

# 9/13/2010: State of the Big Ten, Volume 3 (premium)

*Every Monday, we will be running a weekly series titled "State of the Big Ten," which will be made available to all members of HawkeyeDrive.com. This series of columns will focus on one major headline regarding the conference and go in-depth on the subject at hand.*

By Brendan Stiles

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If BCS conferences were like people, the Big Ten and Pac-10 would be like brothers.

These two conferences have some of the proudest tradition in all of college football. One has powers like Ohio State and Michigan. The other features schools with defining legacies like USC and Washington. They have provided fans of both conferences with memorable Rose Bowls over the past century-plus.

This week, the Big Ten and Pac-10 will have three games against each other featuring respective schools. Minnesota will host No. 18 USC, No. 11 Wisconsin will host Arizona State, and No. 9 Iowa travels to Tucson, Ariz., to play the 24th-ranked Arizona Wildcats.

Over the past decade, the Big Ten has struggled against the Pac-10 head-to-head. In 51 meetings between Big Ten and Pac-10 schools, the Pac-10 has gone 31-20. This record includes a 9-4 showing against the Big Ten in bowl games.

Simply put, these three games are the most important for the Big Ten to have strong showings in.

Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin account for a combined seven of

those 20 Big Ten victories against Pac-10 teams the last 10 years. That's 35 percent.

In fact, the Badgers have performed the best against the Pac-10, winning four out of five games. The only other Big Ten team with a winning record is Ohio State, who has compiled a 5-3 record that includes the Big Ten's only Rose Bowl win over the Pac-10. Iowa and Indiana are both .500, with the Hawkeyes 2-2 and the Hoosiers 1-1.

Unless both conferences send teams to the 2011 Rose Bowl, these will be the only three games all season featuring the Big Ten and Pac-10 squaring off.

Let's start with Minnesota. The Golden Gophers are the for sure underdog of the Big Ten's main trio this weekend. Although its game against USC is at home, Minnesota is coming off an embarrassing 41-38 loss to South Dakota. An FCS opponent. The Trojans, meanwhile, have been the nemesis of the Big Ten, compiling an 8-0 record against five different schools during the 10-year stretch mentioned.

If the Golden Gophers have any hope of salvaging their 2010 season, they need to win this game.

A Minnesota win on Sept. 18 would remove a bulk of the bad taste coming from a loss to South Dakota. It would signify the depth of the Big Ten and help make it a more respectable conference.

It would also be the type of victory inside TCF Bank Stadium that Tim Brewster would need to dodge further questions about his job security.

As for Wisconsin, its game against Arizona State is one the Badgers should win, especially with it occurring at Camp Randall Stadium. Wisconsin is one of the conference's top teams this season, and as mentioned earlier, has fared extremely well against the Pac-10. Its last game against a

Pac-10 opponent came back in 2007, when the Badgers opened that season with a home victory over Washington State.

The Sun Devils might not be in the upper echelon of the Pac-10 this season, but Arizona State is currently 2-0, and has had success against the Big Ten in recent memory. This includes victories over Iowa, Northwestern (twice), and a 2004 Sun Bowl win against Purdue.

Home wins against programs such as USC and Arizona State this coming weekend would show progress from the Big Ten, especially after the spark the conference was provided after Ohio State defeated Oregon in 2010 Rose Bowl.

Finally, there's the biggest game of the three between Iowa and Arizona. Not only is this the one road game for the Big Ten, but it's also the only FBS game on Sept. 18 in the entire country featuring both teams nationally ranked.

Last season, the Hawkeyes defeated the Wildcats inside Kinnick Stadium, 27-17. Both Iowa and Arizona are older and more experienced squads after coming off seasons where both played in bowl games.

Of the three Big Ten teams, Iowa perhaps has the most pressure on it to win this weekend given the circumstances.

The Hawkeyes looked abysmal in its last road game against a Pac-10 opponent, a 44-7 loss at Arizona State in 2004. Some of the same factors entering that particular game, such as a late kickoff time and desert heat, will be intangibles that work against Iowa this weekend.

While Arizona is one of the few Pac-10 teams this past decade to not fare well against Big Ten opponents, the Wildcats might be the best of the Pac-10's three representatives this weekend. Familiarity with the Hawkeyes from 2009 should help Arizona, while home-and-homes have begun with those other two match-ups.

Much like last week with Michigan, Ohio State, and Penn State playing marquee games, getting out of these three marquee games against Pac-10 schools with at least two wins would be beneficial to the Big Ten.

It's not just about winning non-conference games and bowl games as far as conference reputation is concerned. It's also which teams Big Ten schools are beating in these contests. Considering the lack of success against the Pac-10, wins this weekend against teams like Arizona, Arizona State, and USC would be enormous for the Big Ten moving forward.

Michigan beating Notre Dame and Ohio State being Miami (Fla.) are both great for the Big Ten. But neither is going to have the satisfaction that comes with beating a team from what has proven to be a more superior conference on the gridiron in the Pac-10.

This is the last set of non-conference games the Big Ten can legitimately showcase before bowl season. The conference is dependent on Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin to represent it proudly on Sept. 18.