

Purdue Spring Preview

Written by Sean Stires

Monday, 11 February 2013 08:19



The Purdue football team will have a new face at the helm when the 2013 season begins. Former Kent State head coach Darrell Hazell was hired as Purdue's new coach after the school parted ways with Danny Hope after a 6-7 2012 campaign.

Hazell has just two seasons of head coaching experience, but he quickly turned a Kent State program that had not had a winning season in more than a decade into an 11-3 team in just his second year. That 11-3 overall mark included an 8-0 record in the MAC regular season. Kent State fell 44-37 in double overtime to Northern Illinois in the MAC title game and then lost to Arkansas State in the Godaddy.com Bowl.

For insight on Hazell and Purdue heading into spring football, ISD turned to longtime Goldandblack.com Publisher Alan Karpick.

"Everybody's very positive about Hazell, because he's disciplined and he says the right things," Karpick said of Purdue's new head coach. "They need to put fans in the stands. He looks to be a kind of guy that can help you do that. He obviously had some success at Kent State at a place where nobody won."

Karpick says Purdue has touted the school's new investment in the football program. Purdue went from paying Hope's coaching staff a total of \$ 2.6 million to paying Hazell's new staff \$ 4.6 million. It may take a while to find out if that investment pays off. After opening the season with

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Cincinnati and Indiana State, Purdue faces Notre Dame, Wisconsin, Northern Illinois, Nebraska, Michigan State, and Ohio State in succession. Its bye week comes after Northern Illinois.

The fingerprint Hazell brings with him to West Lafayette may take a while to materialize. He spoke at his introductory press conference of molding his team to the talent he has on his roster and his current roster, especially on offense, will look to replace several spots from 2012 this spring.

Offense

Purdue had three quarterbacks share the bulk of playing time last year and two of them, Robert Marve (1,734 yards, 15 TDs) and Caleb TerBush (1,150 yards, 12 TDs) are both gone. Rob Henry (216 yards, 3 TDs) is back after appearing in 11 games last season, but he is not necessarily the starter in waiting.

Redshirt freshmen Bilal Marshall and Austin Appleby along with freshman Danny Etling are expected to see a lot of snaps during this spring's practices, making who gets the starting nod in 2013 "anybody's guess" in Karpick's view.

"It's wide open," Karpick exclaimed of this spring's quarterback derby. "I don't think anybody has a real clue. You would say maybe Etling and Appleby would be the two guys, but without having seen them, who knows."

Etling is an early enrollee from Terre Haute, IN and will be participating in spring drills. Who ends-up being the quarterback is even harder to predict right now, because Karpick and others who follow Purdue football closely are not even sure what offensive system Hazell will use.

"At Kent State they ran a two-back set and tried to manuevere with a power running game to some extent," Karpick said. "That may or may not be what he does here."

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The reason for the offensive uncertainty is Hazell's new offensive coordinator, John Shoop, is known for running a west coast offense. Shoop spent the last five seasons as offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach at North Carolina. He will hold both of those titles as well at Purdue. Hazell's offensive coordinator last year, Brian Rock, stayed at Kent State in that same position rather than going to Purdue.

The Boilermakers have several other notable holes to fill on the offensive side of the ball, including two offensive linemen, two of their top three leading rushers, Akeem Shavers (871 yards, 6 TDs) and Ralph Bolden (325 yards) and leading receiver Antavian Edison (652 yards, 8 TDs). Second-leading receiver O.J. Ross (454 yards, 2 TDs) has also been suspended and whether or not he returns to the team is unknown.

Karpick says Purdue has had some "interchangeable parts" on offense, but filling all of those spots will be a big question for a new coaching staff this spring.

"It's going to really be put to the test," Karpick said of Purdue's depth. "They like their redshirt freshman class. They hope that's going to fill the bill on depth and possibly even some guys that will get a chance to start. We'll see."

Defense

Greg Hudson is Purdue's new defensive coordinator. Hudson spent the last three seasons as the assistant head coach and linebackers coach at Florida State University. The Seminoles improved from 108th in the nation in total defense the year prior to his arrival to second among FBS teams in 2012.

"He has had a track record of attacking defenses," Karpick said of Hudson. "I would think that's what he'll try to do at Purdue, but he's going to look and see what he's got from a talent perspective too."

The biggest (both literally and figuratively) talent Purdue loses on the defensive side of the ball is defensive tackle Kawann Short. The 6'3", 315 pound space eater is projected as a late first to

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early second round pick in April's NFL draft.

"He's by far their biggest loss," Karpick estimated. "It's just going to be interesting on the interior defensive line with (Bruce) Gaston, who was injured last year, and this Ryan Watson, who they liked a lot as a freshman and played some last year - will he come in and get an opportunity? It will be a very interesting thing to see in camp."

The only other defensive starters the Boilermakers lose are cornerback Josh Johnson, who led the team with 16 pass break-ups and also had three interceptions, and linebacker Robert Maci. Who fills the vacated roles is not nearly as intriguing to Karpick as what kind of defense Purdue will actually employ.

"Once we find their scheme on what they're going to do, that's what's going to be interesting to see," Karpick said. "It's interesting any time you have a new coaching staff. All bets are off on what you're going to have."

Special Teams

Johnson was one of Purdue's punt returners as well in 2012, but he only had nine returns for a 3.0 average last season, so his loss will be negligible. Fellow defensive back Frankie Williams split time with Johnson and averaged 1.4 yards on eight returns.

The Boilermakers return the rest of their specialists for 2013, so special teams is an area that will not be as big a concern for the new coaching staff this spring. Kick returners Akeem Shavers (39 returns, 22.2 yard average, one TD) and Raheem Mostert (18 returns, 25.7 yard average) should both be back on kicks again next season. Shavers' TD came on a 100-yard return in 2012.

Sophomore kickers Paul Griggs and West Lafayette native Sam McCartney are both back after sharing kicking duties last fall. McCartney was 5-of-7 on field goals and 28-of-31 on extra point tries, while Griggs was 4-of-7 and 16-of-18, respectively. Griggs handled longer kicks.

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Senior Cody Webster, who averaged 42.3 yards on 70 punts, is back to handle those duties as well. Webster had 17 punts of 50-plus yards and 29 punts that put opponents inside their own 20.