

1/31/2011: State of the Big Ten, Volume 23 (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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On Jan. 30, it was announced that all 13 members of the Iowa football team who were hospitalized for symptoms of Rhabdomyolysis were released from the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics.

Over the past week since the news initially broke, a lot had been written not only about this situation in Iowa City, but how it was handled. The fact that neither head coach Kirk Ferentz nor athletics director Gary Barta were present for a news conference held to discuss the matter ruffled plenty of feathers, to say the least. Some articles written over the past week even went as far as suggesting that Ferentz does not care enough for his current players since he was recruiting when these 13 student athletes were checked in.

What appeared to get lost at times though, was the actual story, the one that should have been at the forefront from the very beginning, that 13 players were all in the hospital being treated for Rhabdomyolysis.

It was disturbing to see how a lot was being conjured up nationwide about how the university botched the news conference it had in Iowa City on Jan. 26. It was sad to see how emotionally revved up people were when it came to the

whereabouts of Ferentz and Barta. It is even embarrassing that an employee of the university would jeopardize their professional career by leaking the results of drug tests done on the 13 players while they were being treated, a violation of HIPAA that will absolutely get that person fired pending the results of the UIHC's investigation into the matter.

But nothing was more painful than what those 13 players went through, and for those on the outside, hearing about it. Nothing.

The story was never about Ferentz. It was never about Barta. It was about 13 student-athletes all coming down with symptoms of a muscular syndrome that did damage to their kidneys. Any one of those 13 could have ended up with permanent kidney damage, and yet there were other things related that got more press, that got more scrutiny. If any of those 13 did end up with permanent damage to their kidneys that not only ended their football careers, but jeopardized their lives going forward, that is what would have been the most depressing, gut-wrenching news of all.

Now that all 13 football players are out of the hospital, now is a more appropriate time to be addressing some of the side stories, and seeing how the independent investigation being conducted by the university's Board of Regents unfolds. Not it there was not an appropriate time originally, as those things were all being discussed. But how much of that mattering paled in comparison to that of someone's health.

It already had to be difficult for the parents of those hospitalized to see their kid in pain. Having to think about other things like what happened at a news conference are the furthest thoughts from their minds, as they should have been.

Now would it have been wise for either Ferentz or Barta (or both) to be on hand to discuss the situation (or at least what they could of it) when that news conference took place?

Probably. Is it wrong for anyone to be critical of Ferentz for not being back in Iowa City sooner? Not at all. But it is also unfair to just throw everyone under the bus like some were doing.

Maybe it was a day or two late, but at least Ferentz did comment on the matter, and he did eventually make it back to Iowa City to check on his players and console their families. It also appears obvious that he was remorseful for not making it back home sooner. The only ones who should truly be allowed to judge him at this point are the players and their families.

More will arise in the days, weeks, and even months about what actually took place that led to everything that happened. But right now is as good a time as there is to remember the importance of keeping everything in perspective.

Right now, be thankful that the 13 players that were hospitalized have recovered enough to be discharged from UIHC and hopefully, those 13 players (as well as those not hospitalized) can move on and try to live their normal, everyday lives in addition to playing football at Iowa.