

TAILGATE GUIDE

Boilers to face the winless-in-America Wildcats



SARA WHITE | SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER

Defensive tackles freshman Mo Omonode and junior Prince James Boyd Jr. sack Illinois quarterback Tommy DeVito last weekend in Champaign.

BY ISRAEL SCHUMAN
Staff Reporter

To keep its title hopes alive Saturday, all Purdue needs to do is beat a team that hasn't won a game on this continent. But coach Jeff Brohm isn't counting out the Northwestern Wildcats.

"I just think that they probably feel like they're very close to getting over the hump, just as we know that we're very close to falling off the edge if we don't do a lot of things correctly," he said Monday. "They're a very well-coached team and we will have our hands full on Saturday."

Since beating Nebraska in its season opener in Ireland, the Wildcats (1-9, 1-6 Big Ten) are winless and sit last in the Big Ten West. But as Brohm noted, that doesn't make them benign, especially given that the game will be held at

Ross-Ade Stadium.

Ross-Ade has been Northwestern's home away from home in recent history, as the Wildcats have not lost to Purdue (6-4, 4-3 Big Ten) there since 2007.

There is a favorable chance the Boilermakers will be able to put an end to that streak Saturday, as the Wildcats are last in the Big Ten West in both total points scored and allowed in conference play. But to do that, they will need to stop the combination of offensive tackle Peter Skoronski and running back Evan Hull, both juniors for the Wildcats.

Brohm noted that Hull will likely get the ball "a lot of different ways," and he expects Northwestern to lean on Skoronski to clear running lanes for Hull. "We're going to have to make sure that we don't allow (Hull) to beat us," he said.

The Boilermaker defense will try to carry its momentum forward from last week, when it was largely responsible for containing Illinois in a victory. Particularly of help to Purdue has been its depth on the defensive line, where it has eight players who have played in all 10 games.

"Without question, playing a lot of defensive linemen and keeping them somewhat fresh, even though you want your best guys in there as much as you can, has helped us," Brohm said.

The collection of talent on the line has helped the Boilers to collect 23 sacks on the season, good for seventh in the Big Ten, an improvement since finishing last in the stat in 2020. But Brohm, in his usual style, emphasized that getting to the opponent's quarterback is a team effort.

"Everything matters in order to get sacks," he said. "We just have to continue to guard guys better and longer and need to get our linebackers not only supporting the run, but they (need) to help on play-action, which has not happened until recently."

On the other side of the ball, the key word is balance. Brohm wants to be able to run and pass well, and to get all of his players involved in the process.

He emphasized that while he has talented players like freshman running back Devin Mockabee at his disposal, eight other backs are on the roster and they all have a job to do.

"(Mockabee) has done a really good job," he said, but added that "our other running backs have worked hard and are ready to go."

Balance is also a key to success through the air. Sixth-year quarterback Aidan O'Connell spread the ball around in the win against Illinois after an uninspiring performance versus Iowa in which he targeted sixth-year wide receiver Charlie Jones 19 times for 11 receptions. Against Illinois, Jones caught only four balls but was effective in taking defensive attention away from his teammates. Brohm wants that to continue.

"It's important that we spread the ball around, and it's important that other playmakers step up and emerge and make plays so that the quarterback feels comfortable going to them," he said.

While the Boilers' first focus on Saturday is beating the Wildcats, they'll have a significant rooting interest in the afternoon, when Iowa plays at Minnesota.

For Purdue to play for the conference championship in Indianapolis this season, it needs the Hawkeyes to lose one of their last two games. If Purdue wins Saturday and Iowa loses, the Boilers will need to beat Indiana in the last game of the season to claim their crown.

Kickoff is scheduled for noon, and the game will be broadcast on Fox Sports 1.



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Engineering a running back

Devin Mockabee works on cars and engineering in between 100-yard games

BY MARY ROSE HOKANSON
Staff Reporter

Devin Mockabee has broken record after record, gaining a national reputation for his breakout season this year. Currently leading the Boilermakers in rushing yards and grabbing his seventh touchdown of the season Saturday, the redshirt freshman running back has everyone's attention.

The Boonville, Indiana, native started at Purdue as a walk-on and has created an impressive résumé for himself since. Mockabee became the third Purdue freshman ever with 700 rushing yards during Saturday's game against Illinois. He also ran for his fourth 100-yard game of the season, the most 100-yard games by any freshman in Purdue history.

But Saturday wasn't the only day he's made Purdue's record books.

Mockabee ran for 178 yards on 30 carries against Nebraska, setting a new single-game record for a Purdue freshman and even earning Big Ten Freshman of the Week honors.

"He really wanted to be here, he's a competitor," head coach Jeff Brohm said after that game. "He figured he could be here and compete and do a good job in a very humble and modest way."

Mockabee attributed the humility to his upbringing.

"With my upbringing and just my parents, I was always taught to be humble and not to brag or boast about myself," Mockabee said. "I've never been the type of guy who likes a person like that, so I always try to keep myself humble."

While he may be understated, it's more than just football that Mockabee could be bragging about.

Growing up in a drag racing family, Devin says he was "always around cars" and "always loved being around cars and working on cars." He attended a technical school with an automotive program during his junior and senior years of high school, and is now a certified mechanic.

Former Purdue running back Zander Horvath also had an affinity for cars. Mockabee said "Zander was also a big car guy too, me and him, we would be at practice talking about cars, just randomly, at random times."

At home in Boonville, Mockabee has a Fox-body Mustang he enjoys working on.

"When other guys have problems with their cars, I usually just go and help them fix it really quick," he said "but that's as much as I get."

Mockabee is studying Mechanical Engineering Technology, in the Polytechnic Institute. MET is a very technical and hands-on major, and football star or not, it's a big time



SARA WHITE | SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER

Redshirt freshman running back Devin Mockabee leaps over Illinois' Sydney Brown to keep a run alive on Nov. 12. Mockabee led the Boilers in rushing with 106 total yards on 28 attempts.

commitment and requires extraordinary dedication to pursue.

Mockabee's school days are no exception to this difficulty, only he has the entire nation watching him play football on Saturdays too.

Despite his newfound stardom outside of the classroom, Mockabee has the same workload as every other student in his courses. There are no handouts for scoring touchdowns, and no less homework because he has practice later that night.

The intensity of both MET and football means long days for the running back, and it starts early.

"If we have morning lift before class, I'll get up at 5 (a.m.); sometimes we have a lift at 6 in the morning," Mockabee said. "I'll basically have class from 8:30 to 1:20, and then leave straight from class, come (to Mollenkopf Athletic Center), have meetings and practice, then go home and do some more homework or whatever projects I have going on."

Then he does it all again the next day.

Day after day, both football and MET are extremely demanding. Mockabee's days come with a lot of pressure to succeed, but he isn't shying away from this challenge.

The discourse surrounding Mockabee has often referred to him as a "pleasant surprise," or an anonymous walk-on turned rising star. While he may seem like an overnight sensation, that success comes from quiet 5 a.m. mornings, long days of class, late nights of schoolwork and a humility that allows his performance on the field to do all the talking.