

1/10/2011: State of the Big Ten, Volume 20 (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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As was expected following Michigan's 52-14 loss in the Gator Bowl to Mississippi State on New Year's Day, Michigan athletics director David Brandon made the move to fire head coach Rich Rodriguez.

The most telling comment Brandon made at a news conference announcing Rodriguez's dismissal was that in the three years Rodriguez was coaching the Wolverines, Rodriguez never "had a peaceful night sleep" in Ann Arbor. That is not something someone just says impasse.

Look, the evidence for severing ties with the man many called "RichRod" was insurmountable. So much so that it is a cruel twist of irony that this happened following Rodriguez's lone winning season at Michigan. There is no need here to rehash all the specifics, but simply put, the move was one that needed to be done, maybe perhaps sooner than it actually was done.

As of Monday, there were two coaching candidates that seemed to stand apart from the rest – LSU head coach Les Miles, and San Diego State head coach Brady Hoke. Honestly, either man would be a solid fit.

Miles was an offensive lineman in the 1970s and played for Bo Schembechler. In fact, when LSU was on its way to winning a national championship under Miles, his name was a hot commodity to replace then-outgoing Michigan head coach Lloyd Carr. If he does make the move to Ann Arbor from Baton Rouge, La., it would be following a very similar script to how North Carolina lured Roy Williams away from Kansas to coach its men's basketball team.

Then there is Hoke, who just completed his second season at San Diego State, one where he guided the Aztecs to a win in the Poinsettia Bowl. Hoke has ties to Michigan as well. He was the team's defensive line coach and also assumed the title of associate head coach for the first eight seasons of the Carr era. During that span, Michigan won a share of the national championship in 1997, and won five games against its hated rival, Ohio State.

There is no doubt that if Miles is there for the taking, that is who Michigan covets more. But Hoke is not a bad fallback. It would be somewhat reminiscent of when Iowa hired Kirk Ferentz to replace Hayden Fry, and that has not worked out too badly for the Hawkeyes now, has it?

When Hoke left his alma mater of Ball State in 2008 – that year, he guided the Cardinals to a 12-win campaign – to coach at San Diego State, the Aztecs were one of the worst teams in the Mountain West and one of the worst programs in college football. In two years, he got them to a winning season and the school's first bowl victory in decades.

Hoke might not be the immediate quick fix, but he knows and understands the culture surrounding Michigan football. He is a guy that would fit right in.

Whichever way Michigan ends up going, either guy could do the job. Whoever it is will definitely need to. Right now, Michigan is grouped with teams like Indiana and Minnesota,

which also made coaching changes following the conclusions of their respective seasons.

Getting back to the same level of respect programs like Wisconsin and Ohio State are currently getting is going to be paramount for this program, not just in the immediate future, but in the long term as well.