

9. Michigan Wolverines (9-3, 7-2)

2019 Projections

F/+	46.9 (9)
FEI	0.55 (11)
S&P+	21.6 (9)
Total Wins	9.4
Conf Wins	6.8
SOS	.055 (15)
Conf SOS	.089 (18)
Div Champ	28%
Conf Champ	16%
CFP Berth	11%

Projection Factors

2018 F/+	45.5 (9)
2018 FEI	0.64 (11)
2018 S&P+	22.0 (10)
5-Year F/+	36.1 (9)
5-Year FEI	0.47 (12)
5-Year S&P+	18.8 (10)
2-Yr/5-Yr Recruiting	19/15
Ret. Offense	76% (30)
Ret. Defense	50% (106)
Ret. Total	63% (68)

Projected Win Likelihood by Game

Date	Opponent (Proj Rank)	PWL	Projected Loss	Projected Win
Aug 31	vs Middle Tenn. (92)	99%	<div style="width: 99%;"></div>	<div style="width: 99%;"></div>
Sep 7	vs Army (54)	95%	<div style="width: 95%;"></div>	<div style="width: 95%;"></div>
Sep 21	at Wisconsin (14)	50%	<div style="width: 50%;"></div>	<div style="width: 50%;"></div>
Sep 28	vs Rutgers (108)	99%	<div style="width: 99%;"></div>	<div style="width: 99%;"></div>
Oct 5	vs Iowa (18)	74%	<div style="width: 74%;"></div>	<div style="width: 74%;"></div>
Oct 12	at Illinois (101)	99%	<div style="width: 99%;"></div>	<div style="width: 99%;"></div>
Oct 19	at Penn St. (13)	48%	<div style="width: 48%;"></div>	<div style="width: 48%;"></div>
Oct 26	vs Notre Dame (10)	59%	<div style="width: 59%;"></div>	<div style="width: 59%;"></div>
Nov 2	at Maryland (73)	96%	<div style="width: 96%;"></div>	<div style="width: 96%;"></div>
Nov 16	vs Michigan St. (23)	79%	<div style="width: 79%;"></div>	<div style="width: 79%;"></div>
Nov 23	at Indiana (51)	87%	<div style="width: 87%;"></div>	<div style="width: 87%;"></div>
Nov 30	vs Ohio St. (5)	51%	<div style="width: 51%;"></div>	<div style="width: 51%;"></div>

The Wolverines were firmly in the playoff picture heading into The Game against Ohio State. Having taken just a single loss (by one touchdown, in the opener against Notre Dame), Michigan was favored against the Buckeyes thanks to a top-ten defense and top-25 level offense. Having beaten the in-state rival Spartans a month earlier, the Wolverines had a chance to end the narrative that Jim Harbaugh’s team couldn’t beat its rivals. But the Buckeyes erased any hope of the Wolverines’ first playoff appearance thanks to a dominating offensive performance (the adjusted scoring margin was -33 for the Wolverines, even worse than the actual 62-39 final score). The Wolverines would be similarly demolished by frequent bowl opponent Florida, 41-15. That is a pretty sour end to what looked like a promising season.

But even with those disappointments, Michigan enters 2019 with a big opportunity. Urban Meyer is gone, and no one knows exactly what the Buckeyes will look like. Penn State has also lost a significant amount of talent, so the Big Ten East looks much more open than usual. This is also likely to be Harbaugh’s first season at Michigan with a clear starter at quarterback—unbelievably, the Wolverines have started someone different every year of his tenure. Shea Patterson returns with significant receiving talent, including Donovan Peoples-Jones and Nico Collins. Patterson was somewhat underwhelming in 2018 despite the Wolverines ranking ninth overall in passing S&P+; against Ohio State and Florida, Patterson completed fewer than 59 percent of his passes and averaged just 212 passing yards and 6.0 yards per attempt. The Wolverines relied on shorter routes, ranking just 69th in passing marginal explosiveness. And while the passing game was effective overall, the offense struggled significantly on

passing downs, ranking 52nd in passing downs S&P+—basically, if the offense didn’t click on early downs, the Wolverines struggled to convert on later ones.

