

Hoosier Happenings

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The latest news from the world of Indiana University athletics

Flipping the script

The Hoosiers closed out spring football practice feeling positive about the future and ready to put last season behind them

Indiana went into its spring workouts hoping to answer three questions.

First, would the Hoosiers feature the type of running back who could help them establish more of a downhill running game in 2009? Second, would Indiana's defense emerge from the winter ready to be aggressive and pack more of a punch? And finally, would the Hoosiers' offensive line be ready to take the next step and become the anchor the coaching staff has been dreaming of for years?

On the first point, the question about the running backs was answered with an emphatic "yes." That said, no one Hoosier emerged as a potential featured back, although the duo of senior Demetrius McCray and redshirt freshman Darius Willis both showed plenty of promise in IU's new "pistol" attack. McCray, whose career has been marred by foot injuries, looked as healthy as he has been in years, and the Hoosiers are counting on his speed and experience to help them early next season. Willis, meanwhile, showed that he can run with power or finesse, and he is packed with potential.

That said, Bryan Payton and Trea Burgess also showed flashes, and there's a good chance all four will get their share of carries as head coach Bill Lynch works to keep fresh legs on the field at all times. Willis, however, is the best of the bunch and could emerge as a star in coming years.

As for the defense, injuries to no fewer than five starters — Nick Polk, Austin Thomas, Deonte Mack, Jammie Kirlaw and Will Patterson — left the question about IU's "D" unanswered for the most part. Polk, Thomas and Patterson participated in some workouts, but they were limited, and Mack and Kirlaw sat out the entire spring. The injuries did allow a number of young players to get more reps, and converted WR Ray Fisher showed promise in his new role at cornerback and likely will emerge as one of the starters in the secondary.

Indiana's offensive line, which was decimated by injuries a season ago, got through the spring pretty much intact, and the group looked solid. Lynch hopes to find more balance on offense this season by running the football a lot more, and he needed to build trust in his offensive line during the spring to go forward with his plan. He has done just that, and the Hoosiers are excited to become more of a ground-based attack next season. The fact the running backs combined to rush for 228 yards during the spring game has Lynch believing his team can surprise next fall.

The biggest thing to come out of spring practice, however, was a renewed sense of purpose and improved leadership over last season. Next year's seniors established themselves as the heart and soul of the team. They felt the disappointment of just missing a bowl in 2006. They felt the sorrow of losing head coach Terry Hooppner in the summer of 2007 and the joy of reaching a bowl in the fall of that same year. Last year's 3-9 nightmare renewed the team's hunger. If IU can avoid any major injuries during the summer workout sessions, the Hoosiers hope to hit the ground running next season by outworking their opponents and shocking the naysayers.

Notable

■ Former QB Kellen Lewis has made a smooth transition to the wide receiver position, and he seems comfortable and happy in his new role. Lewis is undoubtedly the favorite target of QB Ben Chappell, and the fact he



Photo by A.J. Mast

can concentrate on himself and not on running the offense has allowed Lewis to focus better on the field. Lewis also showed good hands on the field and will be a player to watch next season.

■ Former WR Ray Fisher didn't shy away from the physical nature of playing cornerback this spring and is relishing his role as a playmaker on the defensive side of the ball. Fisher will continue to work in the weight room this summer and will be concentrating on improving his footwork over the summer.

■ Word is more Hoosiers than ever will stay in Bloomington this summer to work at the football complex, especially with the new North End Zone facility opening in late July. An upgrade from a 5,000-square foot weight room to a 25,000 square foot workout facility has the players drooling in anticipation, and the players are building excitement for the fall.

Making a move

Spring football workouts are a good time for players who haven't gotten much of a chance on the field to show they're ready to step into the spotlight. Here's a look at four players who made their presence felt this spring.

OT James Brewer — Brewer is a beast on the offensive line, a 6-8, 339-pound behemoth who is finally healthy after years of struggles with injuries. Brewer likely will end up at right tackle, and his ability to be a road-grader blocker should open up his side of the field. Brewer is having fun for the first time in a long time, and his intensity was a positive of the spring.

TE Troy Wagner — Indiana plans on using the tight end more next season as a pass catcher, and Wagner showed promise during the spring workouts. He has good hands and a high motor, which should result in plenty of playing time.

C Will Matte — Matte is a redshirt freshman who worked with the first-string most of the spring. He has plenty of potential inside, and the fact he is surrounded by experienced linemen but has kept pace with his older teammates has the coaching staff believing he can be an

anchor in the future.

DTs Nick Sliger and Larry Black, Jr. — Sliger and Black are both redshirt freshmen, but they made their presence felt in the middle of the line all spring. Both are big and quick, and they should help IU improve vs. the run next fall.

Lynch said it

"It's a more mature group. We have more seniors. We have more juniors. We have a lot of guys who have played a lot of football. They understand it. I think the fact they've had the highs and lows here... they had a little success, then they got knocked down a notch a year ago. They want that success again. That's the way we want them to approach things going into the summer." — IU head football coach Bill Lynch on how the team during the spring seemed different than the squad that went 3-9 in the fall of 2008.

