

# 3/7/2011: State of the Big Ten, Volume 28 (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

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

The 2010-11 Big Ten season in men's basketball concluded last weekend, and later today, postseason honors will be handed out across the conference.

First, there are the individual honors of Player of the Year, Freshman of the Year, and Coach of the Year. Freshman of the Year should be a shoo-in for Ohio State's Jared Sullinger. The Buckeye forward was simply a beast all season long and all of the Big Ten "Freshman Player of the Week" honors make this choice a slam dunk.

Coach of the Year is a little more tricky because Thad Matta did lead the Buckeyes to a second straight Big Ten crown and Ohio State is currently ranked No. 1 in the country. All that being said, it's hard to overlook what Matt Painter has accomplished this season in West Lafayette, Ind.

When Purdue forward Robbie Hummel was ruled out for the entire season with another torn ACL last October, many who felt the Boilermakers had what it took to win the Big Ten and possibly even reach the Final Four backed off. There were still high expectations, but they were somewhat simmered.

All Purdue did under Painter's guidance was finish 14-4,

coming up two games short of being co-Big Ten champions for the second straight season, thanks in large part to the efforts of seniors JaJuan Johnson and E'Twaun Moore. Even though the Boilermakers did not win the Big Ten, they still have a legit chance at a possible 2 seed in the NCAA Tournament, something many did not think was possible once Hummel got hurt.

Player of the Year is the biggest debate. Johnson has the numbers, leading the Big Ten in scoring, as well as blocked shots. However, this is one where Sullinger should and probably will win based off intangibles, the things one does not see in a box score.

As good as Ohio State is, without Sullinger, the Buckeyes probably do not win the league crown. They certainly would not be ranked No. 1 in the country at the moment and have a legitimate crack at the No. 1 overall seed in the NCAA Tournament later this month. What makes what Sullinger did even more impressive is that Ohio State lost a National Player of the Year in Evan Turner early to the NBA, and he had to fill that major void left in the Buckeye starting lineup. Not only did Sullinger do that, but he did so with flying colors.

When first team all-Big Ten is announced, Sullinger and Johnson will both highlight this group. Another prominent name that will appear is Wisconsin point guard Jordan Taylor.

Here is what made Taylor so special to the Badgers this season. In addition to having the ability to take over games like he did in wins over Ohio State and Indiana this season, Taylor was third in the Big Ten in scoring, averaging 20.1 points per contest. But perhaps the most incredible statistic is his assist-to-turnover ratio of 4.63 in conference play. In other words, for every turnover he commits, Taylor averages nearly five assists to make up for that one giveaway.

That's not just the best ratio in the Big Ten, but one of the

best ratios in all of college basketball.

The final two spots on the first team are debatable, but the two players who should make it are Penn State guard Talor Battle and Minnesota forward Trevor Mbakwe.

To simply say the Nittany Lions are not the 6 seed in this week's Big Ten Tournament without Battle would be a major understatement. Without the senior guard, Penn State might be sitting in the conference cellar again like it was last year. He was second in the conference in scoring, and led the Big Ten in 3-point field goals made, which is remarkable considering the accomplishments of Ohio State's lethal 3-point shooter, Jon Diebler.

As for Mbakwe, even though the Golden Gophers had a disappointing end to their season and finished ninth, he was one of the few bright spots for Minnesota. Mbakwe may have only averaged 14.1 points per game, but the junior led the conference in rebounding, averaging 11 boards per contest. In addition, his 14 and 11 made the Gopher junior the only Big Ten player to average a double-double in league play.

Again, he was the only player in the conference to average a double-double. Not Sullinger, not Johnson, but Mbakwe. If that is not good enough, what is?

This probably will not be how everything ultimately shakes out, but more so how it all should shake out. Tonight will make for an interesting night.