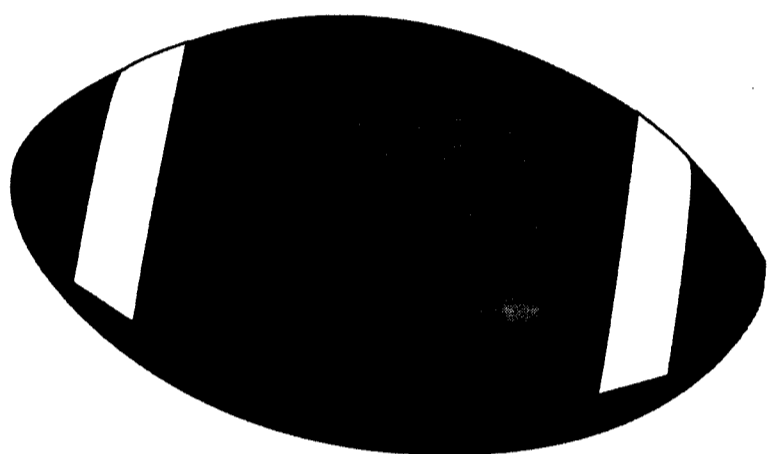
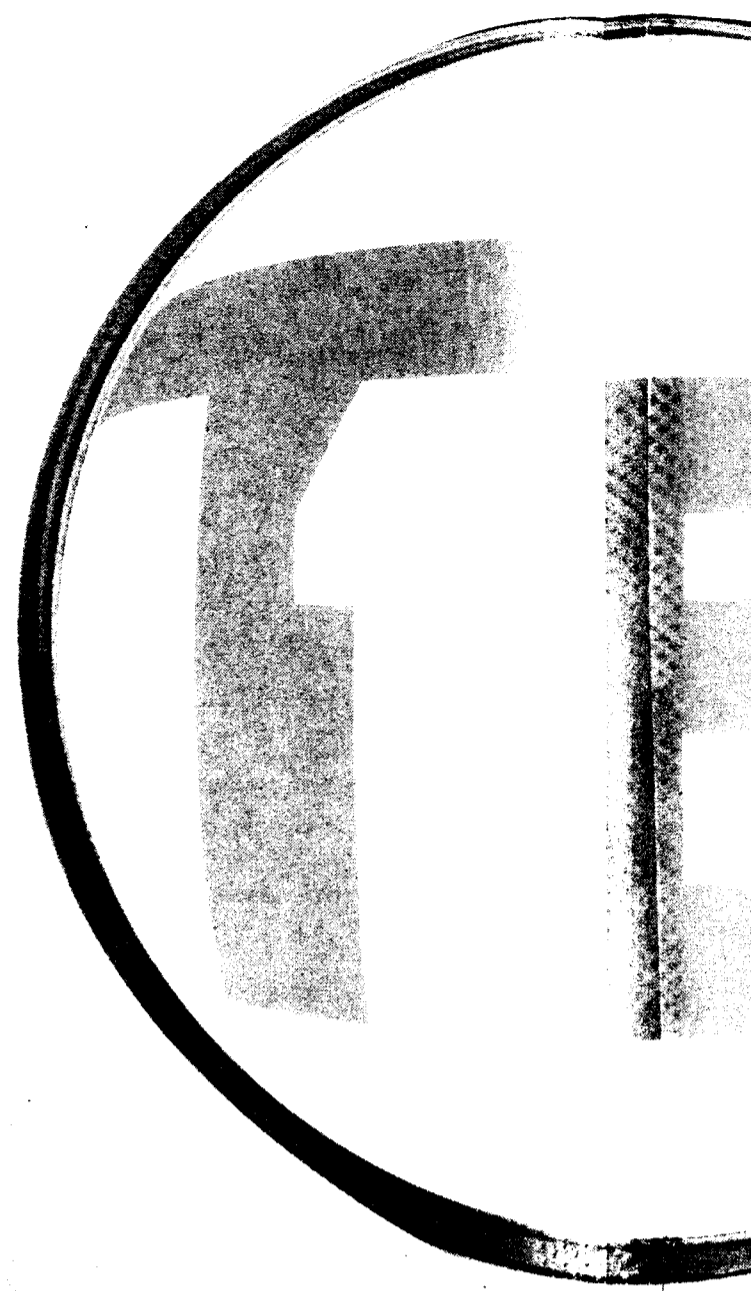


LITTLE



The Big Ten — rather, Little Ten — appears to be down this season based on its early results. In the wake of a few shocking losses and close victories by a narrow margin, it has no position as any to take this year's conference title.

