QB injuries lead to Big Ten scoring woes

BY STEVE MEGARGEE
Associated Press



ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO BY LON HORWEDEL

Michigan State defensive lineman Anelu Lafaele, left, sacks Michigan quarterback Tommy Carr in the second quarter of a game on Saturday in Ann Arbor, Mich.

The addition of four former Pac-12 teams was supposed to bring some offensive firepower to the Big Ten and change its reputation.

It hasn't quite worked out that way.

Scoring in the Big Ten did rise in 2024, the first year after Southern California, UCLA, Oregon and Washington joined a league known more for defense. Point totals went up again last year. But they're dropping this year as three Big Ten teams already have fired their offensive coordinators.

Nebraska dismissed Dana Holgorsen and Michigan fired Jason Beck over the weekend, two weeks after No. 18 Oregon dumped Drew Mehringer.

"I felt like as I watched us play, it just isn't working the way we want it to work," Nebraska coach Matt Rhule said Monday. "For me, you think about what it takes to win in college football, you need to have an explosive offense. You need to have the ability to score points."

Not enough Big Ten teams have shown that ability this season.

Sportradar says games featuring two Big Ten teams have averaged 47.3 total points this season, putting the league on pace for its lowest season-ending average since 2023 (45.0). Before then, the last time Big Ten games averaged fewer than 47.3 points was way back in 2006 (46.5).

The only league whose conference games have lower scoring averages this season is the Mountain West Conference with 45.5. Among Power Four conferences, the Big 12 averages 56.8, the Atlantic Coast Conference has 53.4 and the Southeastern Conference is at 50.7.

"When you think of Big Ten football at its core, you think of running the football and playing defense," said Big Ten Network analyst Ryan Kerrigan, who was named the league's defensive player of the year while playing for Purdue in 2010.

That was supposed to change once those West Coast schools arrived. For a while, it did.

Games featuring two Big Ten teams averaged 48.4 total points in 2024, the highest number since 2021. They went up in 2025 to 49.0 points per game, the most since 2020.

QB issues hinder offenses

It would be easy to write off this year's drop as a result of the flurry of Big Ten quarterback injuries, most notably to preseason Heisman Trophy contenders Dante Moore of Oregon and Julian Sayin of Ohio State.

Other quarterbacks simply haven't developed as expected.

Bryce Underwood, regarded as the nation's top overall recruit in his high school class, got benched midway through his sophomore season at Michigan. Tommy Carr took over and struggled to such an extent in a 15-6 loss to Michigan State on Saturday that Wolverines coach Kyle Whittingham fired Beck and reopened the quarterback competition.

Whittingham said he had intended to wait on any coaching evaluation decisions until after the season, but this game changed his mind.

"When I turned on the film and really dove into it, it just became apparent to me that we needed to make the change now," Whittingham said. "There's just too much regression in the offense in that particular game."

While Big Ten offenses have struggled, the league's defenses have generally stepped up. Five of the top 10 Bowl Subdivision defenses in yards allowed per play are Big Ten programs: No. 6 Indiana (1st, 4.08) No. 4 UCLA (5th, 4.25), Michigan (6th, 4.26), Wisconsin (7th, 4.30) and No. 16 Iowa (10th, 4.40).

Indiana, Iowa, UCLA and Wisconsin all rank in the top 10 in yards allowed per carry.

"Physicality is probably the operative word for defenses in the Big Ten," Whittingham said.

Defensive-minded coaches

Wisconsin coach Luke Fickell struggled to come up with a reason for why the numbers have dropped this year.

"I can tell you this: There's no better-coached conference in college football," Fickell said. "I'm just telling you, the uniqueness of what has always been done in the Big Ten continues to get better. That's why it's difficult to be successful in this league offensively without having the ability to be balanced in what you're doing, to run the football and throw the football, because I think it's so well coached."

Kerrigan and Minnesota offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Greg Harbaugh offered similar assessments.

Kerrigan cited the presence of outstanding defensive coordinators such as Indiana's Bryant Haines and Iowa's Phil Parker. Harbaugh said the defenses Minnesota faces each week are difficult to prepare for because they can attack teams in multiple ways.

"It's just the players, and I think the coaching in this league is really, really good," Harbaugh said. "There's always an answer. You have to prepare. You have to go back and watch things that they've done in years past because you're always attempting to put your guys in a position to succeed and be ready for something that could happen."

That hasn't stopped some staffs from making changes in a season that's become notable for coordinator firings.

Illinois fired defensive coordinator Bobby Hauck after splitting its first four games of the season. Purdue fired defensive coordinator Kevin Kane on Sunday, the day after a 34-29 loss to Maryland that gave Terrapins interim head coach Aazaar Abdul-Rahim his first win. Abdul-Rahim took over after the firing of Mike Locksley in the Big Ten's first head coaching change of the year.

Cousins returns to Vikings; Taylor staying with Colts

BY ROB MAADDI
Associated Press

Kirk Cousins is returning to Minnesota. Keenan Allen is heading to San Francisco. Josh Downs is going to Kansas City.