In addition to the benefits from returning starters in the passing game, Michigan fans have reason for optimism with the addition of Alabama co-offensive coordinator Josh Gattis. Gattis promises a long-desired overhaul of the Wolverines offense, instituting a no-huddle “pro-spread” offense, according to the *Detroit Free Press* (Michigan was 123rd in adjusted pace last year). It is possible that Patterson, who averaged 7.7 yards per carry last season, could be increasingly involved in the run game and with throws on the run. Additionally, another year with Ed Warriner and building on the zone-based run scheme with four returning offensive linemen should be good for the run game—that is, if someone emerges as the lead running back. With Karan Higdon gone and Chris Evans out for the season, Michigan will turn to a young back, potentially sophomore Christian Turner or incoming freshman Zach Charbonnet. All things considered, there’s enough talent in the unit that even the lack of a clear starter shouldn’t be too concerning for the offense.

The defense lost a lot of production, returning just half from last season (106th). Big names such as linebacker Devin Bush, defensive end Chase Winovich, defensive back David Long, and defensive tackle Rashan Gary have all left for the NFL. Defensive coordinator Don Brown will need younger replacements for his stars. Brown has typically relied on an aggressive scheme fueled by havoc (Michigan ranked 23rd in overall havoc rate last year) and press-man coverage. The secondary should be fine thanks to the returning Lavert Hill and incoming five-star freshman Daxton Hill, but there will need to be answers at linebacker and along the line.

10. Notre Dame Fighting Irish (10-2)

2019 Projections

F/+	46.1 (10)
FEI	0.59 (9)
S&P+	19.1 (12)
Total Wins	9.9
Conf Wins	-
SOS	.084 (22)
Conf SOS	-
Div Champ	-
Conf Champ	-
CFP Berth	9%

Projection Factors

2018 F/+	46.2 (7)
2018 FEI	0.67 (8)
2018 S&P+	20.7 (13)
5-Year F/+	35.8 (10)
5-Year FEI	0.51 (11)
5-Year S&P+	18.1 (11)
2-Yr/5-Yr Recruiting	11/10
Ret. Offense	57% (86)
Ret. Defense	55% (95)
Ret. Total	56% (97)

Projected Win Likelihood by Game

Date	Opponent (Proj Rank)	PWL	Projected Loss	Projected Win
Sep 2	at Louisville (95)	99%	<div style="width: 99%;"></div>	<div style="width: 99%;"></div>
Sep 14	vs New Mexico (115)	99%	<div style="width: 99%;"></div>	<div style="width: 99%;"></div>
Sep 21	at Georgia (3)	31%	<div style="width: 31%;"></div>	<div style="width: 31%;"></div>
Sep 28	vs Virginia (45)	91%	<div style="width: 91%;"></div>	<div style="width: 91%;"></div>
Oct 5	vs Bowling Green (123)	99%	<div style="width: 99%;"></div>	<div style="width: 99%;"></div>
Oct 12	vs USC (33)	86%	<div style="width: 86%;"></div>	<div style="width: 86%;"></div>
Oct 26	at Michigan (9)	41%	<div style="width: 41%;"></div>	<div style="width: 41%;"></div>
Nov 2	vs Virginia Tech (48)	92%	<div style="width: 92%;"></div>	<div style="width: 92%;"></div>
Nov 9	at Duke (58)	89%	<div style="width: 89%;"></div>	<div style="width: 89%;"></div>
Nov 16	vs Navy (103)	99%	<div style="width: 99%;"></div>	<div style="width: 99%;"></div>
Nov 23	vs Boston College (67)	97%	<div style="width: 97%;"></div>	<div style="width: 97%;"></div>
Nov 30	at Stanford (24)	67%	<div style="width: 67%;"></div>	<div style="width: 67%;"></div>

The 2018 Notre Dame Fighting Irish had a couple of big factors working in their favor, at least up to the moment where they found themselves facing Clemson in the first round of the playoff. Head coach Brian Kelly made a timely call in 2017 to hire Chip Long from Memphis to help him update the spread offense and mix in some new approaches to power running and RPOs. Then, with the Irish sitting at 3-0 with a big win over Michigan already on the resume, he made a gutsy call to change his quarterback from returning starter and electric athlete Brandon Wimbusch to savvy passer Ian Book.