With a little luck, the Nittany Lions might just win it all.

We don't get paid and we certainly can't promise you anything. The Daily Collegian's look at how the conference stacks up.

— Compiled by Mark Viera, Corey McLaughlin, and Kevin Heron

Big Ten Projected Standings

1		PENN STATE	7-1
1		WISCONSIN	7-1
3		OHIO STATE	5-3
3		PURDUE	5-3
3		MICHIGAN	5-3
6		INDIANA	4-4
6		ILLINOIS	4-4
6		IOWA	4-4
9		MICHIGAN STATE	2-6
10		NORTHWESTERN	1-7
11		MINNESOTA	0-8

Though the Lions look the strongest heading into their Big Ten season, questions still abound: Has this team been tested enough by its cakewalk non-conference schedule? Can Anthony Morelli tune out his critics long enough to lead this offense down the field in crucial situations?

After three relatively unimpressive wins, Wisconsin lost some of the shine with which it entered the season. But make no mistake: The Badgers are talented and led by one of the conference's best coaches, Brett Bielema. Sophomore P.J. Hill, who rushed for 1,618 yards and 15 touchdowns last season, should again be one of the Big Ten's top backs.

New Buckeyes quarterback Todd Boeckman, a junior, has skill, but this isn't the Troy Smith and Ted Ginn offense you're used to. This team is still finding itself, yet this year it does have a shot at claiming the conference title if Penn State and Wisconsin lose some games they're expected to win.

Senior quarterback Curtis Painter has been almost unstoppable to start the 2007 season — averaging more than 300 yards in the air each game, with 13 touchdowns and no interceptions — picking up right where he left off last year. Senior wide receiver Dorian Bryant gives him a reliable target.

This has to be one of the conference's most vexing teams in 2007. The Wolverines have failed to live up to their preseason No. 5 ranking, but they're still stocked with plenty of offensive weapons in running back Mike Hart, wideout Mario Manningham and quarterback Chad Henne. It will be interesting to see what direction Michigan takes come conference play.

The Hoosiers aspire to reach a bowl game, and they have the potential. Kellen Lewis is an improving multi-talented quarterback and he's got 6-foot 7" wideout James Hardy to throw at. The early season schedule isn't too hard (home vs. Illinois, at Iowa, vs. Minnesota).

The Illini have already equaled last year's win total. To add to it, they'll have to rely on senior Chris Norwell to hold down their defensive line and senior J. Leman to lead the linebackers. However, questions continue to revolve around a quarterback who's still learning.

Iowa could be easily overlooked following last week's embarrassing loss to Iowa State, 15-13. Don't overlook the Hawkeye defense, a unit which ranks among the nation's best through three weeks. Keep an eye on Mitch King, an underrated defense tackle who finished with 56 tackles and 5.5 sacks last year.

The Spartans' schedule is brutal, beginning with a trip to Wisconsin and ending with a home date vs. Penn State. They also play Michigan, Ohio State and Purdue, the last two both on the road.

On Saturday, Duke snapped a 22-game losing streak by beating — who else? — Northwestern. As the fans left that game, they couldn't have been too excited about this season. Junior quarterback C.J. Bachér has struggled, and the Wildcats begin their Big Ten slate with Ohio State and Michigan.

So far, the Tim Brewster era has gotten off to a difficult start. Brewster, who took over as head coach, has watched his team lose its first two games — in overtime — by a combined seven points. Luckily for Minnesota, North Dakota State, a Football Championship Subdivision team, is lodged in the middle of the Big Ten schedule.