

WRESTLING

Sabatello collects second B1G Wrestler of the Week Award

PURDUE ATHLETICS COMMUNICATIONS

Purdue's Danny Sabatello has been named the B1G's Wrestler of the Week, the conference office announced Tuesday. It is the second time this season the redshirt junior has received the weekly award, previously being named Co-Wrestler of the Week on Dec. 2, 2014. He is the first Purdue wrestler to twice earn the honor in his career.

Sabatello entered conference duals against Northwestern (1/16) and Penn State (1/18) ranked 20th and emerged with a pair of impressive and dominating upsets. First, the 133-pounder avenged a 9-7 sudden victory loss to Northwestern's Dominick Malone at Midlands with a 10-2 major decision. Sabatello took the 19th-ranked Wildcat down four times and added 2:52 of riding time for his fourth major of the season.

He followed up that performance by shutting out No. 7 Jimmy Gulibon of Penn State, 6-0. Sabatello stunned the Nittany Lion with a takedown in the opening 15 seconds of the match and rode the period out. He scored a second takedown in the third period after escaping and finished the match on top for 2:51 of riding time.

In the two wins, Sabatello outscored the higher ranked opponents 16-2 while improving to 20-4. He has five wins over ranked opponents to his credit with seventh-ranked Gulibon standing as his highest ranked victim. Sabatello is now 12-1 in duals for the Boilermakers and is 3-1 against the B1G. He was also rewarded with a six-spot jump on Inter-Mat's 133-pound rankings, moving into the No. 14 slot, a position he held for four weeks earlier this season.

BASEBALL

All-Ivy Leaguer Vilardo Joins Boilers as Graduate Transfer

PURDUE ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS

Chicagoland native and 2014 All-Ivy League second baseman Michael Vilardo has had his graduate transfer waiver approved by the NCAA and is eligible to play for Purdue baseball during the 2015 season.

Vilardo was a two-year starter at second base for the University of Pennsylvania from 2013-14. He batted over .300 both seasons and led the Ivy League with 55 hits in 2013. The Cary, Ill., native graduated with a bachelor's degree in philosophy, politics and economics last month.

Vilardo was a standout performer in baseball and ice hockey at Cary-Grove High School in the northwest suburbs of Chicago. He played for the Team USA U18 hockey team during the 2009-10 season, was recruited to play hockey at Ohio State and began his college experience as a member of the baseball team at the University of Richmond in the fall of 2011. But after departing Richmond and a stint playing for the Chicago Steel of the United States Hockey League, he decided to pursue a baseball opportunity at the University of Pennsylvania. However, to be eligible for the 2013 college baseball season at Penn, he had to earn an associate degree before enrolling. He did so by taking two years of credits in one calendar year, graduating with an associate degree in general education from McHenry County College in Crystal Lake, Ill.

Midyear baseball transfers are typically not eligible to play in the spring semester at the Division I level. But as a college graduate, Vilardo's situation is unique. He's only a junior in terms of athletic class despite already having his associate and bachelor's degrees. He took classes in the summer of 2014 at Penn and a full course load this past fall to ensure that he would graduate at the end of the 2014 fall semester. He'll have until the spring of 2016 to use his remaining two seasons of collegiate eligibility in baseball. After graduating with a 3.4 grade-point average at Penn, he's pursuing a Master of Science in management at Purdue.

Graduate students are not permitted to compete for intercollegiate athletic teams at Ivy League institutions, another factor in Vilardo's decision to transfer.

Vilardo batted .304 with 17 extra-base hits and 23 RBI to earn Second Team All-Ivy League honors and help lead the Quakers to a 24-17 record in 2014. Penn finished tied for first in the Ivy League's Lou Gehrig Division with a league-best 15-5 record. As a freshman, he was named the Big 5 Rookie of the Year after batting .320 with 19 doubles and 31 RBI. Philadelphia's Big 5 consists of LaSalle, Penn, St. Joseph's, Temple and Villanova. The second baseman was also a two-time All-Ivy League selection by College Sports Madness, highlighted by first-team honors in 2014.

BASKETBALL

Big man provides important production for Boilermakers

BY LOGAN CORDES
Sports Editor

It's a common understanding that when teams' best players perform well, those teams win. That belief is holding true with Purdue center A.J. Hammons.

