

COMMENTARY: Welcome your new Big Ten rival, Hawkeye fans (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

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When the clock strikes midnight, Nebraska will be an official member of the Big Ten conference.

While this news is quite old, now that the transition is finally taking place, this is as good a time as there is to discuss the ramifications this has on Iowa going forward in both football and men's basketball.

We'll start with football because this is where the addition of Nebraska is most significant. In football, make no mistake. The Cornhuskers will be far and away the Hawkeyes' biggest conference rival. That's not to say that Minnesota and Wisconsin won't continue to be, but let's look at this both short term and long term.

In the short term, Iowa and Nebraska will be two of the names that this season and for the foreseeable future will be considered favorites to win the Legends division. Michigan State is in the discussion, but given the uncertainty with Michigan and Minnesota breaking in new coaches as well as how much Dan Persa will be able to help Northwestern in 2011, Iowa and Nebraska will be regarded highly.

As for the long term, there's already bad blood between the two fan bases. There was well before last year when the announcement of Nebraska becoming a Big Ten member occurred. Over the past year, it has escalated and will only continue to escalate.

This game will be played over Thanksgiving weekend for the next four seasons. For the next two seasons (at least), it will take place on the Friday after Thanksgiving. The odds of this being a failure are smaller than a pinch of salt. This year's edition of "Farmageddon" will mark the start of a trend that lasts years, maybe even decades.

As for basketball, this can be a strong rivalry there as well. For one thing, both programs are linked to Andre Woolridge. His college basketball career began at Nebraska before he transferred to Iowa and had a memorable senior season for the Hawkeyes. These programs are also linked to current Iowa junior Anthony Hubbard, who chose the Hawkeyes over the Cornhuskers.

There's no reason to think Fran McCaffery and Doc Sadler won't be battling for similar recruits. The recruitments in basketball might not get as heated as the battles Kirk Ferentz and Bo Pelini have with football, but they will exist.

Not to mention that as McCaffery continues to rebuild the Iowa program, Nebraska will be the nearby Big Ten program it will be compared to. Whereas Wisconsin and Minnesota have appeared in NCAA tournaments more recently and (for now) remain a tier or two above Iowa, many seem to think Nebraska is in that same tier already. With both programs trying to work their ways up into the conference's upper echelon, I expect the hardwood battles to be fierce.

Iowa's rivalries with other Big Ten schools in these two sports won't be going anywhere. But with Nebraska now added in, this is merely the beginning of what will eventually evolve into the biggest rivalry the Hawkeyes have in conference.