Another big factor was better experience across the offensive line and the entire defense, which maintained the scheme and structure that another 2017 hire (defensive coordinator Mike Elko) had established before leaving for another job (Texas A&M). With Kelly's proactive changes across the program and an experienced team, they were well positioned to take advantage of another favorable factor, the collapse of their competition. On the surface, a schedule including Michigan, Stanford, Virginia Tech, Florida State, and USC looked like a murderer's row, but Syracuse and Michigan were the only opponents the Irish faced who managed to win 10 games in 2018. The 2019 slate figures to be less forgiving. Beyond their home opponents, the Irish travel to Athens to play Georgia, play at Michigan in late October, and finish on the road against Stanford.

One big advantage the Irish will have in 2019 is an offensive line returning four starters from the 2018 playoff unit, including both offensive tackles. Book's No. 2 and no. 3 receivers, Chase Claypool (50 catches, 639 yards) and Chris Finke (49 catches, 571 yards), are back to keep the passing game hum-

ming, and running back Jafar Armstrong (383 rushing yards at 5.3 yards per carry with seven touchdowns) flashed regularly in 2018 and figures to be a star. Returning tight end Cole Kmet is a solid receiver and at 6-foot-6 and 255 pounds, he can get on the edge.

The defense is a little mixed. On the perimeter, the Irish have tremendous experience and proven talent leading the way. Defensive ends Khalid Khareem, Julian Okwara, and Daelin Hayes had a combined 28 tackles for loss and 14.5 sacks last season and all return. Cornerback Troy Pride Jr. returns, and the Irish also get back corner/nickel Shaun Crawford, who missed last season with a knee injury. The safety tandem of rangy Jalen Elliott (four interceptions in 2018) and hard-hitting Alohi Gilman (94 tackles) also returns. The question marks are in the middle, where Notre Dame lost three exceptional football players in defensive tackle Jerry Tillery (first-round draft pick), linebacker Drue Tranquill (fourth-round draft pick), and linebacker Te'Von Coney (123 tackles, four sacks). The Irish are hoping that returning starter Asmar Bilal can make an effective conversion from rover to middle linebacker to anchor whichever second-year players surround him at the outside linebacker spots. Their ability to play great run defense against teams like Georgia or Michigan will likely hinge on whether they can consistently free up Gilman to drop down and serve as a fourth linebacker.

Notre Dame should be very good again in 2019, but between a tougher schedule and the fact that they have to reload the middle of their defense, a return to the playoff is a tall order.

11. Washington Huskies (10-2, 8-1)

2019 Projections

F/+	44.5 (11)
FEI	0.56 (10)
S&P+	17.7 (15)
Total Wins	10.4
Conf Wins	7.6
SOS	.275 (76)
Conf SOS	.312 (55)
Div Champ	62%
Conf Champ	36%
CFP Berth	29%

Projection Factors

2018 F/+	46.1 (8)
2018 FEI	0.56 (14)
2018 S&P+	19.9 (14)
5-Year F/+	36.7 (8)
5-Year FEI	0.55 (9)
5-Year S&P+	17.2 (13)
2-Yr/5-Yr Recruiting	14/18
Ret. Offense	67% (55)
Ret. Defense	34% (130)
Ret. Total	50% (118)

Projected Win Likelihood by Game

Date	Opponent (Proj Rank)	PWL	Projected Loss	Projected Win
Aug 31	vs E. Washington (FCS)	100%		
Sep 7	vs California (68)	97%		
Sep 14	vs Hawaii (102)	99%		
Sep 21	at BYU (50)	85%		
Sep 28	vs USC (33)	85%		
Oct 5	at Stanford (24)	65%		
Oct 12	at Arizona (60)	89%		
Oct 19	vs Oregon (28)	80%		
Nov 2	vs Utah (19)	72%		
Nov 8	at Oregon St. (110)	99%		
Nov 23	at Colorado (75)	94%		
Nov 29	vs Washington St. (26)	79%		

Washington lost four games in 2018, but not a single one by more than five points. Unfortunately for the Huskies, but demonstrative of how close they were to bigger things, Washington should have won three of those games based on their S&P+ postgame win expectancies. So it's fair to be a little disappointed, not only because of the final 10-4 record, but also because of the personnel losses—the Huskies are 118th overall in returning production, and dead last in defensive returning production with just 34 percent returning. The losses include longtime quarterback Jake Browning, running back Myles Gaskin, tackle Kaleb McGary, tackling machine Ben Burr-Kirven, and defensive backs Byron Murphy, Taylor Rapp, and Jordan Miller.

