

Playing the role of a Big Ten football schedule maker (Part Two)

In [Part One](#), I put together a proposal for how the Big Ten's football schedule could shape out as far as conference games are concerned over the next four years.

Here in Part Two, I will explain what my thought process was as I put it all together (Jim Delany can thank me later if he wants).

Now first off, there is one major assumption I made with this, that the Big Ten won't expand beyond 12 teams until at least 2015. Let's be honest here. One, the Big Ten is not going to stop at 12 schools, and two, more expansion will occur before 2015. There's no doubt in my mind about this.

The other major assumption, which I did share in Part One, is how I put together the divisions. I did so by geography. Now on June 11, Jim Delany told the media on a conference call that competitive balance matters more to him in assembling divisions, meaning East-West, at least how I have it anyway, may not be how it's all re-aligned.

In the event Delany and the rest of the Big Ten want to just take what I posted and run with it, here are some of the other things I thought about:

1. Ensuring each team plays everybody

This is a lot like what the NFL did with its scheduling after the Houston Texans became the league's 32nd franchise back in 2002. Now, what I did was I kept the number of conference games at eight for each team. I have each team playing everyone in its division every season, and then half of the

opposite division. Then I took the 2011 schedule and swapped home and road for 2012. For the 2013, I took the five division games, and then had each team play the three teams from the other division it didn't play in 2011 and 2012. Then 2014 was like 2013, only with home and road switched again.

This is very similar to how the Big 12 (for now at least) schedules football games.

2. Deciding which weeks teams played division games

One thing I did here was set certain weeks in the Big Ten season that each team plays everyone in its division. I did this as a model off the SEC and how it schedules. For example, Florida and Tennessee always open up SEC play against each other every year. Same goes for Alabama and Arkansas. In my example, I had all division games happen the first two weeks and final three weeks of the Big Ten season.

In Iowa's case, I have the Hawkeyes opening every Big Ten slate with Illinois and Wisconsin as its first two conference games, meaning the first Big Ten game at Kinnick Stadium every year would be against either the Fighting Illini or Badgers, depending on if it was an odd or even year. I then had Iowa playing Minnesota, Northwestern, and Nebraska all at season's end.

3. Deciding how to put interdivisional match-ups together

This was by far the most challenging part, because I had to make sure everything evened itself out in the end.

The first thing I thought about was any potential rivalries that may exist between teams from opposite divisions. Any I found or thought would be big were scheduled for 2011 and 2012. Among the match-ups I made sure to schedule for those two seasons include Iowa vs. Penn State, Illinois vs. Indiana, Illinois vs. Ohio State, Michigan vs. Minnesota, and Northwestern vs. Purdue.

With Nebraska now in the conference, I thought about both 1994 and 1997, and decided that the Cornhuskers' first rotation should feature both Penn State and Michigan. Being new and giving Nebraska more road division games in its inaugural Big Ten season, I have both the Wolverines and Nittany Lions playing in Lincoln in 2011, and then have the Cornhuskers playing both Michigan and Penn State on the road in 2012.

4. Looking at current Big Ten schedules

I factored in the way Big Ten schedules from past years have shaped out. I did this so that way all rivalry games kept a rotation going, which is why I have Iowa playing at Wisconsin and at home against Minnesota in 2011. I also did this so that way anyone who may not have been on a team's schedule recently would be. This is why I have Purdue as one of the three East teams playing the Hawkeyes in both 2011 and 2012.

I had one challenge with this, and that was when I put Northwestern's schedule together. This challenge arose because ...

5. The Michigan/Ohio State factor

Iowa didn't play either team in 2007 or 2008. Northwestern didn't play either team last year and doesn't again this year.

So to avoid this, I made sure Michigan and Ohio State always played different teams in the West division each season. By doing this, every West team's schedule is guaranteed to have either the Wolverines or Buckeyes on it.

What this does is keeps situations like what happened to Iowa State in the Big XII from taking place. For those who don't know, Iowa State's schedule rotation over the years has either had both Texas and Oklahoma on it, or has had neither. As a matter of fact, every season Iowa State has played both schools, either both were road games, or both the Sooners and Longhorns would visit Jack Trice Stadium during the same

season. Never has Iowa State played one, but not the other, in Big XII play.

Is this schedule perfect? Probably not. Are there going to fans across the Big Ten that hate some of what I put together? Probably.

But with that said, how I put it together is fair (every team gets four home and four road each season), and ideal if the Big Ten decides to split the divisions by location, which I ultimately think is the most logical way considering every program goes through cycles of good and bad years.

I hope you all enjoyed it. Feel free to chime in with any opinions.

– by Brendan Stiles