



BIG 10 CONFERENCE

BIG

COLLEGE FOOTBALL: 2026 Preview

5 CAN'T-MISS GAMES



OHIO STATE AT TEXAS

SEPT. 12: Winner clears a giant early hurdle in race for one of 12 playoff spots. This marks the third consecutive season the powers have met, with the Buckeyes winning both. A September clash that pits top of SEC against top of Big Ten.



OREGON AT SOUTHERN CAL

SEPT. 26: Preseason favorite Ducks go on road to open conference play. Both former Pac-12 rivals have aspirations for College Football Playoff berths, while Ducks also have sights set on first national crown.



OHIO STATE AT INDIANA

OCT. 17: A rematch of last year's Big Ten title game will be the biggest game in the history of Bloomington's Memorial Stadium. Curt Cignetti's team went 16-0 in 2025's title run and by this point should know if new QB Josh Hoover is a capable replacement for Fernando Mendoza.



OREGON AT OHIO STATE

NOV. 7: If both Ducks and Bucks survive early tests, this could be a matchup of No. 1 vs. No. 2 in Columbus. Two of the nation's most talented rosters, led by two of the top quarterbacks in the country, set for what should be a classic.



MICHIGAN AT OHIO STATE

NOV. 28: Buckeyes ended an unthinkable four-year losing streak a year ago to restore order to the rivalry. New Michigan boss Kyle Whittingham gets his first crack at Ohio State with a trip to Columbus the Saturday after Thanksgiving.



Associated Press file photo

Indiana coach Curt Cignetti holds the trophy after the Hoosiers' win against Miami in the College Football Playoff championship game in January in Miami Gardens, Fla.

GOING FOR A FOURTH

Oregon eyes first title; OSU, IU will contend

BY WILLIAM BOWMAN, CNHI SPORTS

The Big Ten has crowned three consecutive national champions and enters the 2026 season with the top two teams in preseason polls. Another title run is not out of the question, and perhaps the second-ranked Oregon Ducks can make it four different winners in four consecutive years.

Upstart Indiana and its transcendent coach Curt Cignetti capped one of the more remarkable turn-arounds in college football history last fall, claiming the program's first national title. The Hoosiers, long a doormat in the Big Ten, capped a 16-0 season with a CFP title, taking down Ohio State, Oregon (twice), Alabama and Miami. Clearly, the pendulum has swung to the Big Ten, a trend that feels unlikely to end

anytime soon. Ohio State is first in The Associated Press preseason poll, followed by Oregon at No. 2 and Indiana at No. 6. Four more B1G schools — USC, Michigan, Washington and Penn State — are ranked in the top 20 with Iowa sitting at No. 22. “The Big Ten is the best league in football,” Cignetti said at Big Ten Media Days. “There are a lot of really good teams, very physical, very well-coached teams. It’s hard

to win on the road. The numbers speak for themselves. We don’t run a hype machine here in the Midwest. We believe everything is earned, not given. When we fall short, we say: We fell short. We don’t cry a river, whine and complain. That’s why we’re the best.”

Being the best in 2026 means running the gauntlet that stretches from northern Jersey to Los Angeles.

It means facing quarterbacks such as Dante Moore (Oregon), Julian Sayin (Ohio State), Demond Williams (Washington) and Josh Hoover (Indiana). Or facing All-American defenders such as A’Mauri Washington (Oregon), John Henry Daley (Michigan), Rolijah Hardy (Indiana) and Brandon Finney (Oregon).

Ohio State, Michigan and Indiana have led the charge; two blue bloods and the Hoosiers’ are an incredible 27-2 over the past two seasons. And while the Buckeyes start the year No. 1, Oregon and coach Dan Lanning return maybe the best roster in the nation, anchored by the return of Moore at quarterback. The Ducks have come close in recent seasons, but a national title eludes them.

There is some change across the conference with new coaches at Michigan (Kyle Whittingham), Michigan State (Pat Fitzgerald), Penn State (Matt Campbell) and UCLA (Bob Chesney), along with huge numbers of high-profile transfers at every school, the reality in today’s college football climate.

PLAYERS TO WATCH



JEREMIAH SMITH
WR, Ohio State

- True junior had 87 catches for 1,243 yards and 12 TDs last year. Could be No. 1 pick in next year’s NFL Draft.



JOHN HENRY DALEY
DL, Michigan

- Transfer who followed Kyle Whittingham from Utah, where he had 11.5 sacks



ISAIAH JONES
LB, Indiana

- Coming off junior season that included 15.5 tackles for loss and seven sacks.



JULIAN SAYIN
QB, Ohio State

- Threw for 32 TDs and 3,600 yards in first year as Buckeyes’ starter.



DANTE MOORE
QB, Oregon

- Despite being a likely top 5 pick, returned to Eugene after throwing for 30 TDs in a College Football Playoff season.

STORIES TO FOLLOW

1 Hoosiers reload for repeat title

Another big offseason in the transfer portal, highlighted by grabbing Josh Hoover from TCU, means Curt Cignetti and the champs aren’t going anywhere. Program is 27-2 over past two seasons. Google it.

2 Big Ten’s championship run on the line

The conference has won three national titles in a row for the first time since 1940-42. With three teams starting the season in the top five, and others lurking in the rankings, a fourth consecutive crown is not unthinkable.

3 Coaches offer new faces in new places

Michigan and Penn State both have new coaches, while Pat Fitzgerald makes his return to the Big Ten at Michigan State. Programs were finally able to lure successful coaches from long-standing jobs, with Kyle Whittingham leaving Utah for Michigan, and Matt Campbell coming to Penn State from Iowa State. After leading James Madison to the CFP in 2025, Bob Chesney is now out west at UCLA.

4 Is it finally the Ducks’ time to win title?

Oregon coach Dan Lanning was able to keep likely top 5 pick Dante Moore in college for another year and the Ducks’ roster is as good as any in the nation. Schedule is tough, including games at Ohio State and home with Michigan on consecutive November Saturdays.

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

Oregon
Ohio State
Indiana
Southern Cal
Michigan
Penn State
Washington
Iowa
Illinois
Minnesota
UCLA
Nebraska
Northwestern
Wisconsin
Michigan State
Maryland
Rutgers
Purdue

B1G AWARDS HAUL IN 2025

Led by Indiana coach Curt Cignetti and quarterback Fernando Mendoza, Big Ten players won most of the major awards for the 2025 season:

Curt Cignetti, Indiana



- ▷ The Home Depot Coach of the Year
- ▷ Walter Camp Coach of the Year

Logan Jones, Iowa



- ▷ Rimington Trophy

Fernando Mendoza, Indiana



- ▷ Heisman Memorial Trophy
- ▷ Davey O’Brien Award
- ▷ Maxwell Award
- ▷ Walter Camp Award

Caleb Downs, Ohio State



- ▷ Jim Thorpe Award
- ▷ Lott Impact Trophy

Makai Lemon, USC



- ▷ Fred Biletnikoff Award