It's a new-look Huskies for 2019, so it's good they're led by their most hyped quarterback in years: Georgia transfer Jacob Eason. Eason started at Georgia as a freshman and threw for 2,430 yards with a 55 percent completion rate, but the Bulldogs had just the 91st-ranked passing S&P+ offense and Eason averaged only 5.9 yards per attempt. But the former five-star quarterback is as prototypical as you could hope for, and he returns Browning's top three receiving targets, including Aaron Fuller, Andre Baccellia, and Ty Jones, as well as a number of young tight ends. Given the returning receiving threats and Eason's near-unlimited potential, this could be the

most dynamic passing offense of Chris Petersen's Washington tenure. The Huskies also benefit from Salvon Ahmed at running back. Even though Gaskin has been a mainstay of the Washington offense, Ahmed actually bettered him in nearly every statistical category last season, averaging nearly a yard per carry more, and gaining at least 4 yards approximately seven percent more often (55.8 percent). Despite the loss of the quarterback-running back duo, Washington might even be due for an upgrade offensively.

The Huskies defense lost stars at each level, but there's a chance they don't actually fall too far from their elite play from 2018. The Washington defense ranked ninth in defensive FEI last season, shutting down explosive plays and limiting opponents to just 3.7 points per trip inside the 40. They weren't big on creating havoc (just 67th in overall havoc rate), but they played bend-don't-break defense to near-perfection. While Burr-Kiven, Rapp, and Murphy are all gone, there might be some young guys ready to uphold the high standard in Seattle. Sophomore linebackers Ariel Ngata and Joe Tryon were both disruptive in the spring, and Isaiah Gilchrist grabbed two interceptions in the spring game. But beyond the individual players, the most confidence might come from defensive coordinator Jimmy Lake, who has had nothing but elite units at Washington.

12. Florida Gators (8-4, 5-3)

2019 Projections

F/+	43.4 (12)
FEI	0.37 (21)
S&P+	24.6 (6)
Total Wins	8.4
Conf Wins	4.9
SOS	.024 (8)
Conf SOS	.036 (8)
Div Champ	15%
Conf Champ	7%
CFP Berth	6%

Projection Factors

2018 F/+	44.4 (11)
2018 FEI	0.55 (17)
2018 S&P+	23.0 (9)
5-Year F/+	21.2 (24)
5-Year FEI	0.20 (35)
5-Year S&P+	15.9 (18)
2-Yr/5-Yr Recruiting	8/13
Ret. Offense	77% (27)
Ret. Defense	71% (43)
Ret. Total	74% (26)

Projected Win Likelihood by Game

Date	Opponent (Proj Rank)	PWL	Projected Loss	Projected Win
Aug 24	vs Miami-FL (22)	67%	<div style="width: 33%;"></div>	<div style="width: 67%;"></div>
Sep 7	vs Tenn-Martin (FCS)	100%	<div style="width: 0%;"></div>	<div style="width: 100%;"></div>
Sep 14	at Kentucky (38)	75%	<div style="width: 25%;"></div>	<div style="width: 75%;"></div>
Sep 21	vs Tennessee (40)	87%	<div style="width: 13%;"></div>	<div style="width: 87%;"></div>
Sep 28	vs Towson (FCS)	100%	<div style="width: 0%;"></div>	<div style="width: 100%;"></div>
Oct 5	vs Auburn (8)	50%	<div style="width: 50%;"></div>	<div style="width: 50%;"></div>
Oct 12	at LSU (6)	32%	<div style="width: 68%;"></div>	<div style="width: 32%;"></div>
Oct 19	at S. Carolina (29)	67%	<div style="width: 33%;"></div>	<div style="width: 67%;"></div>
Nov 2	vs Georgia (3)	34%	<div style="width: 66%;"></div>	<div style="width: 34%;"></div>
Nov 9	vs Vanderbilt (61)	95%	<div style="width: 5%;"></div>	<div style="width: 95%;"></div>
Nov 16	at Missouri (15)	46%	<div style="width: 54%;"></div>	<div style="width: 46%;"></div>
Nov 30	vs Florida St. (37)	85%	<div style="width: 15%;"></div>	<div style="width: 85%;"></div>

The Gators made a sizable jump in Year 1 with Dan Mullen as head coach, climbing from 51st nationally in offensive S&P+ to 15th. They notched big wins over Mississippi State, LSU, and Michigan en route to a 10-win season. Mullen undoubtedly benefited from inheriting a highly experienced offensive line from his predecessor Jim McElwain, but his spread tactics quickly enabled the Gators to get more from their big front and depth at running back.

