

In every BCS conference, there's a less-than-a-sure-thing team that has an awful lot riding on the arm of its QB

By Dave Curtis

QUARTERBACK

p r e s s u r e

BIG TEN: Curtis Painter, Sr., Purdue

Curtis Painter sat alone in the ballroom with his dreams spread before him on a table. Boilermakers athletic officials had laid out their early Heisman Trophy campaign for the fifth-year senior: a calendar full of action photos and a highlight DVD entitled *Painting a Masterpiece*.

"I watched it on a plane, and I thought it was pretty cool," Painter says. "But I think my mom is going to enjoy it even more than me."

Painter is the latest in a string of successful Boilermakers quarterbacks. There's Bob Griese, who is now an analyst for ABC. Drew Brees swings through town at least once a year and chats with Painter each time. Painter's closest connection is with Kyle Orton, the Chicago Bear who preceded him as Purdue's starter. And the legacy's current watchman says he doesn't hesitate to talk to those who have gone before him.

"It's great to know a lot of those guys," Painter says. "To get to talk with Drew and get his advice, and to just call up Kyle and know how much he helps me out—it's really a great thing."

As a kid in Vincennes, Ind., Painter watched Brees and Orton turn the Boilers into a perennial bowl team and occasional conference title contender. Now, with Painter near the end of a career in the same Joe Tiller-conceived spread offense Brees and Orton once led, comparisons are valid. With the help of some extra regular-season games, Painter seems a sure bet to break several of Brees' career passing records if he stays healthy in 2008.

But Painter is keeping his view more big-picture and hopes any sort of Heisman run coincides with at least a 10-win season. Purdue will make trips to Notre Dame, Ohio State and Michigan State, but skipping Illinois and Wisconsin in the Big Ten will be an advantage.

Regardless of the schedule, Painter appears to possess the physical skills to fulfill the masterpiece expectations his school has set.

"First time we were just throwing it around, the first pass I caught, it tore my glove," senior receiver Greg Orton says. "I was like, 'Wow, this guy is for real.' And all he has done since then is work hard and get better."

After going 8-5 last season, Purdue hopes its record will get better—and those hopes rest squarely on Painter's right shoulder.

