



# Penn State has the parts to take the Big Ten title

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Penn State's women's soccer team has won the Big Ten regular season title seven straight times, so nobody should be surprised that the Nittany Lions have been picked by the Big Ten coaches to claim an eighth consecutive conference title.

Penn State has arguably the most talented team it has ever had. It starts with senior forward Tiffany Weimer, who has put herself light years ahead of every athlete in the conference, leading every offensive category except for assists; fellow senior forward Carmelina Moscato has the most dishes. With 12 goals through eight games, Weimer has the conference high.

But of course, soccer is a team sport, and collectively, Penn State statistically trounces most of the conference, scoring the most points, goals and assists.

And then they have the most important statistic of all: wins. Penn State hasn't lost yet, stringing together eight straight wins for the best start in school history. That quick start has given Penn State the No. 2 ranking in the nation,

behind only storied North Carolina. Unlike most non-conference games, those eight wins were not gimmes. Through those games, Penn State beat four ranked teams, including then No. 3 UCLA in SoCal.

"It gets more difficult each year because the Big Ten teams get stronger," she said. "Obviously, we're a target for other teams."

Wilkins' athletes have risen to all challenges this season. Only eight games into the season, several Lions have been on and off the injury list, especially the defense. Fifth-year senior defender and co-captain Lindsay Bach has battled a left ankle sprain, and defensive starter Natalie Jacobs is still recovering from a bone graft in her left knee. Several players have elevated their game, though. Freshman Allie Long has filled in well for Bach, and midfielder junior co-captain Ali Krieger has found ways to create opportunities, scoring four goals so far this season.

No team in the Big Ten can match Penn State in terms of talent. If the Lions can keep the momentum going through the very physical Big Ten season, an eighth straight regular season Big Ten crown is theirs for the taking.

## The teams set to test the Lions



### No. 2 Penn State

**Last year:** 19-3-1, 10-0 Big Ten, 1st  
**This year:** 8-0  
**Analysis:** Since Penn State has not lost a regular season Big Ten game at home in the millennium and only No. 16 Wisconsin resides in the top 25, there's no reason to believe that they can't sweep the home schedule against such bottom-feeders as Minnesota and Iowa, who combined for two conference wins last year.

The Golden Gophers had both wins. The most difficult opponent coming to Jeffrey Field is Illinois, who finished fourth.

There is a four-game road swing, including two trips that involve traveling to two schools in one weekend, which will show if Penn State has a top-tier program or wavers in the limelight.

First they journey to Madison, Wisc. against the Badgers on Sunday Oct. 2. This may be the first loss of the Lions season after what should be an 11-0 start.

The Lions visit the Cheese State after going to Evanston for the Northwestern Wildcats on Friday night. Not easy.

Next there is Ohio State, who finished second in the Big Ten last year and won the Big Ten Tournament.

This year the Buckeyes host the Lions on Oct. 14. OSU has one of the nation's top goal scorers in Lara Dickemann.

In the Lions' most recent trip to Columbus, Ohio, they came out on the short end of a 3-2 score in the finals of said tournament, as Ohio State hosted the three-round event. If revenge worked against an out-of-conference team like Maryland, this should be no different.

The Lions also have to be aware of the "Tour de Michigan."

The trip to Michigan and Michigan State close out the nonconference schedule and a four-game road trip.

The bumps, grinds and fatigue may catch up with them as they split the series.

**This year:** 6-1  
**Analysis:** The Wildcats had the exact opposite plan heading into nonconference play. Northwestern scheduled yawners, except for one against Marquette, to whom they lost on the road, 2-1. Apparently it's strategy was to gather early season momentum before tackling the Big Ten. The Lions have been tested and prevailed thus far. Experience should show in this Sept. 30 road game. Penn State can't look past Northwestern to its Sunday game against Wisconsin, however.



### No. 16 Wisconsin

**Last year:** 16-6-1, 5-4-1 Big Ten, t-5th  
**This year:** 5-2-1  
**Analysis:** The Badgers seem poised to challenge the Lions, at least on paper.

As the only other ranked team in the conference, Penn State's trip to Madison may be the game that decides whether the Lions win an eighth consecutive Big Ten regular season championship.

Then-No.7 Portland and then-No. 15 BYU have been the Badgers' lone losses.



### Illinois

**Last year:** 16-6-2, 5-3-2 Big Ten, 4th  
**This year:** 4-2-2  
**Analysis:** The winning record is somewhat deceiving. The Fighting Illini's biggest win came Sept. 2 against Nebraska. The 1-0 win over a borderline top 25 team gave them credibility until, they lost 2-1 to Indiana State at home.

Wilkins said Illinois has a strong defensive backfield. Although the Lions have had a number of goal scorers, only Krieger has emerged to complement Weimer.

Should Weimer be marked as she has against a solid defense, another threat may have to emerge by Oct. 9.



### Northwestern

**Last year:** 10-8-2, 5-4-1 Big Ten, t-5th



### Michigan State

**Last year:** 12-7-1, 3-6-1 Big Ten, 9th  
**This year:** 4-2-3  
**Analysis:** Texas A&M came into East Lansing inside the top five. They left with a 1-0 overtime loss, now holding down the No. 15 spot.

This game will be part of another taxing road weekend.

After going to Ann Arbor on a Friday, they travel to Spartan territory for a Sunday afternoon game.

The third game in that four-game road trip to close conference play, the Lions may get up just so they can go home again.

MSU, meanwhile, could bolster its national credibility with an upset on its home field.