Hammons has been a polarizing figure for Purdue fans since his arrival at Purdue in 2012. He's been heralded as the best player and the most disappointing player at different points throughout his career. However, looking at the last 10 Purdue games, Hammons' production has been vital for victory.

Since Purdue's stunning 73-70 home loss to North Florida on Dec. 6, the Boilermakers have gone 5-5. In those five losses, Hammons has averaged 9 points, 4.8 rebounds and 20.4 minutes per game. In the five wins during that same span, the junior big man has averaged 11.6 points, 10 rebounds and 25.2 minutes per game.

Is Hammons being on the court more frequently the cause? Not necessarily. According to Hammons, it's a matter of playing smarter. After a recent practice, Hammons said his good play is a product of not committing reach-in fouls on entry passes, forcing his defensive assignment off the block "before they even look

at him" and being more aware on screens.

In the team's recent overtime victory at Penn State, Hammons accounted for 21 points and 12 rebounds. He was aware of fellow big man Isaac Haas's foul trouble and played "smarter" because of it, not to mention Coach Painter mentioning that Hammons needed to play well early in the game.

"I get myself going early, or coach gets on me, saying I need to pick it up," Hammons said. "I had to calm myself and know that Isaac was picking up fouls."

But one play in particular showed just how important Hammons can be when he plays well: a Purdue foul shot was missed, but despite being boxed out, Hammons tipped the ball to teammate Kendall Stephens who ran behind the three-point line and drilled a triple with five seconds left, sending the game into overtime. His first instinct after the play? Get back on defense.

"I'm just glad that we got the shot off; I would have been so disappointed," Hammons said. "I was just surprised and just had to run back and make sure I played defense."

Stephens has been thoroughly impressed with Hammons' play off the bench, especially his effort on the game-saving play against the Nittany



TAYLOR KENNEDY | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Maryland freshman Dion Wiley shoots as Purdue junior A.J. Hammons blocks on Jan. 10 at Mackey Arena. Hammons and the rest of the Purdue Men's Basketball team will take on the University of Illinois at 9 p.m. today.

Lions.

"(Hammons has been) huge, man," Stephens said. "We have a lot of guys who want to do their role and, more importantly, want to win. Even on that last shot, I wasn't able to shoot it

without him getting a tip on it."

The Boilermakers, who now sit at 11-7 and 3-2 in the conference, will need Hammons to continue his string of good play if they're planning on dancing in March.

BIG TEN FOOTBALL POWER RANKINGS 2015-16

BY MITCH LYON
Assistant Sports Editor



OHIO STATE

2014 RECORD: (14-1, won National Championship)

1 The Buckeyes won last season's inaugural College Football Playoff, shocking Alabama and Oregon in back-to-back games to take home the title. With Ohio State returning a large part of last season's incredibly young roster, the Buckeyes are poised to be a national title favorite again this coming year. It will be interesting to see how the quarterback situation plays out for Ohio State, but regardless of whether Cardale Jones or J.T. Barrett is under center, the Buckeyes are going to be tough to beat this fall.



MICHIGAN STATE

2014 RECORD: (11-2)

2 Although the Spartans will have to replace star offensive players Jeremy Langford and Tony Lippett, the announcement that quarterback Connor Cook will return for his senior season is a massive boost to Michigan State. Under the guidance of coach Mark Dantonio, the Spartans will have a chance to join the playoff this season if the team can find a way to pick up a victory over either Oregon or Ohio State.



MINNESOTA

2014 RECORD: (8-5)

3 Minnesota was the surprise of the conference last season, and the Gophers have the opportunity to solidify their place in the upper echelon of the Big Ten with another strong season in 2015. The Gophers could struggle to replace their top two running backs from last season, both of whom graduated, but have managed to improve in every season under head coach Jerry Kill. If Minnesota can survive a season-opening bout against likely No. 1 TCU, the Gophers have a real opportunity to make some noise in the Big Ten.



WISCONSIN

2014 RECORD: (11-3)

4 It's tough to lose the most dynamic player in college football and not suffer some sort of drop-off, but the Badgers are poised to absorb the hit of running back Melvin Gordon declaring for the NFL draft better than almost anyone in the country. Running back Corey Clement is a star in the making, and new head coach Paul Chryst should have a stout defense capable of making up for any early offensive shortcomings for Wisconsin.



