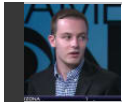


PURDUE

How Purdue quietly became one of college basketball's best teams

Joe Robbins/Getty Images

Carsen Edwards (left) and Vince Edwards (right) are dangerous weapons for Purdue. Matt Haarms, a mobile 7-foot-3 center, gives the Boilermakers a unique defensive presence.



Ryan Connors

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Posted 6 months ago

In a plodding season for Big Ten basketball, Michigan State, not Purdue, was supposed to be the sure thing. The Spartans returned one of the country's top players in Miles Bridges, and surrounded him with the league's best young talent.

But glance at any rankings you wish — [AP Top 25](#), [KenPom](#), or just the [Big Ten standings](#) — and Purdue, not Michigan State, is the better team in the Big Ten. Matt Painter's Boilermakers made it to the Sweet 16 last season before getting mashed by Kansas, but they're poised to make even more noise this season. Despite losing Big Ten Player of the Year Caleb Swanigan to the NBA, Purdue has improved while rocketing up the polls.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

The Boilermakers were ranked No. 20 in the Associated Press preseason poll, but they didn't crack the top 10 until two weeks ago, when they vaulted from No. 13 to No. 5. They survived a brief blip around Thanksgiving with close losses to Tennessee and Western Kentucky at the Battle 4 Atlantis.

Purdue (19-2, 8-0 Big Ten) hasn't lost since, and is holding steady at No. 3.

With a schedule that hasn't featured many big names, you'd be forgiven for wondering how Purdue got here. For starters, the Boilermakers rank 16th in [minutes continuity](#), Ken Pomeroy's stat that measures returning experience year-over-year. It shows. Purdue starts seniors Vince Edwards, Dakota Mathias, P.J. Thompson and Isaac Haas, and standout sophomore Carsen Edwards. Even with Swanigan gone, Purdue improved in just about every facet of the game.

	2016-17	2017-18
O-efficiency*	24th	4th
D-efficiency*	23rd	3rd
Effective FG%*	16th	5th
Turnover %*	163rd	48th
O-rebound %	114rd	142th
D-rebound %	12th	124th
2-point shooting	47th	31st
3-point shooting	7th	1st
2-point defense	66th	4th
3-point defense	79th	38th
*Per KenPom		

Vince and Carsen Edwards are the biggest drivers of Purdue's success

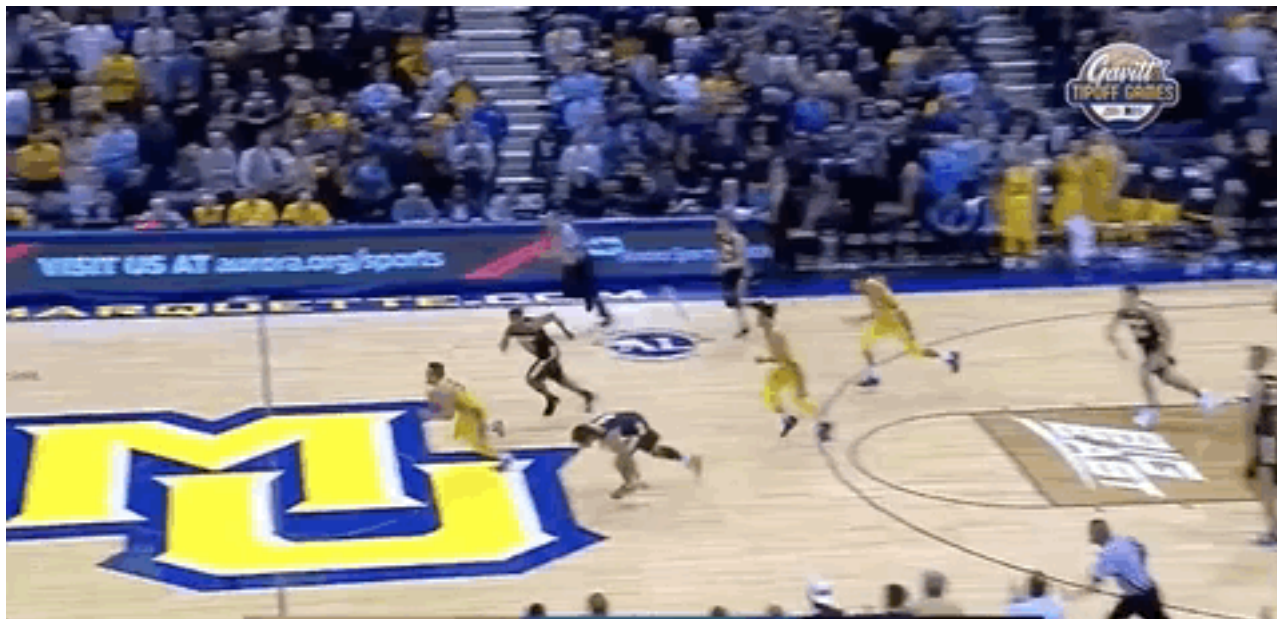
Vince Edwards, a senior, continues to elevate his game in his final season as a contributor for the Boilermakers. He's improved in Swanigan's absence, getting his offensive rebound percentage from 8.3 to 10.6, and his defensive rebounding percentage from 11 to 18. He can make plays just about anywhere, whether he's backing someone down or getting the ball on the perimeter and driving to the hoop.



