



Away from the court, Annie Drews is a sweetheart. On it, she's an opponent's worst nightmare.

By Sam King • sking@jconline.com

The atmosphere is very warm and inviting. • Young professionals and college students, some Purdue athletes, some not, file in to a small Russell Street apartment on a Wednesday evening. Twelve in all form a circle in the living room area, each with a Bible in hand. • Sitting on the floor, long legs stretched across the room, is 6-foot-4 Annie Drews, making jokes —and more importantly, making sure everyone at this small church group feels comfortable in a setting that can sometimes be anything but when young people meet new friends. • At this moment, Drews

doesn't capture the essence of "the monster of the Big Ten." But that's exactly the phrase her coach uses. • What some in this circle don't realize is there is a transformation process that takes place when Drews enters the gym. The left hand she gently sifts through her Bible with is the end point of what Boilermakers coach Dave Shondell refers to as a bionic arm. It may look regular, but rest assured, it is not. • Drews is a terminator. She has been for a long time. • It was that way when Purdue freshman Azariah Stahl first teamed with her at the club level six years ago. • "She is very sweet and really approachable off the court," says Stahl, who played against Drews in high school. "On the court, she's really intimidating. She is huge and she can bomb the ball. She can hit it harder than anyone else." **See DREWS, Page D4**

AUTO RACING

Stewart is cleared; pot found in Ward

By Jenna Fryer and Carolyn Thompson
Associated Press

CANANDAIGUA, N.Y. — Three-time NASCAR champion Tony Stewart will not be charged with the death of a fellow driver at a sprint car race in upstate New York, prosecutors said Wednesday in disclosing for the first time that the victim had enough marijuana in his system the night he died to impair his judgment.

Ontario County District

Attorney Michael Tantillo said a grand jury decided against charging Stewart with second-degree manslaughter or criminally negligent homicide in the Aug. 9 death of Kevin Ward Jr., who was struck and killed as he walked down the track in an apparent attempt to confront the NASCAR veteran after their cars got tangled up one lap earlier.

"There is toxicology evidence in the case relating to Kevin Ward that indicates that

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PURDUE FOOTBALL

Five keys to Big Ten success



MICHAEL HEINZ/JOURNAL & COURIER
Darrell Hazell and Purdue begin conference play Saturday.

By Mike Carmin
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The question of the week — are the Boilermakers ready for Big Ten play?

The answers start coming in Saturday when Iowa visits Ross-Ade Stadium to open the conference season.

Most of the players on the roster now understand the rigors of league play. Those expected to see a bulk of the action were baptized last season when wholesale changes were made to the offense and defense. It wasn't pretty.

It took quarterback Danny Etling until November to

adjust. He wasn't the only one. Granted, his first three games were against Nebraska, Michigan State and Ohio State — difficult for anyone, let alone someone playing for the first time.

But have the Boilermakers made enough improvements to avoid another winless conference season? Coach Darrell Hazell and the players keep saying it's a different team. In some respects, they're right, but you're measured on what happens in conference play.

Here are five keys over the next eight games:

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DREWS

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Stahl is well aware of that intimidation factor.

Touted as one of the nation's top players while competing for Elkhart Central, Stahl was lined up to block Drews during her early years of high school when Penn was on the schedule.

"She hits the ball really hard and she can reach really high because she's tall," Stahl said. "I was just ready to play her, play against someone I knew (was the caliber) I would be facing in college. She did very well for Penn, and that was the reason they were successful.

As a Boilermaker, Drews, a junior right side, had been erratic over two up-and-down seasons. Now, she's being asked to be the "monster" coach Dave Shondell wants and the one Purdue needs.

Stahl is content being on Drews' side of the net now and seeing the look of opponents when Drews cocks her left arm while soaring through the air.

"You can tell she is really intimidating to other people," Stahl says.

The intimidation factor can be worth a few points at least.

