

2/21/2011: State of the Big Ten, Volume 26 (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.

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On Monday, the Big Ten announced tip-off dates for games taking place on the final weekend of the regular season. Historically, this has been a common practice by the conference because it allows networks such as CBS and ESPN the opportunity to promote the teams who have a shot at winning the regular season crown.

With Ohio State, Purdue, and Wisconsin atop the Big Ten standings, those two networks opted to show their games, which left the Big Ten Network to schedule Indiana's game at Illinois on the morning on March 5, which is a Saturday. As a result, Hoosier head coach Tom Crean became irate and went on a rant via Twitter about having 36 hours (actually, 37 hours because of time zone change) between games, as Indiana plays at home against Wisconsin on March 3.

Crean is not the only Big Ten coach who has been upset recently about the Big Ten's scheduling procedure. Following Northwestern's 73-70 win over Iowa on Feb. 17, Wildcat head coach Bill Carmody was ticked about having only one day between that game and Northwestern's contest at Indiana on Feb. 19, a game the Wildcats won, 70-64.

Like Northwestern, Iowa also had a game on Feb. 19 against

Michigan, and that was in the afternoon as opposed to the Wildcats' game being that night. Meanwhile, Ohio State is currently in its day between games at Purdue on Feb. 20 and a home contest against Illinois on Feb. 22.

With all this in mind, here's a suggestion for the Big Ten when Nebraska does start competing in the conference next season: Eliminate the wild card scheduling. Yes, it would upset some of the higher-ups at networks like CBS and ESPN, but doing this would serve the best interests of many people, including your soon-to-be 12 men's basketball programs first and foremost.

Since the Big Ten Network was established in 2007, conference games have typically appeared on five out of the seven days in the week – Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday. This was done to ensure that when a conference game took place, it was the only one taking place during its given two-hour window. From a marketing perspective, that has been successful because it has allowed the Big Ten to showcase all of its schools at different times.

Following this model can still work when Nebraska joins, but instead of having what are dubbed "wild card" games where the dates and times are not decided until later in the season, having set times established the entire way just makes sense.

Have two games each on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, then have three games each on Saturday and Sunday. Then make it so the four teams playing on a Thursday during a given week are all automatically playing on the Sunday that same week so every team is assured a minimum of two days between conference games. Then even it out so that way all 12 teams have at least three appearances on each of those days, including a minimum of one home and one road.

What this would do is make scheduling as close to equal as it would get in the conference because right now, all indications

have been that there will still be 18 conference games and that it would be divided so each school plays seven teams twice and the other four teams once.

By establishing dates and times for all 18 games right away, the conference is doing a service to many – the coaches, the players, the schools in terms of being able to sell tickets, media who cover teams regularly in terms of being able to coordinate travel with their respective outlets.

It just makes sense, and is something the Big Ten ought to explore before next season starts, especially since doing this still ensures that every team gets the same amount of exposure it would be getting anyway.

Just something to think about so that way at this time next year, there are not more coaches getting bitter about the cards they are dealt.