four stops marked a new single-game best, while the sack was the second of his career and his first this year ... Has seen action in all nine contests so far and made four starts with 11 tackles, one sack and one pass broken up.

Notebook: Mark Dantonio Previews U-M, Talks Harbaugh

Clayton Sayfie • TheWolverine

Michigan State Spartans (4-5 overall, 2-4 Big Ten) head coach Mark Dantonio spoke to the media Tuesday ahead of his team's road trip to Ann Arbor this Saturday to take on the Michigan Wolverines (7-2, 4-2).

The Spartans have lost four straight games and haven't come out victorious since the Sept. 28 game with Indiana. Last week, MSU squandered a 28-3 lead over Illinois, falling 37-34 at Spartan Stadium.

U-M has won its last two games, both coming in blowout fashion. The Wolverines disposed of then-top-10 Notre Dame (45-14) and also Maryland (38-7).

Dantonio On Michigan And The Rivalry

Coming off of the Illinois debacle, Dantonio insists his team is solely focused on U-M.

"It's Michigan week this week, so we have to put that behind us and move forward," Dantonio said. "We've played well down there in the past. They have an outstanding program. When you look at them right now, you look at their defense. I see, probably, a top-15 defense. They do a great job of being disruptive and moving people back. We've got to be able to pass protect.

“As far as running the football, same type of thing, we’re going to have to be able to run it some. You can’t turn the football over in a rivalry game. I think that’s been the thing that we’ve got to be able to deal with more effectively.

“On the offensive side of the ball, they’ve got four offensive linemen back. I think they’re young at the running back position, experienced at the wide receiver position and quarterback position. They make some plays, create some loose plays with the quarterback. They play well on special teams. [They are a] well-coached football team.

“We have to compete daily. We have to move forward here. Rivalry game — I think it’s good for college football and good for this state. I’ve said it many, many times over the course of my time here that we have to measure up in this football game. You’re either green or you’re blue in this state, for the most part. This crosses families and everything else involved with it.”

MSU’s four-game slide isn’t necessarily indicative of what will happen in a rivalry game like this. Dantonio recalled the 2009 matchup between the Spartans and the Wolverines, when U-M came into the game at an undefeated 4-0, while the Spartans touted a 1-3 record.

“You sort of throw the records out a little bit, pretty much like Coach Harbaugh said yesterday,” Dantonio said. “I think that there’s been times where they’ve been 4-0 and we’ve been 1-3 yet we’ve been able to find a way to win. Those type of things have happened in the past.

“Right now, for me, my main consideration is our football team and getting them down to the football game ready. ... We’ll compete. We’ll play hard. We just can’t make mistakes and beat ourselves. If you look at our season right now, what’s transpired and what’s happened is we’ve beaten ourselves in some respects. We’re playing a good football team, in this case, and you can’t turn it over. In the first five games, we had a very productive turnover ratio. In the last four, it’s probably been in the negative situation.”

Dantonio noted how important the game against U-M is each season for the identity of his program.

“The Michigan game has always been a game that we’ve pointed toward ever since I’ve come here,” Dantonio explained. “I’ve said many, many times I didn’t create that environment, I’m just trying to empower it and stay with it. I knew that if we were going to be successful here, we were going to have to win down the road some and here at home, and we were going to have to measure up every time we played that football game. That’s what we put into effect that we were going to measure up in this football game.

“I’ve been here 13 years, and we need to do that again. It’s a constant thing because you’re going to compete against them in everything that we do, whether it’s recruits in the state, or on the field, or on the basketball court, on the hockey rink. That’s just the way it’s built here. You’re going to compete with them in everything across the board. That’s the way I’ve tried to approach it.”

MSU and Dantonio have been on the receiving end of much criticism this season and

in recent years. The Spartans have a 15-18 record in the Big Ten since 2016 and a 24-23 record overall in that span. Dantonio was asked if there’s any added pressure to this year’s game, given the recent struggles and current criticism he is receiving.

“No, I don’t feel any added pressure,” he insisted. “I feel that there’s always pressure in this game because you’re always trying to measure up. ... This is a big game. It’s always been a national TV game, pretty much. It’s always been a game that’s always had everybody looking at it.”

Before last season’s game between the two teams, the Spartans locked arms during pregame warm-ups and walked down the field, clotheslining a few U-M players that were on their side of the field warming up. U-M linebacker Devin Bush, in retaliation, tore up some of the grass on the Spartans’ mid-field logo with his cleats. Dantonio was seen smirking as he walked behind the MSU players during the fiasco.

U-M went on to win the game 21-7 and held MSU to just 94 total yards in the game. Dantonio was asked if there would be any carryover from that incident to this year’s game.

“That’s in the past, in my mind,” he said. “Those things have taken place. If you don’t like confrontation, this probably isn’t a good game to go to. That’s just the way it is. It’s just natural.

“You’ve got guys that have played against each other in high school, you’ve got guys that have played already in this football game. It’s just a competitive environment. The biggest thing that we need to do is have total focus on what we need to do at the right time and not make mistakes and play hard. That’s what we’ll focus on.

“[When] we’ve gone down there in the past, there’s been great sportsmanship. I look towards that. I don’t look away from that, I look towards that.”

Dantonio has taken jabs publicly toward U-M in years past, dating all the way back to mocking U-M senior running back Mike Hart’s height in 2007. Tuesday, he was asked if he has instructed his players on what to say to reporters this week ahead of the game.

“I really haven’t,” he said. “I’ve chosen to just try to be respectful towards the rivalry. I sort of take the high road. I think our players have tried to do that as well.”

Dantonio On Michigan Wolverines Head Coach Jim Harbaugh

During Jim Harbaugh’s Monday press conference, he complimented Dantonio, calling him a “master motivator.”

Dantonio had positive things to say about Harbaugh when asked Tuesday.

“I think he’s done, obviously, a great job,” Dantonio said. “I think he’s won 10 games numerous times. We’re 2-2 against them right now. Our games have been close, relatively close. The one in 2016 wasn’t as close. The rest of them were pretty close. Last year was close until they hit that 80-yarder.

“He’s done a great job; he’s recruited extremely well. Michigan has always had great players. I think they’re doing a great job defensively and offensively. He’s a good football coach. The guy is a Hall of Fame football coach, whether it’s in the NFL or whether it’s in college. You can expect them to play well.”

Dantonio was asked to describe Harbaugh in two words — but could only come up with one.

“Intense,” Dantonio noted. “I think he does a great job. I think he’s truly committed to every single play on the football field. He’s going to think outside the box — you see him do different things offensively; you’ve seen that in the past. They do different things in the past that create adjustments for you, and then you’re going to have to adjust to it within that football game.

“He’s extremely competitive and intense, but I think most coaches are.”

Dantonio On Injuries vs. Illinois

Junior tight end Matt Dotson suffered an injury in the game against Illinois and did not

return. Dantonio gave an update and said that Dotson tore his achilles, ending his season.

Junior cornerback Josiah Scott also left the Illinois game with an undisclosed injury.

“As far as Josiah, we expect him to play,” Dantonio said.