

10/28/2010: Big Ten Media Day notebook

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ROSEMONT, Ill. – Coming off a second straight appearance in the Final Four last April, it shouldn't have come as a surprise when the Big Ten announced that Michigan State was tabbed as the preseason favorite to win the conference on Thursday during the Big Ten Basketball Media Day at the Crowne Plaza O'Hare.

In addition, the first AP poll of the 2010-11 season was released on Thursday, and the Spartans come in ranked second nationally behind only defending champion Duke. Michigan State was joined by conference foes No. 4 Ohio State, No. 13 Illinois, and No. 14 Purdue in the AP rankings.

The Spartans are aware of the bulls-eye on their backs.

"We're always being hunted," junior Draymond Green said. "But at the same time, that's what we come to Michigan State for, and that's what we work hard for each and every day."

The Buckeyes, who won both the Big Ten regular season and tournament crowns, was picked to finish second in the conference, followed by the Boilermakers being selected third. Ohio State has a load of talent returning, but also has a major challenge on its hands replacing Naismith Player of the Year Evan Turner, who was picked second in the 2010 NBA Draft by the Philadelphia 76ers.

Purdue cracked the preseason top three despite the loss of Robbie Hummel to a second torn ACL in the same knee he tore the ligament during a game at Minnesota last February. With

Hummel out, the Boilermakers will be relying a ton on the leadership of fellow seniors E'Twaun Moore and JaJuan Johnson, both of whom were selected preseason all-Big Ten.

"Guys are ready to step up, ready to play, ready to go win ball games," Moore said about the team's mindset since Hummel's injury on Oct. 16. "Everybody has a great attitude."

Big Ten likely to stand pat on 18 games

Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany was on hand at the Crowne Plaza O'Hare on Thursday. When basketball was brought up, so was the future of conference scheduling.

While Delany didn't give a timetable for when the conference scheduling format would be finalized, he said the most likely scenario is keeping the current 18-game schedule the Big Ten already has in place now.

Under this format, there would be no divisions like there are with football. Each team would play seven teams twice and four teams once, and the Big Ten Tournament format wouldn't change aside from having a No. 12 seed.

"I think 18 is the place that we work to get to," Delany said. "I know this from our presidents' perspective: We didn't expand to play less, so I can't see fewer games."

Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery is in the crowd of Big Ten coaches who wants to keep the conference slate at 18 games.

"You go with what the league decides, but I think we'll still be able to have some traditional rivalries," McCaffery said. We'll still have seven teams we play twice and four teams we play once, and that will fluctuate. I think it's fine.

"What's the alternative? We're not going to go to 22 games. We're not going to go round robin. It is where it was, you add a team, and you might not play a traditional rivalry twice."

An old face at a new place

The entire previous Hawkeye coaching regime is gone, but a part of it remains in the conference.

LaVall Jordan, who was an assistant for three seasons at Iowa under Todd Lickliter, was successful in finding a new home in Ann Arbor, Mich., joining John Beilein's new coaching staff at Michigan.

Wolverine junior Zack Novak said having the former Hawkeye assistant around has been fun.

"He really, really knows the game well," Novak said of Jordan. "He knows how to teach guard skills very well, especially defensively. He knows what he's talking about."

"He's just a great person to have around. We're really glad to have him now."

A conference perspective on McCaffery

Iowa's move to name McCaffery head coach last March was the only head coaching move in the Big Ten. While expectations around the Hawkeyes appear low, plenty of coaches across the conference have already taken notice.

Below are thoughts on McCaffery from some of his Big Ten coaching peers:

Tubby Smith (Minnesota): *"Fran brings a renewed energy, number one. Whenever there's a change, there's that hope and that energy that's there. We had a pretty good run at the end of the year and had a good win against them at our place in the end, but they were going through some tough times. Todd got sick there, and you don't know how that affects your team. Obviously, it had an impact on how they played. I think Fran, with his style and watching how his Siena teams played, his teams are very team-oriented. They get it up and down the court pretty good. They do more pressure, and you'll see a*

different system, a different style of play. Again, it's one of those wait and see. And with recruiting, he beat us for a kid we can't really talk about, we can't name names, but he established his presence already from that standpoint."

Bo Ryan (Wisconsin): "Cheesesteaks, hoagies, and soft pretzels. That's what he has brought to Iowa City. (sarcasm) Fran is a great basketball guy. He's an X-and-O guy. He played the game at a high level. He's a tough competitor. He has been around the block. Iowa City isn't getting a guy that doesn't know the ropes. They'll be fine."

Tom Izzo (Michigan State): "Well, I've know Frannie since he was an assistant at different places and watched the job he did at Siena. I think, no insult to any other coach that has been there, but he's going to kind of bring that happy medium. He's not going to probably run and press like Tom Davis did. He's not going to walk it up like some coaches have done. Everybody has got their own style, and everybody's successful with their style. I've walked it up and won, and I've run it and won. But I think Fran wants to play an up-tempo game, which I think the people in that state want, I think recruits rather, and I think he is a very, very good coach. I think our league has as good coaches as any other league in the country, and as good as they've been since I came in when the Knights and Keadys and the Davises and all of them had been there. Yeah, it's a tough road for him. He lost some players. He's rebuilding. But just talking to him this morning, I think he thinks he has got better talent than he had if he can keep everybody healthy. I think he thinks he has got his work cut out, but more than happy – I heard he brought in a good kid from New York – to withstand the challenge. It's just, are you doing it when the league is at its best in years, or one of the best it has been in years? It makes it more difficult, but makes it more rewarding when you get it done."

Bruce Weber (Illinois): "Obviously, he has a tough task ahead of him. But I've known him for a long, long time, way back

when he was an assistant at Notre Dame. I followed his career. He has done a tremendous job. His teams at Siena were not only good in their league, but they were beating quality teams in the NCAA Tournament. I think he has got a challenge ahead of him, but he has got the experience. That is so important as a coach, as a guy that has been around. I know this summer, he was out everywhere. He was working his tail off, and he's starting to get some reward from that with recruiting. His thing, right now, is just kind of help get through the first year, get a feel for it, and then I think he'll do a tremendous job there. There's no doubt."

Jim Jackson (former Ohio State player, current Big Ten Network basketball analyst): "I think Todd did his best to try and infuse some life and enthusiasm, not only into the program, but into the fan base. But I think Fran's style of play will kind of bring that out. He wants to play up-tempo. He wants to get the ball up the court. But he wants to be smart when he does it. So that kind of brand of basketball ... and his players like it. So you'll see it a little bit more in their body language, that this is the style of play that we want to play, and it can be infectious and hopefully translate into some Ws."