PENN STATE

2014 RECORD: (7-6)

5 The Nittany Lions should be much improved from last season's 7-6 record, aided by the continued development of quarterback Christian Hackenberg and the first full recruiting class for head coach James Franklin. During Franklin's first full recruiting season at Vanderbilt, the Commodores increased their win total by four games, which is the kind of improvement Penn State could see this fall.



NEBRASKA

2014 RECORD: (9-4)

6 The Huskers find themselves in the same position as Wisconsin after losing stud running back Ameer Abdullah to the NFL, only Nebraska doesn't seem nearly as capable of handling his departure. Nebraska's offense struggled mightily with Abdullah off the field last season, and new head coach Mike Riley could have his hands full getting the Huskers back into the top-third of the conference.



IOWA

2014 RECORD: (7-6)

7 Iowa's rank as the seventh strongest team in the conference heading into this fall is more a testament to the team's favorable schedule as opposed to the Hawkeyes ability to perform. The Hawkeyes should be a competitive squad next season, but having no games against Ohio State, Michigan, Michigan State or Penn State may allow the team to pick up a few more victories than they might in other years. Still, last year's 4-4 record to close last season should be enough to give Hawkeyes' fans pause.



MICHIGAN

2014 RECORD: (5-7)

8 With the big-time splash hiring of former Michigan player and San Francisco 49er's head coach Jim Harbaugh, many fans in the Big Ten might have lofty expectations for the Wolverines next season. While Harbaugh's presence should be enough to get Michigan back into the post-season next year, the Wolverines have some major issues at quarterback that need worked out before the glory days return to the Big House.



MARYLAND

2014 RECORD: (7-6)

9 The Terrapins earned the title of "most-erratic team in the Big Ten" after a wildly inconsistent debut season in the conference last fall. Maryland went 4-5 to close this past season, but didn't lose or win consecutive games until dropping two straight to end the year. Being in the tougher eastern division won't do the Terrapins any favors, and neither will the shaky quarterback play the team will hope to get fixed this offseason.



RUTGERS

2014 RECORD: (8-5)

10 Rutgers ended the season on a high-note with the team's 40-21 drubbing of North Carolina in the Quick Lane Bowl, but struggled to even compete against the top teams in the Big Ten last year. The Scarlet Knights, who dropped all three of their contests against ranked opponents by an average of 33 points per game, lost quarterback Gary Nova to graduation after this year and could be hard pressed to find a competent replacement to take on Rutgers' brutal schedule next fall.



ILLINOIS

2014 RECORD: (6-7)

11 The Illini's historically bad defense from last season lands them in the basement of the way-too-soon rankings, but Illinois has a chance to be this year's surprise team in the Big Ten. Quarterback Wes Lunt and star wide out Mike Dudek both return to Champaign next fall after spearheading one of the most lethal aerial attacks in the conference last season. Illinois won't struggle to put up points next year, and if the defense can even slightly improve, the Illini have a chance to greatly increase their win total.



NORTHWESTERN

2014 RECORD: (5-7)

12 After an injury-ridden start the last season, the Wildcats were able to win some big games and build some momentum heading into this coming fall. Freshman running back Justin Jackson should be even better next season after rushing for 1187 yards and 10 touchdowns during his debut campaign. With a little luck, the injury bug will stay away from Northwestern and give the team an opportunity to make good on the preseason hype they received in 2014.



PURDUE

2014 RECORD: (3-9)

13 It was a disappointing 2014 campaign for the Boilers, who lost several close games against quality opponents before having their season derailed by injuries. Purdue will feel the pain from several big time departures on both sides of the ball, but should be able to improve in head coach Darrell Hazell's third season at the helm. Quarterback Austin Appleby will have one last chance to prove he's the answer to the team's offensive struggles next fall, with incoming freshman Elijah Sindelar possibly getting an opportunity if Appleby falls short.



INDIANA

2014 RECORD: (4-8)

14 The impact of losing star running back Tevin Coleman cannot be stressed enough for Indiana. Coleman carried the ball 270 times for 2062 yards and 15 touchdowns last season, something the Hoosiers can't even begin to replace. For perspective, Coleman's rushing yards were nearly half of Indiana's total offensive yards for the season, and were nearly double quarterback Nate Sudfeld's 1151 passing yards. The team will get Sudfeld back from injury to start the year, but without Coleman, Indiana figures to have a tough time putting up points this fall.