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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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If the Big Ten has proven anything in college basketball this season, it is that point guard remains the game's most important position.

Sure, Ohio State freshman forward Jared Sullinger will probably come away with the conference's Player of the Year honor among many accolades sure to come his way. But the fact of the matter is point guard still makes or breaks teams.

Let's start with Wisconsin's Jordan Taylor, who was just named the Big Ten's Player of the Week, and for good reason. Taylor, who came into this season as somewhat of an unknown because the Badgers had Trevon Hughes the past few seasons, was the sole reason why Wisconsin managed to beat then-No. 1 Ohio State on Feb. 12 at the Kohl Center in Madison, Wis. The Badgers were down double-digits in the second half against a team that was the only unbeaten remaining in college basketball, and the junior point guard just took the game over.

Taylor was either making big buckets for Wisconsin, or was getting teammates open looks that resulted in points for the Badgers. Regardless, he was the focal point as to why the Badgers pulled off their biggest regular season victory in 49

years.

Continue to look around the conference, and look at the Buckeyes. He might not start, but Aaron Craft has been as good a freshman as there is in the Big Ten this season. He not only comes off the bench and gives Ohio State a spark, but he consistently makes plays when he steps on the court. If he is not getting teammates involved, he is there on the defensive end stripping the ball away from opposing players and setting up transition points for the Buckeyes.

Then there is Penn State, who has been somewhat of a surprise this season, even with all the experience it brought back. Look at Talor Battle, who is currently second in the Big Ten in scoring behind only Purdue's JaJuan Johnson. Battle considered going pro after last season, but never signed with an agent and ultimately decided to return to Penn State. This Nittany Lion team would be nowhere decent to what it is right now without Battle, plain and simple.

Even Michigan has gotten stellar play from its guards this season, led by sophomore Darius Morris at the point. Morris posted a triple-double for the Wolverines against Iowa back on Jan. 30, and he currently averages 6.8 assists per game, which leads the Big Ten.

Point guard play has also been somewhat of a downfall this season, or in some cases, a situation where there is not much depth available for some teams. Iowa lost Cully Payne to an injury that still appears to be season-ending (nothing has been made official yet, however), and as a result, head coach Fran McCaffery has found himself relying on a junior college transfer in Bryce Cartwright to play the bulk of the Hawkeyes' minutes at the point this season.

Cartwright has improved with each game and is starting to become more consistent, but the lack of depth at the position has hurt Iowa at times this season. Same goes for Minnesota,

who right now is without Al Nolen due to injury. With Nolen out, shooting guard Blake Hoffarber has now assumed the point guard responsibilities for the Golden Gophers.

Then there are two senior players that came into this season with high expectations both individually and for their teams, yet really have not lived up to that hype. One of those guys is Michigan State senior Kalin Lucas. Now granted, Lucas had to recover from multiple injuries sustained late last season, but he also came into this season as the Big Ten's Preseason Player of the Year, and Michigan State was ranked No. 2 in the country preseason behind only defending national champion Duke.

So far this season, Lucas has posted solid numbers for the Spartans. But he has also drawn the ire of head coach Tom Izzo at times this season as well for some of his decision-making. The same can also be said for Illinois senior Demetri McCamey. Even though he is currently second to Morris in the conference in assists, McCamey was taken out of the starting lineup by head coach Bruce Weber prior to the Fighting Illini's Feb. 10 contest at Minnesota.

Both Michigan State and Illinois have had their struggles this season, and a lot of fingers have been pointed at both Lucas and McCamey. Whether that criticism is warranted does not really matter here. The fact is they are being looked at as their teams' respective leaders, and blame certainly heads their way when things are tough.

Now this is not to mean that post-players should not be in the spotlight. In addition to Sullinger, Purdue's Johnson currently leads the Big Ten in scoring, and players like Wisconsin's Jon Leuer, Minnesota's Trevor Mbakwe, and Michigan State's Draymond Green have all had productive seasons.

But with that being said, it all comes back to play from the point guards. Just look at the conference standings, because

that ought to be enough evidence.