It could happen, as the Lions may just want to get the conference schedule over with and return to Jeffrey field for a game against Navy to close out the regular season.



### Michigan

**Last year:** 11-9-2, 6-3-1 Big Ten, 3rd  
**This year:** 3-2-2  
**Analysis:** Another big game is Michigan at Michigan on Oct. 21. Ann Arbor hosts the Big Ten Tournament. A win here bodes well for the postseason. It's the third stop on that road trip, and the U of M always plays tough.

The Wolverines have played well at home, playing then-No. 6 Texas A&M to a tie.

In their toughest game to date, they dropped a 3-0 game on the road to then-No. 5 Notre Dame.

Wilkins believes Michigan has one of the best forward tandems in the conference.

"Michigan is dynamic offensively with [Melissa] Dobbyn up front along with Therese Heaton," Wilkins said. "They've done well against Texas and Texas A&M. Along with Michigan State they've both done quite well against very good competition, and so they're going to be well organized."



### Ohio State

**Last year:** 19-4-3, 6-1-3 Big Ten, 2nd  
**This year:** 3-2-2  
**Analysis:** With wins against Xavier, Northeastern and Kent State, the Buckeyes have not matched the Lions in terms of strength of schedule or quality wins.

Their offense has been relatively quiet, scoring a high of three goals against Xavier Aug. 28.

If Dickenmann gets hot however, they could very well resemble the team that finished second in the Big Ten last year.

Wilkins is cautious that may happen, as the sophomore helped the Bucks to a second place conference finish, their lone loss coming to Penn State.

"Ohio State has Dickenmann. She is probably one of the best players in college soccer and can create stuff," Wilkins said. "She'll be a problem."



### Indiana

**Last year:** 9-7-3, 3-5-2 Big Ten, t-7th  
**This year:** 4-3-1  
**Analysis:** The Hoosiers lost to USC 6-0. The Lions defeated the Women of Troy 3-1. "Nuff said. Indiana comes to the Valley at 7 p.m. to open the Big Ten schedule. The Lions should start off 1-0 in the conference."



### Purdue

**Last year:** 10-10, 4-6 Big Ten, t-7th  
**This year:** 4-4  
**Analysis:** The Boilermakers, despite a slow start against some stiff competi-

tion, have rattled off three wins in a row against Butler, Nebraska and Kansas. They've won all their games at West Lafayette and a 1-0 loss to Cal Poly showed they can play with just about anybody, at least at home. The problem is they come to Happy Valley this Sunday. Wilkins says that Purdue has two main threats. The Boilers are very good in the air and they come out of restarts extremely well. Moscato however, is a tall midfielder, and Weimer boasts that Krieger can jump higher than anybody at this level. Penn State should sweep this weekend and reach the double digit win total without a problem.



### Minnesota

**Last year:** 8-10, 2-8 Big Ten, 10th  
**This year:** 3-3-2  
**Analysis:** The Golden Gophers get the Lions at home, but that's the only thing they have going for them, and the value in that is debatable. They played South Dakota at home and played to a scoreless tie. Offensively, they just haven't gotten it done, and against PSU's back four it will only get more difficult.



### Iowa

**Last year:** 2-14-2, 0-9-1 Big Ten, 11th  
**This year:** 1-5-2  
**Analysis:** Halfway to last year's win total isn't a bad thing for most teams this point in the season. For Iowa, it means they have one win.

If Penn State goes to Iowa City on Oct. 9 and loses, it may be one of the biggest upsets in women's soccer history, as the Lions should still be undefeated.

## Andrew Staub's prediction

Barring a massive collapse, Penn State will win its eighth straight Big Ten title, and should do so in style. In the Big Ten, the only teams that should pose a real threat are Ohio State and Michigan on the road. Penn State has proved that it can win in difficult road conditions though, beating both Southern California and then-No. 3 UCLA on the road in the same weekend.

Penn State has three of the best athletes in the country in Jacobs, McLeod and Weimer.

Those three coupled with a strong supporting cast and Wilkins, one of the nation's best coaches, should be enough to give the Lions a strong regular season and a conference title.

**Prediction:** Penn State finishes 18-1-0 in the regular season, losing to Michigan in the second leg of a tough four-game October road trip, but nevertheless will win an eighth consecutive Big Ten regular season championship.



## Chris Weeden's prediction

Penn State will go 17-2 and win the Big Ten again. An 11-0 record to start the season will end against Wisconsin.

Even though the Lions should win this game on paper, the travel from Northwestern on Friday to Wisconsin on Sunday will be too much.

The "Tour de Michigan" will be tough, so look for them to split the series, probably falling in the Michigan State game. It's too hard to go undefeated in soccer, unless you're North Carolina. There are just too many games.

The potential letdown game comes against Navy.

For some reason, this non-conference home game closes out the regular season.

The Lions may find it too easy to look ahead to the Big Ten tournament since essentially nothing will be at stake, barring that they're not still undefeated.



## Remaining Schedule

Date	Opponent	H/A	Time
9/23	Indiana	H	7:00 p.m.
9/25	Purdue	H	1:00 p.m.
9/30	Northwestern	A	4:00 p.m.
10/2	Wisconsin	A	11:30 a.m.
10/7	Illinois	H	7:30 p.m.
10/9	Iowa	H	12:00 p.m.
10/14	Ohio State	A	7:30 p.m.
10/21	Michigan	A	7:00 p.m.
10/23	Michigan State	A	12:00 p.m.
10/28	Minnesota	A	7:00 p.m.
10/30	Navy	H	3:00 p.m.