Looking ahead

2009 OUTLOOK: Indiana hopes to bounce back from a dismal 2008 campaign by staying healthy and counting on improved leadership in the locker room. IU doesn't face an easy schedule, but a quick start

could build confidence in a team that features plenty of experience. This is a team that isn't at all content after last season, and Indiana has felt disrespected following last year's disaster. Turning things around won't be easy, but there is a sense of urgency for the 2009 campaign.

SCOUTING THE OFFENSE: Indiana is looking to become more of a downhill running team, and the Hoosiers have switched to a "pistol" offense to improve their rushing numbers. QB Ben Chappell is comfortable with lining up a couple of yards closer to center, and his ability to make quality ball fakes on play-action is going to keep opponents guessing. Playmakers abound both at wideout (Kellen Lewis, Damarlo Belcher and Tandon Doss) and in the backfield (Darius Willis, Bryan Payton, Demetrius McCray), which should allow IU to avoid some of the offensive brownouts that plagued the team last season.

SCOUTING THE DEFENSE: Indiana's defense was awful last season, but the "D" suffered a lot of injuries in the secondary and hopes to bounce back by staying healthy this year. There are some hard-hitters in the IU lineup with Matt Mayberry, Nick Polk, Austin Thomas and Tyler Replogle all able to bring the wood. IU hopes to use more man-to-man coverage in pass defense, and DE Greg Middleton is looking to rebound from a disappointing 2008 campaign to prove he's an NFL-caliber player.

SCOUTING THE SPECIAL TEAMS: Indiana is searching for answers on special teams. The return positions are pretty open right now, although Ray Fisher likely will hold down one of the kickoff return spots and could become the man on punt returns. P Chris Hagerup was limited during the spring as he recovers from off-season ACL surgery, but he has shown plenty of promise in the past. Placekicker is a question mark. Although Nick Freeland came out of the spring as the Hoosiers' best option on the roster right now, incoming freshman Mitch Ewald will be given every opportunity to win the kicking job during fall camp.

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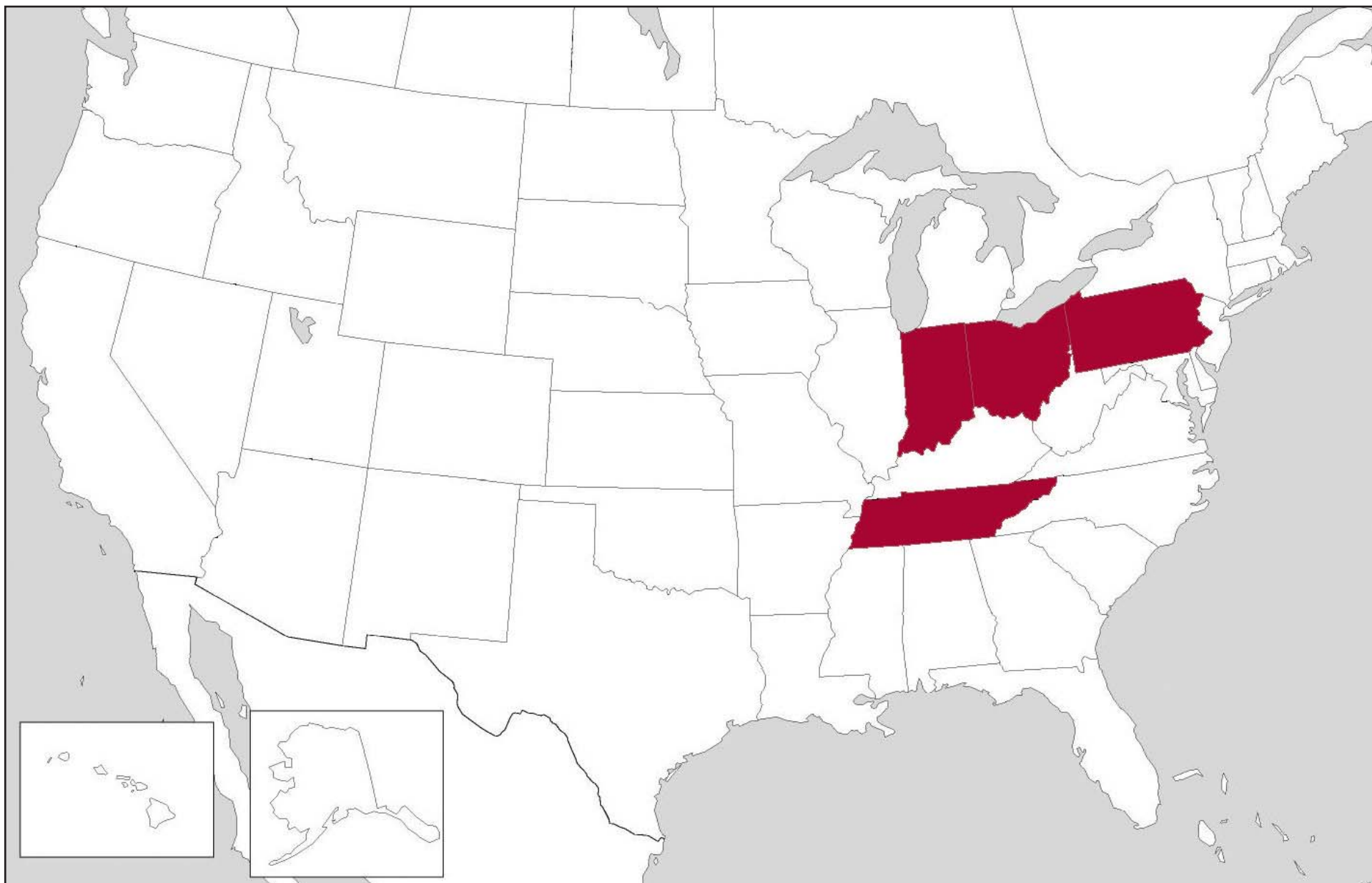
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Where are the Hoosiers?