Lamical Perine and Jordan Scarlett combined to turn 265 carries into 1,602 yards at 6.0 yards per carry with 12 touchdowns. After removing sack yardage, quarterback Feleipe Franks also revealed a mobile side that had not been a part of the offense under McElwain with 95 carries for 452 yards at 4.8 yards per carry with seven touchdowns. The Gators passing game sputtered at times, but Franks threw for 2,457 yards with 24 touchdowns to just six interceptions. Franks returns for 2019 along with Scarlett and four of the top five wide receivers, led by senior Van Jefferson (35 catches for 503 yards and six touchdowns).

But now Mullen has to transition from helping McElwain's offensive recruits realize their potential to rebuilding an offensive line that loses three starters, including both tackles. Departing right tackle Jawaan Taylor ended up being a second-round draft choice, while left tackle Martez Ivey was a four-year starter for the Gators. The prospective first-team line will be comprised mostly of former backups who were rated as three-star recruits, save for Texas transfer and former four-star recruit Jean Delance, who's leading the pack at right tackle. Mullen is no stranger to building strong offensive lines with lower-rated players from his time at Mississippi State, but he'll really need to pull through here to maximize the Gators' returning skill elsewhere.

The passing game should be improved with so much return-

ing skill and chemistry between Franks and the receiver corps, but this team leaned on its ability to run the ball in 2018 and will probably need to do so again. The Gators have a wild card with freshman quarterback Emory Jones, who played in just four games in 2018, thus preserving his redshirt. Jones flashed major explosiveness as a runner in Wildcat-style packages designed to help him ease into the offense, although his deployment was often fairly predictable.

Florida's defense also took some tough losses, including three starters who were selected in the NFL draft. On the bright side, defensive end Jabari Zuniga returns after a solid 2018 season (6.5 sacks), multiple defensive backs with starting experience (including both cornerbacks) are back, and steady linebacker David Reese returns in the middle to help direct traffic.

Defensive coordinator Todd Grantham has long been known for generating pressure and teaching pattern-matching coverage, and he'll have another strong cast to execute that vision. What the Gators need is to find a little more up the middle to help stop the run and put teams in obvious passing downs after finishing just 41st in rushing S&P+. Florida has defensive linemen (like 275-pound West Virginia grad transfer Adam Shuler) who are effective in the pass rush on slants and stunts, but they need to find an anchoring nose tackle to give them some power in the box.

The ceiling for the 2019 Gators will be set by how well they can fill out the trenches with new starters on the lines and at linebacker. Beyond their strategic aims to run the ball with spread-option and spread-iso tactics and put opponents in passing downs, Florida needs stout fronts to realize their goal of winning the SEC East division. Currently the road to that title goes through Jacksonville, where they have their annual showdown with big, physical Georgia that hasn't gone Florida's way since Kirby Smart got the Bulldogs going.

13. Penn State Nittany Lions (9-3, 7-2)

2019 Projections

F/+	43.3 (13)
FEI	0.48 (12)
S&P+	18.4 (14)
Total Wins	9.5
Conf Wins	6.6
SOS	.081 (21)
Conf SOS	.085 (17)
Div Champ	18%
Conf Champ	10%
CFP Berth	7%

Projection Factors

2018 F/+	41.8 (14)
2018 FEI	0.50 (20)
2018 S&P+	19.0 (15)
5-Year F/+	32.4 (13)
5-Year FEI	0.46 (13)
5-Year S&P+	16.9 (15)
2-Yr/5-Yr Recruiting	5/12
Ret. Offense	44% (116)
Ret. Defense	68% (55)
Ret. Total	56% (100)