Jonathan Taylor is staying in Indianapolis.

The Colts' decision to keep the three-time Pro Bowl running back was the biggest surprise Tuesday when several teams filled needs ahead of the trade deadline.

Buffalo added safety Amani Hooker, Denver got linebacker Daiyan Henley, and Baltimore and Atlanta swapped offensive linemen.

The Vikings (6-2) turned to a familiar quarterback to try to rescue a woeful offense, acquiring Cousins from the Las Vegas Raiders in a move that bolsters their chances in a competitive NFC North that features four teams with winning records.

Carson Wentz's dismal performance in a 23-6 loss to the Bills on Monday night fueled Minnesota's push for a reunion with Cousins, who threw for 4,547 yards and made his fourth Pro Bowl in 2022 while helping the Vikings win 13 games in coach Kevin O'Connell's first season.

After a 6-0 start, the Vikings have lost two in a row. They have the league's stingiest defense, allowing 14.5 points per game.

But they're scoring just 18.3 points per game. Kyler Murray is dealing with a hamstring issue, but the offense wasn't productive with him. Wentz came off the bench after Murray was injured and completed 12 of 19 passes for 133 yards, three touchdowns and no interceptions in a 39-22 win over Green Bay in Week 1.

Against the Bills, he was 8 of 25 for 81 yards, two interceptions and lost a fumble on an overthrown backward pass. His QB rating was 8.9 for the game.

The 38-year-old Cousins threw for 2,340 yards, 20 TDs and eight picks for Las Vegas (4-5). The Raiders now turn to rookie No. 1 overall pick Fernando Mendoza while the Vikings hope Cousins can lead them on a Super Bowl run.

The injury-riddled 49ers (7-1) added another veteran receiver to a depleted group, getting Allen from the Colts to give Brock Purdy a reliable option. The 34-year-old Allen has 40 catches for 351 yards and one touchdown in eight games in his first season in Indianapolis.

Mike Evans missed the past two games because of Achilles tendinitis and it's not known when he'll return. Ricky Pearsall is already out for the season, rookie De'Zhaun Stribling is on injured reserve with an ankle injury that will sideline him until at least December and Christian Kirk went on IR last week with a knee injury. Deebo Samuel could return this week after missing three games with a hamstring injury.

It was San Francisco's second trade with Indianapolis in less than a month. The 49ers previously got defensive tackle DeForest Buckner.

The Chiefs (6-2) are counting on Downs to provide Patrick Mahomes with a primary option. Downs had 33 catches for 354 yards and a touchdown in nine games with Indianapolis.

Tyquan Thornton, who was Kansas City's top deep threat, suffered a dislocated left ankle and torn ligaments in Week 4. Rashee Rice missed three games with a hamstring injury and has been injury-prone throughout his career. Xavier Worthy is expected to miss several weeks with a hamstring injury.

Hooker upgrades Buffalo's secondary. The Bills (7-1) have played better defensively the past two games after allowing 28.5 points per game over the first six. Hooker is tied with Xavier McKinney for the most interceptions in the NFL with five. Hooker had three of those picks against Joe Burrow in Tennessee's 43-36 loss to Cincinnati on Nov. 1.

Henley joins a once-stout defense in Denver, where he'll play alongside linebackers Alex Singleton and Justin Strnad. The Broncos (7-2) allowed the second-fewest yards in the league last season but are tied for 26th this season.

The Falcons sent starting center Ryan Neuzil to the Ravens for offensive lineman Andrew Vorhees and a draft pick. Baltimore acquired center Cam Jurgens from Philadelphia last month, so one of them will be moving to guard.

Jacksonville Jaguars

The Jaguars (6-2) loaded up on Monday to make a run in the AFC. Jacksonville went all-in on, acquiring defensive tackles Jordan Davis from Philadelphia and Davon Godchaux from New Orleans, and safety Jessie Bates from Atlanta.

The Jaguars traded a lot of draft capital, including a 2027 first-round draft pick and a 2029 second-rounder for Davis. But they're aiming for the No. 1 seed in the AFC.

Chicago Bears

The Bears (7-2) already got an immediate impact from All-Pro defensive tackle Jeffery Simmons, who was acquired from the Titans two weeks ago. Simmons has been dominant in his first two games.

Seattle Seahawks

The reigning Super Bowl champion Seahawks (5-4) added Pro Bowl guard Quenton Nelson in a trade with the Colts two weeks ago. Nelson played one game for Seattle before being sidelined by a knee injury. He could return before the end of the month.

Detroit Lions

The Lions (6-2) strengthened a depleted secondary on Monday, getting Andre Cisco from the Jets.

Baltimore Ravens

The Ravens (4-5) got veteran QB Jacoby Brissett from Arizona last week after Lamar Jackson went down with a thumb injury and backup Tyler Huntley sustained a season-ending toe injury.

New York Giants

The Giants (5-2-1) pursued Taylor but didn't make a deal. They acquired backup QB J.J. McCarthy from Minnesota earlier in the season and he's replaced Jameis Winston. The NFC East leaders lost Jaxson Dart for the season in Week 2.

