

← Back

Who can Cris-cross Ohio St.?

By Terry Boers September 2, 1987 Publication: Chicago Sun-Times Page: 5 Word Count: 923

The day Ohio State split end Cris Carter decided it was better to receive than to just receive may have been the day the Big Ten race went up for grabs. Carter, a consensus All-America last year when he hauled in 69 passes for 1,127 yards and 11 touchdowns, probably would have been the conference's most exciting offensive player had the school not declared him ineligible July 15 for accepting money and signing a contract with an agent.

Carter, the Buckeyes' all-time leading pass-catcher, ran afoul of NCAA rules when he signed a \$5,000 promissory note with **Lloyd Bloom** and **Norby Walters**, agents of World Entertainment and Sports Inc.

While Ohio State coach Earle Bruce rightly declared his program "bigger than any one player," the fact is Carter's loss leaves the Buckeyes on shakier ground.

1. Ohio State

Flanker Everett Ross (team-leading 20.4 yards per catch) is the only proven receiver on the team. But senior quarterback and punter Tom Tupa, who takes over for Jim Karsatos, could have used the instant confidence boost he would have gained throwing to Carter.

Still, Ohio State returns 14 other starters from last year's 9-3 team, including the top two tailbacks - Vince Workman (985 yards) and James Bryant ((653) - and fullback George Cooper (411).

The defense has eight returnees, headlined by the most devastating pair of linebackers - Chris Spielman and Eric Kumerow - in the country.

That should be enough to win the Big Ten title and make for plenty of pleasant Saturdays for Bruce, who just might break out those fancy duds he wore in the Cotton Bowl last January for this season's Rose Bowl.

The dark suit and hat might have made Bruce look as if he were trying to get a part in the next Al Capone movie, but his team is no longer untouchable.

The rest of the Big Ten:

2. Michigan

The major problem for coach Bo Schembechler, whose defending champions made too many Bo-boos in their Rose Bowl loss to Arizona State, will be replacing Jim Harbaugh. Senior Chris Zurbrugg decided to forgo his final year of eligibility, leaving sophomores Demetrius Brown and Michael Taylor to battle it out. The Wolverines will rely heavily on senior tailback Jamie Morris, who led the league last year in all-purpose running. Michigan can win the title if Morris has nine lives.

3. Michigan State

A disappointing 6-5 record threw a monkey wrench into coach George Perles' five-year plan, but there's nothing wrong with the Spartans that a healthy Lorenzo White wouldn't cure. Michigan State can win the title if White stays healthy and returns to the form with which he gained 1,908 yards as a sophomore.

4. Iowa

The Hawkeyes don't have their usual squeezably soft schedule - seven of the 12 games are on the road. And coach Hayden Fry must also face life without 10 starters from last season. But don't cry for Fry. He has loads of talent at his disposal, and that includes the league's most intriguing player, 6-8 sophomore quarterback Dan McGwire, whose big brother Mark is the big bopper for the Oakland Athletics. Iowa can win the title if McGwire becomes a long-ball threat.

5. Indiana

It seems like only yesterday the Hoosiers were a moribund 0-11 in Bill Mallory's first year as coach. Mallory, the reigning Big Ten coach of the year, brought the Hoosiers back to 6-5 last year and took them to their first bowl game in seven seasons. Linebacker Van Waiters is one of the league's best and sophomore tailback Anthony Thompson rushed for 679 yards in the last eight games. Indiana can have a good year if Thompson picks up where he left off.

6. Illinois

The times - and names - they are a changin'. Two years ago, coach Mike White gave every member of his coaching staff a new job description. After last year's 4-7 debacle, White swung a mighty ax through his staff once more. When the bloodletting was complete, White had a new offensive coordinator - Dwain Painter - and a new defensive coordinator - Howard Tippett. This team is heavy on defense, where nine starters are back.

7. Northwestern

After a sometimes stormy and often petty relationship with the school's administration, coach Francis Peay signed a five-year contract two days after the 4-7 Wildcats completed their most successful season since 1973. Peay is good, but you have to wonder if all his benefits can make up for a team that still lacks talent. Northwestern can have a good year if quarterback Mike Greenfield stays healthy.

8. Minnesota

The Golden Gophers, who tied for third place last season, could surprise again if coach John Gutekunst can find some linemen gute-nough to open some holes for last year's freshman sensation, Darrell Thompson, who gained 1,240 rushing yards. Senior quarterback Rickey Foggie, returns for his fourth year as the starter. Minnesota can have a good year if Foggie finally puts it all together.

9. Wisconsin

New coach Don Morton, who built consistent winners at North Dakota State and Tulsa, will find the cupboard in Madison is pretty bare, as evidenced by the fact that just one starter returns on defense. Morton's track record says he'll get the job done, but this will be a long-

distance event. Wisconsin can have a good year by winning two Big Ten games.

10. Purdue

Welcome to the ball of confusion. The Boilermakers had high hopes last year because of freshman quarterback Jeff George, who had been the nation's top high school gun. George, who's since transferred to Illinois, was quickly shot down and coach Leon Burtnett was fired. Fred Akers takes over a team that has plenty of ground to make up.

Chicago Sun-Times

Date: September 2, 1987

Page: 5

Copyright 1987, 1996 Chicago Sun-Times, Inc.