Drews has developed into the go-to weapon during her junior season. In 12 matches, she's taken 353 swings. That's 108 more than Sam Epenesa, who has been set second most on the team.

For some, as Purdue saw happen with Ariel



JERRY SCHULTHEISS/FOR THE JOURNAL & COURIER
Annie Drews has become Purdue's go-to hitter during her junior season.

Turner not too long ago, fatigue becomes an issue when you become too reliant on one player.

Shondell doesn't see that happening with Drews.

"I have never seen her with what we refer to as a dead arm. It's live," Shondell said a little over a week ago. "She doesn't want to take time off from practice. She always wants to be in there working, working, working. Because of that mentality, she will be a great player for us at Purdue."

Purdue put Drews to the test two weeks ago at Western Kentucky. In defeat, Drews had her breakout match just a week after having what was then perceived as her breakout match against

LSU. Against the Hilltoppers, Drews pummeled 33 kills. It's easily a rally scoring record for the Boilermakers.

For someone who Shondell says has to lead the Big Ten in scoring for this season, Drews certainly did her part in the nonconference. Her 4.15 kills per set average is nearly equal to Minnesota's Daly Santana for the league lead. Her 162 kills are the most among Big Ten players.

Drews' 35 points (33 kills, 2 aces) against Western Kentucky are eight more than any Big Ten player has scored in a match this season.

Though Drews says she much prefers

balanced numbers on the stat sheet, she realizes as a veteran player that this is her time to step up.

"When they recruited me, they said they want me to be everything they've ever wanted in a player and for me to be everything I've ever wanted in a player," Drews recalls when choosing Purdue. "(Coaches said), 'You could be one of the best players that ever comes out of here.'"

"That comes with time and I know my time is now being an upperclassman, leading more, having more responsibilities ... I knew that was the expectation. That is the role I am trying to fill and need to fill now."

Yes, she can dominate. Indeed, she intimidates.

Volleyballs explode off her left hand like bullets from a machine gun.

To not rely on a player like that would be foolish for setter Val Nichol.

"By getting her the ball, she knows that I know that she will put it away," Nichol said after Saturday's sweep of Notre Dame. "When she doesn't, I don't stop going to her. By building that confidence and trust within each other, we are going to make each other more successful."

Hitting appears to be a point of emphasis. Drews' kill percentage is .283, a strong number for someone who has quickly become point No. 1 on defensive scouting reports.

As the Big Ten season begins Friday night, Drews is far from a finished product. She's

6-4, touches nearly 10 and a half feet and possesses rare strength for someone so long. She should block opposing hitters with ease, an area Drews and her coaches admit she should be better in.

Her ball control is not as good as she knows it should be, but Drews is getting there.

Assistant coach John Shondell has worked tirelessly on Drews' topspin serve. It's a beauty, but you have to keep it in play.

Drews boasted last week that she fired 14 in a row inbounds during a recent practice. Her 10 aces are third most on the team, but her 17 errors are the most.

Part of the problem in the past has been that she

overthinks. Dave Shondell said Drews could be become distracted by outside circumstances, such as crowds or officials.

His advice?

Just go play.

Drews seeks feedback, and sometimes the best feedback the coaches can give is that her left arm is as powerful as any in the country. Use it, and good things will happen.

"Annie Drews is a special young woman and we're fortunate she's at Purdue," Dave Shondell said. "She brings enthusiasm. She brings charisma. She wants to win everything. Both physically and emotionally, she still has progress to make before she is the great player she can be."

BIG TEN

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Minimizing mistakes

Limiting turnovers and penalties are two of Hazell's concerns. Purdue's turnover margin is plus-2 in its two wins; minus-4 in the two losses. Penalties have decreased each week from seven in the opener to four against Southern Illinois.

One touchdown last week was wiped out because of an illegal formation. The margin for error remains small.

"The lack of turnovers and the lack of penalties, they're starting to become a little smarter every week," Hazell said.

