

9/6 Purdue at Marshall 3:00 ET (Line: Marshall -7.5 Total: 61.5)

**Play: Over 61.5**

**Background:** Marshall finished last season a gaudy 13-1 and its only loss last season was a 1-point defeat to Western Kentucky. But the knock on the Thundering Herd was their schedule. They played approximately nobody. Meanwhile, Purdue went 3-9. Believe it or not, that was a 2-game improvement over Purdue's dismal 1-11 campaign in 2013. This game is the first time ever that a Big Ten team will travel to Huntington, WV for a football game.

**Why this play:** Marshall is replacing two of its primary playmakers from 2014. Rakeem Cato is playing in the CFL, and his favorite target (by a longshot) Tommy Shuler has graduated. But the cupboard is not bare. Marshall returns a trio of running backs that combined for over 3,100 rushing yards last season. They'll run behind an experienced line and will be led by QB Michael Birdsong who transferred from James Madison where he threw for over 2,700 yards and 22 tds in 2013. The Thundering Herd likes to play fast. Marshall ranked # 15 in tempo in 2014. Marshall's fast-paced offense will face off against Purdue's depleted defensive front (including the suspension of DE Galen Robinson), which looks like it will struggle to bring pressure. The Boilermakers also lose three of their top DBs from a defense that allowed 31.7 ppg in 2014 and was in the bottom quarter of the nation in defensive yards per point. If ever there's a good way to break in a new QB, this is it. The Purdue offense is nothing great, but Marshall loses quite a bit from its front seven, which should open things up for the Boilermakers a bit.

**What could go wrong:** Rakeem Cato did it all for Marshall last year, so there may be some adjustment, especially early on. As crazy as it sounds, Purdue is the second toughest opponent on Marshall's schedule. The step up in competition could hinder the Marshall attack, and if Marshall doesn't score a lot, it's unlikely Purdue can carry the scoring load in this one. However, given the discussion about Marshall's terrible schedule last year, the Thundering Herd are eager to prove that they can play with the Power 5 (even if it's only Purdue). The school is expecting a packed house and has even implemented special procedures for online sales to get more fans to the game. I think the Thundering Herd will be fired up for this one and should turn that into positive energy.