

# More Big Ten realignment: Championships (What If?)

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With all the current talk about how Big Ten divisions should be devised, I decided to take a look back at the Big Ten since it expanded to 11 teams with Penn State in 1993, and determine what possible conference championship games would've looked like.

Below are the match-ups that would've resulted each season under the division format I presented last weekend and re-emphasized on Wednesday with an East-West split.

Before I present these, let me give a disclaimer and an observation.

**Disclaimer:** I did not include Nebraska in these what-if scenarios because it was already a member of the Big Eight, which later became the Big XII and formed a championship game in 1996. Again, this only goes back to when Penn State joined the conference in 1993.

**Observation:** "Competitive balance," something Jim Delany said would be the biggest factor, is clearly more visible between the proposed East and West divisions after compiling this information. With the exceptions of Indiana and Minnesota, every other Big Ten school would've have appeared in a Big Ten championship game at least once.

In fact, here are the number of appearances over the last 17 years:

**EAST: Ohio State – 8** (1993, 1995, 1996, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2007, 2009); **Michigan – 4** (1997, 2001, 2003, 2004); **Penn State**

– 3 (1994, 2005, 2008); **Michigan State** – 1 (1999); **Purdue** – 1 (2000)

**WEST: Wisconsin** – 6 (1993, 1994, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2006); **Northwestern** – 5 (1995, 1996, 2000, 2005, 2008); **Iowa** – 4 (2002, 2003, 2004, 2009); **Illinois** – 2 (2001, 2007)

### **1993 – Ohio State vs. Wisconsin**

*These two teams met at Camp Randall Stadium with the game ending in a 14-14 tie. Both the Badgers and Buckeyes finished 6-1-1 in Big Ten play, but it was Wisconsin who went to the Rose Bowl thanks to the old Big Ten tiebreaker where the Granddaddy of Them All took the team with the longest Rose Bowl drought if head-to-head couldn't settle it.*

### **1994 – Penn State vs. Wisconsin**

*The defending Rose Bowl champion and eventual Rose Bowl champion did not meet during the 1994 season. Penn State went on to an unbeaten season after winning the 1995 Rose Bowl over Oregon, but it was an undefeated Nebraska crowned as the only national champion that year.*

### **1995 – Northwestern vs. Ohio State**

*These teams did not meet in 1995. Northwestern went 8-0 in the Big Ten and won the conference outright after Michigan upset Ohio State, sending the Wildcats to their first Rose Bowl in 46 years.*

### **1996 – Northwestern vs. Ohio State**

*Just like in 1995, the Wildcats and Buckeyes did not meet during the regular season and wound up being co-champs in 1996. Ohio State was the recipient of the Big Ten's Rose Bowl bid and used it to shock Arizona State in the 1997 instant classic.*

### **1997 – Michigan vs. Wisconsin**

*These teams met late in the season at Camp Randall Stadium in Madison. Michigan won the game, 26-16, en route to an undefeated season and a share along with Nebraska of the national championship.*

### **1998 – Ohio State vs. Wisconsin**

*These two teams did not meet during the 1998 season. Ohio State was No. 1 in the country until a loss to Michigan State in the Horseshoe. Ohio State, Wisconsin, and Michigan all tied for first place in the Big Ten. The Buckeyes would've gone to our mythical championship game with a head-to-head victory over Michigan (one of the few John Cooper had). Wisconsin went to the Rose Bowl this season and defeated UCLA.*

### **1999 – Michigan State vs. Wisconsin**

*These teams met in 1999 at Camp Randall Stadium. Wisconsin, behind Hesiman Trophy winning running back Ron Dayne, crushed Michigan State, 40-10. The Spartans would've represented the East this season thanks to a head-to-head win over Michigan where Jeff Smoker found Plaxico Burress for the game-winning score. Wisconsin again won the Rose Bowl.*

### **2000 – Northwestern vs. Purdue**

*These two teams, along with Michigan, were co-champions in 2000. Purdue won head-to-head against both schools and the Boilermakers, led by signal-caller Drew Brees, went to the 2001 Rose Bowl. Although it wouldn't have mattered in these mythical Big Ten standings, Northwestern did win an instant classic at home over Michigan.*

### **2001 – Illinois vs. Michigan**

*Michigan gave Illinois its lone regular season loss in 2001, winning 45-20 in the Big House. But it was the Fighting Illini who won the conference outright after the Wolverines stumbled at home against Ohio State in their regular season finale.*

*Because the Rose Bowl was the national championship game (which featured a Nebraska squad that didn't even win its own division in the Big XII), Illinois found itself in the 2002 Sugar Bowl against SEC champion LSU.*

### **2002 – Iowa vs. Ohio State**

*This might have been the best Big Ten championship game of all-time. Both the Hawkeyes and Buckeyes went 8-0 in regular season play. Iowa had a Heisman runner-up at quarterback in Brad Banks, while Ohio State had a defensive captain by the name of Mike Doss who led the way. The Buckeyes went on to win the national championship, while Iowa headed to the Orange Bowl.*

### **2003 – Iowa vs. Michigan**

*Michigan won the Big Ten outright with a 7-1 conference record. However, that one loss came inside Kinnick Stadium, with the Hawkeyes beating the Wolverines, 30-27. Iowa would've been in this game thanks to winning a head-to-head tiebreaker over Minnesota.*

### **2004 – Iowa vs. Michigan**

*The Hawkeyes and Wolverines were co-champions with 7-1 conference marks, but it was Michigan's head-to-head win in the Big House that sent the Wolverines to Pasadena, while Iowa settled for the Capital One Bowl.*

### **2005 – Northwestern vs. Penn State**

*Penn State earned the Big Ten's BCS bid winning head-to-head against co-champion Ohio State, going to the 2006 Orange Bowl. The Nittany Lions would've faced Northwestern, who would've won head-to-head tiebreakers over both Iowa and Wisconsin in 2005. Penn State defeated Northwestern at Ryan Field, 34-29, thanks to a last-minute touchdown scored by Derrick Williams.*

### **2006 – Ohio State vs. Wisconsin**

*These teams didn't meet in 2006, but both were strong. Ohio State won the Big Ten outright and played for a national championship. Wisconsin, meanwhile, lost one game at Michigan, but ran the table the rest of 2006, including a win over Arkansas in the Capital One Bowl.*

### **2007 – Ohio State vs. Illinois**

*This would've been a rematch of an epic contest at the Horseshoe won by Juice Williams and the Fighting Illini. Although Ohio State lost this game, it won the Big Ten outright and found itself playing for a national championship once again, while Illinois filled an at-large spot in the Rose Bowl.*

### **2008 – Northwestern vs. Penn State**

*These teams didn't meet in 2008. Just like 2005 though, Penn State would've been here thanks to a head-to-head win over Ohio State, while Northwestern would've been here thanks to a head-to-head win over Iowa.*

### **2009 – Iowa vs. Ohio State**

*This would've been a rematch of what ended up being a de facto Big Ten championship game at the Horseshoe, won by Ohio State in overtime, 27-24. What would've been interesting here is whether Iowa quarterback Ricky Stanzi would've been able to play in this game after missing the aforementioned instant classic due to an ankle injury.*

So now that you've seen what these match-ups would've looked like, how do you think they would've fared?