

3/14/2011: State of the Big Ten, Volume 29 (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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The week was certainly interesting for those invested in the Scarlet and Gray.

On the positive side of things, the Ohio State men's basketball team won both the Big Ten regular season title outright, and three games in Indianapolis, Ind., to win the 2011 Big Ten Tournament. As a result, the Buckeyes locked up the No. 1 overall seed in this year's NCAA Tournament and will begin their pursuit of the national championship on March 18 just a few hours north in Cleveland, Ohio.

But the week provided a mixed bag. Unfortunately for Buckeye fans, much of the talk didn't surround the recent success of Ohio State's basketball program, but rather the transgressions of its football program.

Last week, Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel was found to have been knowingly aware of NCAA violations taking place and failing to notify compliance of what occurred. At a press conference in Columbus on March 8, Ohio State athletics director Gene Smith (who also was the chairman of the NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament selection committee) announced that Tressel would have to pay a \$250,000 fine, attend a compliance seminar, and be suspended for the Buckeyes' first

two games of the 2011 season against Akron and Toledo. Keep in mind that there are already five players, including quarterback Terrelle Pryor, that will serve five-game suspensions at the start of the 2011 season.

No matter how one slices and dices everything, what became clear following this press conference is that the program, and possibly the athletics department and university, are in some disarray.

When the school president replies to a question about dismissing Tressel for the violations by saying "I hope he doesn't dismiss me," that says everything one needs to know about Ohio State right now. When the football coach is not being held accountable by his university's president or by his athletics director, something is wrong.

The shame here is that Tressel has always come off as a likable guy. One would be hard-pressed to find any player or coach associated with Ohio State or with college sports that has a negative thing to say about the guy. Heck, back in October when he locked up (for now at least) his 100th victory at Ohio State, "State of the Big Ten" paid tribute to his accomplishments since taking over as the Buckeyes' head coach in 2001.

But now there is reservation. No matter what Tressel does from this point forward to try and rectify all of this, the stigma from this incident will stick with him. It will also stick with Ohio State. There is the saying that "perception is reality." Right now, Ohio State is perceived in a very negative light and will continue to be, perhaps even unjustly, for the foreseeable future.

The evidence against Tressel is damning to the point that many are saying the punishments he has been handed are not enough. He will not be fired for his actions (Ohio State president Gordon Gee already said so), but it is tough to argue that

coaches at other schools would manage to keep their jobs if such accusations were brought against them.

Simply put, this is one story that is not going away, and will not be going away anytime soon. Whether this leads to wins being vacated, who knows?

In the meantime, Buckeye fans at least have a basketball team to enjoy watching this month.