

5/18/2011: Big Ten spring meetings notebook

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CHICAGO, Ill. – The final day of the Big Ten spring meetings came to an end a little earlier than expected after athletics directors from the 12 institutions on hand walked out without any sort of resolutions or votes occurring. But that didn't mean specific things weren't discussed.

One of the more heavily discussed topics Wednesday morning was with primetime football games. Due to current TV contracts, the Big Ten won't have any night games scheduled in November. The inaugural Big Ten Championship Game taking place on Dec. 3 in Indianapolis, Ind., is set for primetime.

Mark Rudner, who is the Big Ten's Associate Commissioner, did say however that the conference plans to have more night games this season than ever before. Seven games, including four in conference, have already been scheduled for primetime, and more are expected to be announced this week when the Big Ten Network reveals which games it will air at night.

"I think night games are really special. They are. They're special for the viewers, they're special for the fans, yet Saturday afternoon college football is still pretty special," Rudner said. "All of our games are nationally televised anyway, so whether it's at 1 o'clock, 3 o'clock or 7 o'clock, if people want to see the games on TV, they're going to be able to see them."

One trend that seems more evident this year than ever before are weekday college football games. Rudner said there are no plans in place to have weekday games throughout the season

aside from exceptions taking place this year such as Iowa and Nebraska on the Friday after Thanksgiving (Nov. 25) and both Wisconsin and Michigan State opening their seasons in primetime on Sept. 1 and Sept. 2, respectively.

From Dantonio's perspective, the state of Michigan opens its high school football seasons on that Thursday, so the Spartans' contest against Youngstown State to a Friday night wouldn't dramatically affect the high school scene. As for the Badgers opening on a Thursday night this year, Wisconsin head coach Bret Bielema said it's something he's O.K. with doing as long as it's only the season opener at Camp Randall Stadium and that he wouldn't want a weekday game during the middle of the season unless the Big Ten made it a high priority.

"Obviously, it puts us as the first game on national TV," Bielema said about the Badgers' opening contest against the UNLV, which will be televised by ESPN and is one of four night games Wisconsin will play in 2011. "Four weeks leading up to that game, you'll see that television spot run every day and it will be talking about Wisconsin and obviously UNLV, but it's kind of a great way to put us at the forefront of college football for the season."

Scheduling also hot topic with basketball

When basketball was discussed on May 17 with Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany, he made mention of how some men's basketball coaches entertained the thought of moving 1-2 conference games up to the early part of December so that the start of the Big Ten season wouldn't conflict with bowl games.

This conflict has taken place the last two seasons, and both cases feature Iowa. When the Hawkeyes played host to Ohio State back on Jan. 4, the Buckeye football team was playing in the Sugar Bowl on that same night. In 2010, the Iowa football team played in the Orange Bowl against Georgia Tech the same evening of an Iowa men's basketball game at Illinois.

The idea of moving games up has been implemented in recent years with women's basketball.

Both Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery and Michigan State head coach Tom Izzo voiced reasons why the move would make sense. McCaffery mentioned this tactic was done in the MAAC while he coached at Siena.

"You'd have to move some games and things like that, so sometimes, it's more complicated than you think," McCaffery said. "But I think it would create interest in the first semester because you would be playing conference games when our students are there as opposed to playing a conference game, or two conference games, or more when our students aren't there."

As for Izzo, he believes there is more of a challenge for college basketball now with garnering interest as more conferences such as the Big Ten start scheduling football games into December and add championship games. He also said the high number of bowl games played has an affect as well and described it as "a problem nobody really looked at."

"Everybody used to be done by Thanksgiving and they wouldn't start again until after Christmas," Izzo said. "Now there are so many bowl games, they start like the 8th or 10th of December, and I think that's another area that creates problems for us and giving us less flexibility."

Nebraska getting more acclimated

The Nebraska Cornhuskers aren't official members of the Big Ten until July 1, but athletics director Tom Osborne, football head coach Bo Pelini and men's basketball head coach Doc Sadler were all on hand at the Palmer House Hilton for this week's meetings.

Speaking briefly with reporters Wednesday morning, Osborne said the biggest adjustment for his athletics department comes

with travel, as Nebraska would overtake Iowa as the Western-most Big Ten school once July comes around.

"I think the Big Ten has been really generous with their time," Osborne said. "They've really bent over backwards to make us feel welcome. It's just a matter of getting acclimated to personalities, knowing what you do when."

Meanwhile, Pelini has taken in the meetings coming away more and more impressed by how the people that comprise the conference operate.

"It's obviously a very classy conference," Pelini said. "I think the commissioner is a very strong presence and does a great job. I've enjoyed working with all the new Big Ten people that I have met. It just exudes class, and it's great to be a part of."

Michigan-Ohio State rivalry flexes muscles

As both Jim Tressel and Brady Hoke made themselves accessible to the media Wednesday morning, the one topic where questions got into both were regarding the future of their annual rivalry.

Tressel, who only made himself available for less than a minute, was asked a question about Hoke and what facing him brings to the rivalry. His answer was pretty simple.

"Anything that's good for the Ohio State-Michigan game, I'm for, and Brady is good for it," Tressel said.

While the friendly aspect was on display, so was the fiery aspect. Much like Ohio State icon Woody Hayes would refer to Michigan as "That School Up North," Hoke just calls his rival to the South, "Ohio." He said "I don't know" when he asked why he always does that.

"When you coach at Michigan, you always look at Ohio," Hoke said in reference to competing against Ohio State. "There's no

question about it. That's a great rivalry, and the greatest rivalry in college football."