

11/22/2010: State of the Big Ten, Volume 13 (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

HawkeyeDrive.com

The Big Ten enters the last week of conference play in this 2010 football season, and now three teams remain.

After Wisconsin, Michigan State, and Ohio State all won last weekend, all three have 10-1 overall records, all three have 6-1 Big Ten records, and all three can win a share of the Big Ten crown with victories on Nov. 27.

This is significant in two ways. On one hand, if this three-way tie for the Big Ten crown comes to fruition, the conference will likely cement itself a second BCS bid, meaning everyone who is bowl-eligible (there are eight and only eight teams) moves up the bowl pecking order when the games are announced on Dec. 5.

On the other hand, it means that there is going to be an 11-1 Big Ten team that ends up having to settle for a bid in the Capital One Bowl.

Instead of arguing the merits of whoever wins the Big East or ACC against a team like Michigan State, who many have pegged for Orlando instead of a BCS game in this scenario, let's look at this from the perspective of the Big Ten's future.

This is why a 12th team was needed. This is why a conference

championship game is needed.

The beauty of having a Big Ten championship game next year and beyond is that there will always be one conference champion, period. Now there could be a situation inside divisions where three teams all beat each other and it comes down to the BCS standings like it did in the Big 12 South division two years ago.

But even if that does happen, this is why competitive balance was such a huge priority for commissioner Jim Delany when the Big Ten established these two divisions that as of now remain unnamed.

The biggest shame here is that Michigan State and Ohio State did not play each other, and head-to-head cannot be entirely taken into account. This is where the divisions come into play.

If one team does not play another because they are in different divisions, then they will eventually meet in the championship game. So something like this would not occur.

Now if they were in effect this year, Wisconsin's head-to-head over Ohio State as of now would place the Badgers against the Spartans, who are slated to be in the other division. Michigan State won the head-to-head with Wisconsin back in East Lansing, Mich., on Oct. 2.

But back to the present matter. Right now, Wisconsin is seventh in the BCS standings, Ohio State eighth and Michigan State is 10th. If the three-way tie happens and there is no change in this positioning, then the Badgers would be the ones heading to Pasadena, Calif., to play in the 2011 Rose Bowl. Wisconsin plays a 2:30 p.m. contest at Camp Randall Stadium in Madison, Wis., against Northwestern.

The Buckeyes are likely to lock up yet another BCS bid with a win at home on Nov. 27 against their hated rival, Michigan,

who comes to "The Horseshoe" with a 7-4 overall mark.

That leaves the Spartans possibly on the outside looking in, despite the win over the Badgers last month. Michigan State has the most daunting task of the three teams this weekend, traveling to State College, Pa., to play Penn State. If there is a sliver of good news for the Spartans, however, it's this: A win at Penn State, coupled with an Ohio State loss to Michigan, would lock up the Rose Bowl bid for Michigan State before Wisconsin even takes the field to play the Wildcats.

However, should the Nittany Lions upset the Spartans, it would be the Badgers clinching a Rose Bowl berth with a win, thanks to their head-to-head victory over the Buckeyes on Oct. 16 in Madison.

Regardless of how this all plays out, it has been real fascinating to see unfold, especially when one considers this is the last time there will ever be teams sharing a Big Ten championship.