STORY CONTINUES BELOW

Oh, and he shoots 45 percent from 3-point range.

Carsen Edwards has made a huge leap that's vaulted him into star status on a top team. He's increased his assists and cut down on turnovers. Given an athletic frame that allows him to do this at 6-foot-1, he'd be an effective player even if he couldn't shoot.



But more than anything this season, Carsen Edwards has gotten better at simply putting the ball in the basket. The younger Edwards (they aren't related) has increased his 2-point shooting percentage from 41 his freshman season to 56 as a sophomore, and upped his 3-point shooting percentage from 34 to 40. He's adept at creating his own shot, and opponents pay the price if they leave him open.



Purdue has an ideal starting 5 that could make deep run in March

Two high-level scorers are a good base for any team, and the Boilermakers surround them with quality, experienced players. Senior guards Mathias and Thompson are knockdown shooters who each hit more than 45 percent from deep, meaning four of Purdue's five starters are threats from beyond the arc.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

At center, Purdue has not one, but two 7-footers. Isaac Haas is the senior starter who measures in at 7-2 and 290 pounds. You've probably heard of him. Haas is huge, and he plays like it. The big man lumbers at times and is not particularly quick, but his size and brute strength are distinct advantages that allow Haas to get to the hoop. Haas' backup is 7-3 shot blocker Matt Haarms, a redshirt freshman poised to terrify guards for years.

Everyone works well together, with point guard Thompson running an efficient offense that thrives on unselfish passing. You don't see many Purdue possessions end with contested isolation 3s, and no one's firing up shots they aren't supposed to shoot. The Boilermakers sport the best 3-point shooting percentage in the country at 43.7, and they are committed to playing great defense.

Purdue's recipe is working. Michigan is the only one of five teams since Big Ten play started back up to get within single digits of the Boilermakers in a narrow 70-69 decision. At 8-0 in a conference that figures to get only four bids to the NCAA Tournament, the Boilermakers trail only a 9-0 Ohio State team that had four nonconference losses.

ESPN and **CBS** both have Purdue as a 1 seed, and it's easy to see that materializing. Purdue hasn't suffered a letdown loss and has three games against contenders left. A rematch Thursday against Michigan is the first, while back-to-back tests against Ohio State and Michigan State in mid-February will decide their Big Ten fate.

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Bye Week		Sat, Oct 06
@ 	Illinois	Sat, Oct 13 TBD
		Sat Oct 20

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