

IN THE TRENCHES: WEEK 10 OUTLAND TROPHY MATCHUPS



PRESENTED BY THE NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR INFECTIOUS DISEASES

PENN STATE AT MICHIGAN, 3:45 P.M. ET ON ESPN

Our weekly Outland Trophy sojourn travels us back to the Big House in Ann Arbor, Mich., for this week's biggest game in the Big Ten, as two programs known for churning out All-American linemen battle for the top spot in the East Division. Three Watch List members are among the starters in this game.

Michigan (7-1) is the favorite in this game, looking to bolster its No. 5 position in the first College Football Playoff rankings. Left guard **Ben Bredeson** (Hartland, Wis.) is up front on one of the most balanced offenses in the country. The 6-5, 320-pound junior has helped Michigan average 212.8 yards rushing and 207.6 yards passing through eight games, a difference of only 41 yards (1,702 rushing to 1,661 passing) on the season while averaging 420.4 yards per contest.

Bredeson is the most experienced player in Michigan's lineup with 28 career starts. The Second Team All-Big Ten selection from 2017 has been named Michigan's Offensive Player of the Game twice, following games against Western Michigan (Sept. 8) and in the Wolverines' most recent win against Michigan State (Oct. 20). The offensive front has paved the way for the team's top two rushers, Karan Higdon and Chris Evans, to combine for 1,025 yards on 191 carries (a 5.4 average) and score eight rushing touchdowns despite both players missing four total games due to injury. Quarterback Shea Patterson has benefitted mightily from their protection and is 18th in the nation in completion percentage (67.2) and 22nd in passing efficiency (155.5 rating).

Penn State counters with two of its stalwarts on the offensive line in junior right guard **Connor McGovern** (Larksville, Pa.) and junior left tackle **Ryan Bates** (Warrington, Pa.). Bates (6-4, 302) and McGovern (6-5, 323) are the Nittany Lions' most experienced linemen with 30 starts apiece, with McGovern starting the last 29 straight. In their most recent action against Iowa, the tandem helped quarterback Tracy McSorley post his 20th career game with a passing and a rushing touchdown, including a 51-yard touchdown run that was only the second run of 20 or more yards allowed by Iowa this season. Penn State gained 312 total yards against Iowa's defense that was fourth nationally going into the game.

Against Michigan State on Oct. 13, Penn State's offensive line cleared out enough room to gain 397 total yards, including 205 on the ground against the nation's No. 1 rush defense. Running back Miles Sanders had a third 100-yard rushing day for the season, and against Indiana a week later posted 126 all-purpose yards as Penn State posted 417 total yards.

WEST VIRGINIA AT TEXAS AT 3:30 P.M. ET ON FOX

Another top offense is on the road Saturday playing for a spot in its conference title game as West Virginia (6-1), ranked 13th in the first College Football Playoff rankings, faces No. 17 Texas (6-2) in Austin. Graduate senior left tackle **Yodny Cajuste** (Miami, Fla.) has led the Mountaineers to near the top of the national offensive statistics, as WVU is No. 3 nationally in team passing efficiency, No. 6 in completion percentage, No. 9 in passing offense, No. 15 in total offense, No. 16 in scoring offense and No. 26 in third-down conversions. West Virginia is one of only four Power Five conference teams to rank in the top 25 nationally in scoring offense (No. 16 at 39.9 points per game) and scoring defense (No. 23 at 19.6).

Cajuste thought about turning pro after last season, but when some of his teammates, including All-American quarterback candidate Will Grier, coming back for their final seasons, Cajuste was the last of the Mountaineers to make the decision to return. The 6-5, 323-pound left tackle has started 27 games has helped Grier and receiver David Sills V become on the country's top threats – they've connected on 27 touchdowns since the start of 2017, or nine more than any other quarterback-receiver duo in the FBS.

Texas still sits atop the Big 12 standings despite last week's loss at Oklahoma State that ended a six-game win streak and can re-shine its playoff resume against West Virginia. **Patrick Vahe** (Eules, Texas) has 39 career starts and has the Longhorns giving quarterback Sam Ehlinger outstanding protection. Ehlinger, a true sophomore, has attempted 210 straight passes without an interception, a new school record, and turnover margin has been a key to Texas' season. Vahe and the Horns have had four turnover-free games so far in 2018, including three of them against ranked opponents TCU, Oklahoma and Oklahoma State.

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