Projected Win Likelihood by Game

Date	Opponent (Proj Rank)	PWL	Projected Loss	Projected Win
Aug 31	vs Idaho (FCS)	100%		
Sep 7	vs Buffalo (89)	99%		
Sep 14	vs Pittsburgh (53)	93%		
Sep 27	at Maryland (73)	94%		
Oct 5	vs Purdue (63)	95%		
Oct 12	at Iowa (18)	54%		
Oct 19	vs Michigan (9)	52%		
Oct 26	at Michigan St. (23)	61%		
Nov 9	at Minnesota (42)	78%		
Nov 16	vs Indiana (51)	93%		
Nov 23	at Ohio St. (5)	30%		
Nov 30	vs Rutgers (108)	99%		

The Nittany Lions took a definite step back on offense in 2018 following Joe Moorhead’s move to Mississippi State. After ranking fifth in offensive FEI in 2017, Penn State’s offense fell all the way to 44th last season despite featuring numerous senior leaders who have since moved on. Those include quarterback Trace McSorley (and his backup Tommy Stevens, who transferred), running back Miles Sanders, and senior receivers DeAndre Thompkins and Juwan Johnson.

Moorhead’s offenses varied between emphasizing efficiency and explosiveness (particularly with Saquon Barkley as the prime boom-or-bust running back), but McSorley certainly seemed to have a gift for the deep ball. Unfortunately, a lack of consistency was partly responsible for the offense’s regression to 64th in passing S&P+. McSorley played through injuries throughout the season, and while the passing offense was relatively more explosive (41st in passing marginal explosiveness), it often couldn’t connect on more efficient throws (103rd in passing marginal efficiency) and in obvious passing situations (69th on passing downs), with all starting receivers averaging under a 60 percent catch rate.

Sean Clifford now takes over at quarterback. A former four-star recruit, Clifford hasn’t seen a ton of action, but he completed five of his seven passes last year for an astounding 195 yards. One of those completions was a 95-yarder, but he nevertheless averaged 25 yards per completion on his other four. The early

indications are that Clifford and Penn State could continue to go deep frequently. Even without Johnson and Thompkins, Penn State returns leading receiver KJ Hamler, who averaged 18.0 yards per catch last season, and young receivers Justin Shorter and Jahan Dotson could be primed for a breakout. Miles Sanders admirably replaced Barkley, offering improved efficiency but lower explosive potential. Now the Nittany Lions will likely feature a running back rotation that starts with Ricky Slade but includes a number of other former blue-chippers, including freshmen Devyn Ford and Noah Cain.

Even with all of its attrition, the offense seems to have highly prized recruits waiting for their breakouts. The defense also features a number of personnel losses, but is still expected to be among the best in the country. Shareef Miller, Kevin Givens, and Robert Windsor are all gone from the line, but Yetur Gross-Matos exploded for 20 tackles for loss last season and could be one of the top defensive ends in the country. He’ll need another end to step up without Miller, but Jayson Oweh could be that guy, and Shaka Toney was disruptive as well. But with Micah Parsons looking like a star at linebacker already (he led the team in tackles despite not starting) and incoming freshman linebacker Brandon Smith nearly equaling Parsons’ accolades as a recruit, it’s possible that the Nittany Lions don’t see too much of a drop off from their 11th-place defensive S&P+ ranking last season.

14. Wisconsin Badgers (10-2, 7-2)

2019 Projections

F/+	42.3 (14)
FEI	0.41 (16)
S&P+	20.1 (11)
Total Wins	9.6
Conf Wins	6.6
SOS	.104 (35)
Conf SOS	.107 (20)
Div Champ	50%
Conf Champ	22%
CFP Berth	14%

Projection Factors

2018 F/+	27.1 (33)
2018 FEI	0.24 (37)
2018 S&P+	15.5 (19)
5-Year F/+	34.5 (11)
5-Year FEI	0.57 (8)
5-Year S&P+	18.8 (9)
2-Yr/5-Yr Recruiting	28/32
Ret. Offense	85% (7)
Ret. Defense	60% (78)
Ret. Total	73% (29)

