

9/20/2010: State of the Big Ten, Volume 4 (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.

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As the month of September winds down, the Big Ten enters a week that quite possibly has the worst slate of college football games for the conference in recent memory.

Ten Big Ten teams will all be playing at home on Sept. 25, playing either a team from the Mid-American Conference (MAC) or an Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) opponent.

Indiana plays Akron, No. 18 Iowa plays Ball State, No. 21 Michigan plays Bowling Green, No. 25 Michigan State plays Northern Colorado, Minnesota plays Northern Illinois, Northwestern plays Central Michigan, No. 2 Ohio State plays Eastern Michigan, No. 23 Penn State plays Temple, Purdue plays Toledo, and No. 11 Wisconsin plays Austin Peay.

Now, it should be noted that the Big Ten has had recent history of match-ups with MAC schools over the years. In fact, Wisconsin is the only Big Ten team not to play a MAC opponent in 2010.

The problem is not Big Ten teams facing these programs. Everyone understands it is all about money, and every BCS conference program wants to schedule 7-8 home games every year.

No, the problem is having all these match-ups during the same week of the season. It is pathetic.

Every other week thus far during the 2010 season has featured at least one marquee match-up featuring a Big Ten team. What's that match-up this coming Saturday? Probably Penn State-Temple ... by default.

Not because it is an in-state rivalry like Iowa-Iowa State, but because Temple might be the MAC's best team while Penn State looks like it may be regressing from its 11-2 season in 2009.

How exactly is the Big Ten thinking it is showcasing itself with these selections of match-ups? Seriously.

The only thing worse the Big Ten could do is actually have one of these 10 teams in action this week play its respective opponent on the road.

This stems as a direct result of the Big Ten pushing its conference season back a week, so it now concludes Thanksgiving weekend. Because of that, these are the match-ups being shown before everyone opens conference play next week.

And once Nebraska joins the conference in 2011, more scenarios such as what is on tap this week will happen again and again in future years. The way the Big Ten set up its conference schedules for 2011 and 2012, both seasons are going to carry over to Thanksgiving weekend.

Picture being in the shoes of an Illinois fan this week. Not only are the Fighting Illini not playing this weekend (which they ought to be commended for, honestly), but chances are, no Illinois fan likes the idea of having to decide whether to watch Ohio State-Eastern Michigan or Penn State-Temple at 2:30 p.m. on Saturday because those are the only two games at that time featuring a Big Ten team.

Also keep in mind with this scenario that in a strange coincidence, the Fighting Illini's first two Big Ten opponents are, yep, Ohio State and Penn State.

Now if there is any good news, it is that Big Ten play starts next week. Otherwise, what is the Big Ten thinking here?

Games this weekend that sound much more enticing are Miami-Pittsburgh, Alabama-Arkansas, Oregon State-Boise State, Virginia Tech-Boston College, California-Arizona, Stanford-Notre Dame, just to name a few.

And guess what? All those other BCS conferences have a chance to showcase themselves in a manner this weekend that the Big Ten will not be able to with the games it has.

The conference has had match-ups already like Illinois-Missouri, Michigan-Connecticut, Penn State-Alabama, Ohio State-Miami, Iowa-Arizona, Minnesota-USC, and Wisconsin-Arizona State. And now the Big Ten goes from all of that to this?

If the Big Ten is looking to earn respect, this is not how it is going to be done successfully. There should be at least one marquee non-conference game every week in the season where there are no conference games.

Again, it is not so much the specific match-ups this week. It is that all of them are this week.