

# TAILGATE GUIDE

## Who to watch for against Indiana State

BY VAL ELLIS  
Asst. Sports Editor

Purdue is likely to be favored by more than 30 points in its upcoming game against Indiana State. In what many expect to be a blowout against an opponent from the Football Championship Subdivision, some lesser-seen players may be more likely to see time on the field.

### Brady Allen

The highest-rated recruit to come to West Lafayette since George Karlaftis and David Bell could be one of the quarterbacks to see playing time in the Saturday game. The freshman quarterback arrived on campus last semester as an early enrollee after a prolific high school career that won him Mr. Indiana Football, an award given to the best high school football player in the state.

Allen, as well as any other freshman, can play in up to four games this season without losing his redshirt status.

"The biggest thing for me is being a sponge and just trying to learn as much as possible," Allen said in early August. "Doing what I can control and handling what I need to. If it comes a time where I get my chance, I'll be ready."

Allen won't be alone in his wait to line up behind the center. Sixth-year quarterback Austin Burton is the likely No. 2, while Allen and Michael Alaimo will battle for No. 3.

### Michael Alaimo

The sophomore quarterback will likely be competing with Allen for not just more snaps on Saturday's game, but for the starting quarterback position next year as well.

Alaimo has an extra two years of studying the playbook under his belt compared to Allen. Alaimo has not had major playing time so far, appearing just once against UConn last season.

### Jion Steptoe

The freshman wide receiver who stood out during the spring game will see his most likely opportunity come through Saturday. Steptoe has several names in front of him in the receiving corps. Steptoe led the receivers during the spring game this year, tallying five receptions, 52 yards and a touchdown.

He was the recipient of several throws from Allen, as the two early enrollees showed an early connection.

### Deion Burks

The redshirt-freshman wide receiver did not see much playing time last year, using his redshirt to preserve his eligibility. Burks recorded just one catch last season, but it was an impactful one: a 26-yard reception during the Music City Bowl victory that helped Purdue take the lead before halftime.

"He has to (take the next step) for us," wide receivers coach Garrick McGee said in August. "He has that skill set you can't teach. He has elite foot speed. He's a very tough kid. The way that he can accelerate and run, you can't keep a guy like that on the sideline."

### Mershawn Rice

The junior wide receiver isn't a new face – arriving in West Lafayette the same year as George Karlaftis, David Bell and Milton Wright – but Rice has been plagued by injury issues throughout his college career.

Prior to this season, Rice had played in just five games. Last year, he played in three before having his season cut short by a foot injury after the Notre Dame game. Rice said his injury history also consisted of "a lot of mental warfare."

"You come here, you want to play football, you want to get a good education and then when one part of that gets taken away from you, it's a mental battle for sure," Rice said. "Along with the other stuff that athletes deal with, it was tough, but it's made me stronger as a person."

### Devin Mockobee

Running backs coach Chris Barclay called the walk-on freshman running back a "pleasant surprise."

"I knew that he would be good in time, but his progress up to this point has been remarkable to say the least," Barclay said. "It's got the defense talking. He's twitchy, he's faster than you think (and) he's slippery, like trying to tackle an eel. I can see him getting in the game at some point for sure."

### Kobe Lewis

The junior running back transferred



SARA WHITE | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Freshman quarterback Brady Allen releases a throw before redshirt freshman defensive end Yanni Karlaftis can reach him during a practice in April.

to Purdue from Central Michigan, where he didn't play last season due to injury.

"(Lewis), I think, can really help us," Brohm said in August. "He'll push King (Doerue) there in the backfield. He's played a lot of football. He did sit out last year over an injury so he's just got to get back in the flow once again."

Lewis did not have a carry during the game against Penn State, but did see playing time in select moments.

### Nic Caraway

Another early enrollee, the freshman defensive end has made some early waves during practices, even catching the eye of the head coach.

Brohm said Caraway has stood out as someone who can be a very good

player in the future. Caraway has also stood out to his teammates.

"A lot of energy, excitement and speed," is what senior defensive end Lawrence Johnson said he saw in Caraway. "He's one of those that's ready to learn and he's always soaking it up when coaches are talking to him."

### Mo Omonode

The freshman defensive lineman is another early enrollee for the defensive line.

"Mo Omonode is a guy who I think, when you look at the nose position, he gives us the most athleticism out of anybody at that spot," defensive line coach Mark Hagen said in August.

### Paul Pferi

The tight end position took a hard

blow with the season-ending injury to junior Garrett Miller. The backup spot is up for grabs, and junior tight end Paul Pferi is slated to be next in line.

Tight ends coach Ryan Wallace said Pferi has to be more consistent.

"I think (Pferi's ready to take on a bigger role)," Wallace said in August. He's got the consistency battle we're fighting. Paul's a tremendous asset in the passing game. He can run. He can catch.

"He's got to come along in the running game. He's got to be able to hold up there, and he's hot and cold there right now."



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## 1st FCS matchup in 6 years

Indiana State players who died in crash to be honored at game



DAVID HICKEY | SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER

Sixth-year quarterback Aidan O'Connell throws the ball during the Sept. 1 home game against Penn State. The Boilermakers will go up against Indiana State Saturday at 3 p.m. in Ross-Ade Stadium.

BY VAL ELLIS  
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Purdue will honor the three Indiana State students who died in a car crash with a moment of silence during Saturday's game.

The Aug. 21 crash involved 5 students, four of whom were members of the football team, an Indiana State press release reads. Christian Eubanks and Caleb VanHooser were the two players who died in the crash, and linebacker John Moore was injured. Jayden Musili, a sophomore not on the football team, also died as a result of the crash.

One of the two injured passenger is Omarion Dixon, a standout running back at Harrison High School, the release reads. Dixon is currently "awake, alert and talking" after being taken to the hospital in critical condition, according to his parents.

The game will be Purdue's first against an opponent from the Football Championship

Subdivision since 2016, and the first under head coach Jeff Brohm.

The Boilermakers are 12-0 historically against FCS opponents. The closest margin of victory comes from a 20-14 win against the Sycamores in 2013 in then-head coach Darrell Hazell's first game. The Boilermakers are 5-0 all-time against Indiana State and the two have played four times since Division I split into two subdivisions in 1978. In their most recent meeting in 2015, the Boilermakers defeated ISU 38-14.

So far this season, no Power Five team has lost to an FCS opponent. The closest game so far this season was between South Dakota State and Iowa, which had a final score of 7-3 without anyone scoring a touchdown.

"We play the teams that are on the schedule and you have to respect all your opponents," Brohm said Monday. "They all play good football. You saw this weekend, there were

a lot of FCS opponents that were really close to winning the game against really good teams."

The Sycamores are coming off of a 5-6 season in 2021 and a 17-14 overtime victory against North Alabama last weekend.

Indiana State safety Rylan Cole was named Missouri Valley Football Conference Player of the Week for his eight tackles, two and a half tackles for loss and two interceptions. Indiana State wide receiver Dante Hendrix was named to the MVFC preseason all-conference second team.

The Sycamore offense was led by running backs Tee Hodge and Justin Dinka, who combined for 143 rushing yards. Indiana State quarterback Gavin Screws threw for 141 yards, two touchdowns and two interceptions.

The two teams will face off this Saturday at Ross-Ade Stadium with a 3 p.m. kickoff time.