Indiana's spring athletic schedule is in full swing, and the Hoosiers are traveling across the country to carry on the glory of old IU. Take a look at the map below to see if the Hoosiers are going to be visiting your state and check the schedules at the bottom of the page for information about when Hoosier athletic teams might be visiting your area.



Men's May athletics

Baseball

May 1-3 — at Purdue

May 8-10 — Northwestern

May 12 — at Evansville

May 14-16 — Michigan State

May 20-23 — at Big Ten Tournament; Columbus, Ohio

Golf

May 1-3 — at Big Ten Championships; State College, Pa.

Track & Field

May 1-2 — at Jesse Owens Classic; Columbus, Ohio

May 8 — Billy Hayes Invitational

May 15-17 — at Big Ten Championships; Columbus, Ohio

Dates subject to change

Women's May athletics

Rowing

May 2 — Big Ten Championships; Columbus, Ohio

May 16-17 — at Aramark NCAA South/Central Region Sprints; Oak Ridge, Tenn.

Softball

May 2-3 — at Penn State

May 9 — Purdue

Track & Field

May 1-2 — at Jesse Owens Classic; Columbus, Ohio

May 8 — Billy Hayes Invitational

May 15-17 — at Big Ten Championships; Columbus, Ohio

Dates subject to change

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A tour of the North End Zone facility

Photos taken April 9



Heading out the tunnel leading to practice fields



Bill Lynch emerges from the tunnel



View from the concourse of one of the towers



View of the concourse that runs around the facility



Mural in the men's restroom on the concourse level



View of the arches in the Hall of Champions

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Inlay for the floor in the entryway to the football offices



Inlay for the floor in the entryway to the football offices



View from a coach's office overlooking the balcony

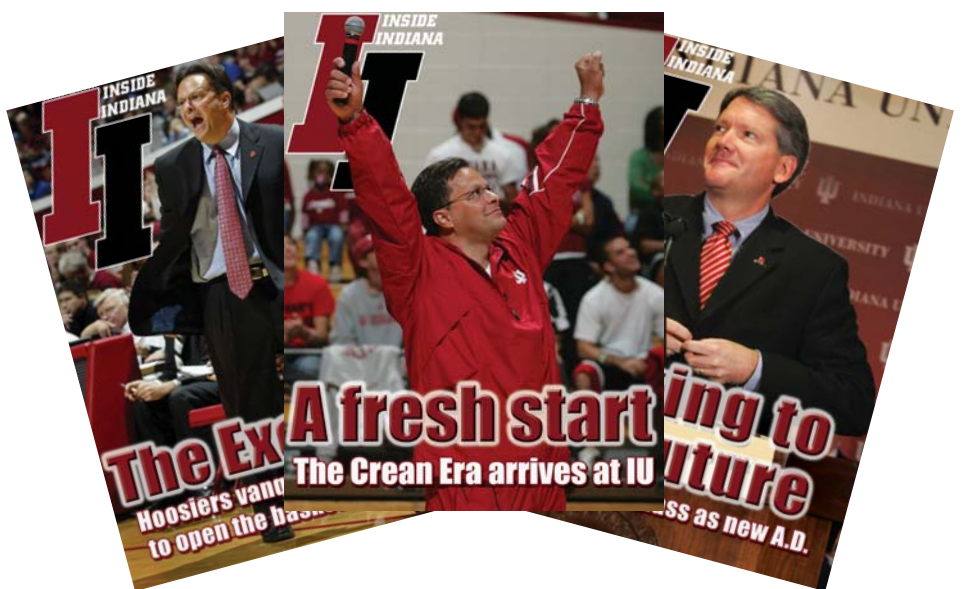


A closer look at the planned balcony area

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