Projected Win Likelihood by Game

Date	Opponent (Proj Rank)	PWL	Projected Loss	Projected Win
Aug 30	at South Florida (83)	97%	<div style="width: 3%;"></div>	<div style="width: 97%;"></div>
Sep 7	vs C. Michigan (114)	99%	<div style="width: 1%;"></div>	<div style="width: 99%;"></div>
Sep 21	vs Michigan (9)	50%	<div style="width: 50%;"></div>	<div style="width: 50%;"></div>
Sep 28	vs Northwestern (46)	89%	<div style="width: 11%;"></div>	<div style="width: 89%;"></div>
Oct 5	vs Kent St. (120)	99%	<div style="width: 1%;"></div>	<div style="width: 99%;"></div>
Oct 12	vs Michigan St. (23)	73%	<div style="width: 27%;"></div>	<div style="width: 73%;"></div>
Oct 19	at Illinois (101)	99%	<div style="width: 1%;"></div>	<div style="width: 99%;"></div>
Oct 26	at Ohio St. (5)	29%	<div style="width: 71%;"></div>	<div style="width: 29%;"></div>
Nov 9	vs Iowa (18)	68%	<div style="width: 32%;"></div>	<div style="width: 68%;"></div>
Nov 16	at Nebraska (49)	81%	<div style="width: 19%;"></div>	<div style="width: 81%;"></div>
Nov 23	vs Purdue (63)	95%	<div style="width: 5%;"></div>	<div style="width: 95%;"></div>
Nov 30	at Minnesota (42)	77%	<div style="width: 23%;"></div>	<div style="width: 77%;"></div>

Most prognostications missed Wisconsin's window over the last two years. The Badgers weren't expected to do much in 2017 but rode a veteran defense and star freshman running back Jonathan Taylor over a soft schedule to the Big 10 Championship Game. Then things flipped, with the Badgers picked as high as fourth in 2018 preseason polls only for a retooled and beat-up defense to let Wisconsin down as they went 8-5 against a tougher schedule.

Their 2019 team should be interesting, if nothing else. The offensive line is replacing three starters but has an all-Wisconsin group led by All-Big 10 center Tyler Biadasz, who will likely be flanked by a pair of massive former walk-ons in Josh Seltzner (6-foot-4, 326-pound redshirt sophomore) and Jason Erdmann (6-foot-6, 325-pound redshirt senior). Cole Van Lanen also returns as a starter at left tackle. The Badgers also return their two-headed running back tandem of Jonathan Taylor and Garrett Groshek. Taylor ran for 2,194 yards in 2018 at 7.1 yards per carry with 16 touchdowns and will be running for an NFL contract in 2019. Groshek was brought in on third downs for his pass-catching abilities. Flex tight end Jake Ferguson emerged in 2018 to take the mantle of the departing Troy Fumagalli, who had been drafted, and finished second on the team with 456 receiving yards and four touchdowns. Ferguson is back as a junior alongside leading receivers Danny Davis and A.J. Taylor.

After throwing 26 interceptions over the last two years,

quarterback Alex Hornibrook has grad transferred to Florida State for a fresh start. It seems unlikely that backup Jack Coan pushed him out after a mixed performance in five games. Instead, look for the Badgers to turn to four-star true freshman and early enrollee Graham Mertz. Wisconsin will also likely move to more shotgun looks with Mertz (a spread quarterback in high school) and Coan (at his best in the shotgun zone-read game) competing for the job.

The Badgers defense slipped from fourth in S&P+ in 2017 to 29th in 2018 and had some struggles along the way against some Big 10 West opponents like Northwestern (a 31-17 defeat) and Purdue (a 47-44 victory). They had lots of injuries over the year and struggled to find a pass rush. The six-man rotation at linebacker of 2017 that had generated 24.0 sacks shrunk to a five-man rotation that produced just 14.0 in 2018. In 2019, the defensive line should be healthier and deeper, and the linebacker corps will be bolstered by Alabama transfer Christian Bell and a healthier season from Zach Baun on the outside.

But the schedule is rough, offering home dates against Michigan and Michigan State and a road trip against Ohio State to supplement an improving Big 10 West. Their schedule ends with the road trip against Ohio State, Iowa at home, a road trip to resurgent Nebraska, Purdue at home, and then a road trip to Minnesota. Without experience at quarterback, this doesn't look like a prime year for Wisconsin.