Houston Texans

The Texans (3-5) got wide receiver Marvin Harrison from Arizona last month. Harrison has six catches for 60 yards and one TD in three games with his new team.

Dallas Cowboys

The Cowboys (4-5) added cornerback Joey Porter in a trade with Pittsburgh last month. Porter played well in three games but missed last week with ankle and heel injuries.

Ohio State sticks with QB, focuses on final 3 games

BY MARCUS HARTMAN
Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Facing the first regular-season losing streak of his eight years as head coach at Ohio State, Ryan Day acknowledged feelings of anger and frustration permeating the Woody Hayes Athletic Center as another game week began.

The 21st-ranked Buckeyes dropped 10 spots in the AP Top 25 after a humbling 41-28 loss to Oregon on Saturday. That came a week after Ohio State, then ranked No. 2, lost at Southern California 30-18.

Although they are not mathematically eliminated, the Buckeyes (6-3, 4-2 Big Ten) are staring at the possibility of missing the Big Ten Championship Game as they share third place in the standings with five other teams.

Ohio State's College Football Playoff hopes are also hanging by a thread, but Day said he is not ready to turn his attention to other postseason opportunities or preparing for 2027 with three games remaining.

Day said, "I'm not there yet," and noted the Big Ten has rules regarding a team potentially declining a bowl bid, but he did allow that development is still part of the equation with Northwestern coming to town this weekend. After that, the Buckeyes will go to Nebraska before concluding the regular season at home against archival Michigan.

"How do we want to be remembered knowing that we have these two games and the rivalry game at the end of the season?" Day said summing up discussions with team leaders over the past two days.

"Life is all about how you respond to things. What do we want the outcome to be? To finish the regular season with these three games and walk off that field at the end of the regular season with that win. Then we'll figure out what goes on from there, but we have an obligation to do that as a team, and that's it."

While Day did not rule out some lineup changes if younger players earn opportunities in practice, he is not planning to make a change at quarterback.

Freshman Luke Fahey started the past two games in place of Julian Sayin, who is not expected back this season after suffering an elbow injury in late October.

Fahey threw for 360 yards last week, though most of that was in garbage time after the Ducks took control of the game with 38 consecutive points from late in the second quarter to the early fourth.

To ascend to starter, Fahey had to jump sophomore Tavien St. Clair, a five-star prospect from Bellefontaine, Ohio.

"Luke is going to be our quarterback this week, and Tavien's one snap away," Day said. "And that has got to continue to be his mentality and he has to continue to grow. If we can continue to improve in practice and build enough trust within practice, and we feel like he gives us the best chance to win, we'll make that move. We're not at that point right now."

PREP REPORT

Football

Area playoff seedings, pairings

Dates, times TBA unless noted

Division I nonselect
No. 24 Terrebonne at No. 9 Dutchtown
No. 25 Sulphur at No. 8 Zachary
No. 28 Chalmette at No. 5 East Ascension
No. 21 Walker at No. 12 Denham Springs
No. 19 Prairieville at No. 14 St. Amant
No. 18 Central at No. 15 Airline

Division II nonselect
No. 17 Belle Chasse at No. 16 Plaquemine
No. 21 Minden at No. 12 West Feliciana
No. 27 Brusly at No. 6 Opelousas
No. 26 North Vermillion at No. 7 Lutcher

Division III nonselect
No. 21 Donaldsonville at No. 12 Green Oaks
No. 2 St. James, bye

Division IV nonselect
No. 1 East Feliciana, bye
No. 21 East Iberville at No. 12 Welsh
No. 23 Merryville at No. 10 North Iberville

Division I select
No. 7 Catholic, bye
No. 19 Woodlawn at No. 14 St. Paul's

Division II
No. 24 McKinley at No. 9 Booker T. Washington-Shreveport
No. 3 Madison Prep, bye
No. 22 Scotlandville at No. 11 Vandebilt Catholic
No. 7 St. Michael, bye

Division III select
No. 24 Fisher at No. 9 Dunham
No. 21 Helix Mentorship Academy at No. 12 Baker
No. 20 Parkview Baptist at No. 13 Amite
No. 19 Istrouma at No. 14 Independence
No. 6 University High, bye
No. 18 St. Thomas Aquinas at No. 15 Episcopal

Division IV
No. 8 Southern Lab, bye
No. 20 Central Private at No. 13 J.S. Clark Leadership Academy
No. 3 Kentwood, bye
No. 22 Vermillion Catholic at No. 11 St. John
No. 18 St. Edmund at No. 15 Catholic-PC
No. 2 Ascension Catholic, bye

Volleyball

State quarterfinal schedule

Division II
No. 6 St. Michael vs. No. 3 St. Scholastica

Division III
No. 9 Berwick vs. No. 1 University High
No. 6 Lutcher vs. No. 3 Iota
No. 7 Parkview Baptist at No. 2 Hannan

Division IV
No. 10 Houma Christian vs. No. 2 Dunham

Division V
No. 5 Central Catholic vs. No. 4 Ascension Catholic