

2/28/2011: State of the Big Ten, Volume 27 (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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Monday proved to be a pretty big day in the world of college football. Not because of anything that was taking place at the 2011 NFL Scouting Combine in Indianapolis, Ind., but because conferences like the Big East and the MAC revealed their conference football schedules for the upcoming 2011 season.

These aren't the only conferences to do something like this. The ACC just recently announced its conference schedule earlier this month.

The reason for making mention of the ACC doing this is because it's a conference in football that has two divisions not necessarily based on geography and a championship game in early December.

See where this is going yet?

It is absolutely in the Big Ten's best interests to never wait this long to announce conference schedules. Ever.

Unlike conferences like the ACC or Big East that are better known for basketball, the Big Ten's reputation has always been centered around football. Just look at some of the venues Big Ten teams play in.

Michigan has "The Big House." Ohio State has "The Horseshoe." Penn State has Beaver Stadium. All three of these stadiums hold over 100,000 spectators. These institutions and their campuses thrive on home game-days. When Penn State is playing at home in front of a sellout crowd, Beaver Stadium in State College becomes the third-largest city in the state of Pennsylvania, behind just Philadelphia and Pittsburgh.

Simply put, places like State College thrive because of Penn State football, and the more known from a scheduling standpoint ahead of time, the better. Hotels in State College are almost impossible to find rooms at on weekends of games, and if someone is fortunate enough to find a hotel there, it's a hefty price to pay for two nights minimum.

With Nebraska joining the Big Ten, it probably is no different in Lincoln on fall Saturdays than in State College, or Ann Arbor, or Columbus, or even places like Madison and Iowa City, both of which are known for fun football atmospheres.

The beauty of all these places is that they are unlike the majority of environments that exist in college football. Part of that beauty comes from preparation, and the stakes are obviously bigger when other Big Ten teams come to town.

One of the smartest things the Big Ten did as soon as it announced how the divisions would be divided last September was it also assembled conference schedules together for the 2011 and 2012 upcoming seasons. Fans, local businesses, and of course, the athletics departments among the 12 Big Ten schools can plan ahead for the weekends that their respective teams are at home.

One of the dumbest things the conference can do is wait until February of 2013 to announce the dates and times for all 2013 Big Ten games. This is something that ought to be announced no later than the conclusion of the 2011 season. Waiting until 6-7 months before a season begins to set dates up, especially

when it is not as though conference schedules are round-robin, would only do more harm than good in terms of providing the same sort of culture that exists among Big Ten country right now.

Conference schedules have almost always been put together years in advance. Here's hoping that never changes for any of the soon-to-be 12 Big Ten teams.