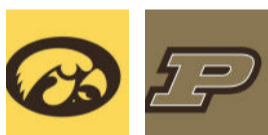
Purdue, though, has to continue to force turnovers, set up the offense in good field position — and capitalize with touchdowns. The Boilermakers have scored 35 points off five turnovers this season.

"That's a good team if you get a turnover and convert it into points," Iowa coach Kirk Ferentz said. "That's just a good sign, a good indicator."

Run the ball, stop the run

Purdue is better, at least statistically, in both areas through four games. It has to continue.

Center Robert Kugler watched last year's matchup against the Hawkeyes, who rushed for 318 yards in the 24-point victory. Iowa was one of four teams to gain more than 300 yards on the ground last season against the Boilermakers.



SATURDAY'S GAME

Iowa (3-1) at Purdue (2-2)
Time: Noon
TV: BTN Radio: WAZY (96.5)
Tickets: Available at Purdue's athletic ticket office and purduesports.com.

"You almost cringe," Kugler said. "It doesn't look like we know what we're doing and there are some clips where you think you played well, and you look back and it's pretty bad compared to where we are at now."

Purdue is averaging 146.7 yards on the ground, more than doubling its 67.1 yard average from a year ago. It is close to matching last year's big-play production in the running game. It had 28 runs of 10 yards or more in 2013 and already has 18 this season.

"In order to be competitive in the Big Ten, you've got to be able to run the ball," Kugler said. "That's been a big improvement for us which will translate into good Big Ten play."

Third-quarter play

A recent trend has developed — sluggish play in the third quarter.

The Boilermakers haven't executed in the 15 minutes after halftime. That helped Notre Dame pull away and allowed Southern Illinois to stay close. Regardless, Purdue has to find a way to play full games against Big Ten competition.

"I think you have to

consistently deliver the message that we have to be a team that executes in the third quarter," Hazell said.

The Boilermakers have been outscored 21-3 in the third quarter over the last three games.

Big plays

The longest play from scrimmage this season is 44 yards. More big plays are needed, especially in the passing game, to keep opponents from crowding the line of scrimmage.

Receivers have improved getting off press coverage and Etling has had enough time in the pocket. Drops have dwindled, but not completely vanished.

Even defensively, the Boilermakers have missed opportunities. Against Southern Illinois, safety Taylor Richards dropped a pick-six, which would've put the game out of reach.

"We need to continue to make plays, and that's putting yourself in position and being able to make those plays," Hazell said.

Confidence

They have more of it, and not because the Boilermakers have surpassed last year's win total.

Heading into this year's conference schedule, the Boilermakers are stronger physically and mentally. They have more experience and are comfortable in the system. There's better chemistry and an understanding of what it takes to win.

The victories over Western Michigan and Southern Illinois helped

build a foundation that wasn't evident last season. The loss to Central Michigan showed Purdue can't take anything for granted. The prime-time setback to Notre Dame provided an indication of what Hazell's team can do.

"I think we're improving," Hazell said. "That's the key. As long as we continue to get better in every element, I think that will suit us well as we continue to move forward."

PURDUE

SATURDAY @ NOON
HOMECOMING
TICKETS START AT JUST \$10!

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Enjoy family-friendly games, inflatables, and meet the men's basketball team. Country music star Levi Riggs will be performing on the Crossing stage.

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Colts personnel, giveaways, opportunities to win tickets and much more located at the Crossing!

SOCIAL MEDIA DAY
Follow @PurdueSports and use #BoilerUp throughout the day to win great prizes. Don't miss the special Social Media helmets the team will be wearing too!

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@carminjc

Join us this Saturday for a **TAILGATE TWEET-UP** with Journal & Courier sports reporter **Mike Carmin** at **Fresh City Market** on Northwestern from 10-11 a.m.

You follow him on Twitter and if you don't, you should. Meet and chat with the man behind the best Purdue football coverage in town. Check out the new WL full-service grocery and enter to win Fresh City Market and VISA gift cards. First 5 Carmin fans get FREE coffee!

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