

9/5/2011: State of the Big Ten, Volume 32 (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 first weekend of the 2011 college football season was rather unusual, as five different games had some sort of weather delay occur. Two of those five games involved Big Ten teams, and what transpired with those two respective contests couldn't have been more different.

On one hand, there was Iowa's game last weekend against Tennessee Tech at Kinnick Stadium. Lightning was spotted in the vicinity during the third quarter, and both teams were instructed to leave the field at the 3:37 mark of the quarter for what turned out to be an 84-minute delay in action. Now keep in mind the Hawkeyes were already ahead 34-0 when this took place, so it wasn't as though the outcome was going to change significantly.

The two teams returned to the field to complete the game, one Iowa ended up winning 34-7.

Later that afternoon, Michigan's opener against in-state opponent Western Michigan was delayed on two separate occasions. Unlike what occurred at Kinnick Stadium, the final decision was made during the second delay to just suspend the remainder of the game, one the Wolverines wound up winning 34-10.

Now, there's nothing wrong with either decision made in Iowa City or Ann Arbor. In Iowa's case, there was never a question of the game being cut short unless darkness came into play since Kinnick Stadium doesn't have permanent lighting. Plus, the opponent was one that probably was willing to deal with whatever as long as it got its paycheck for showing up.

As for what happened at the Big House, it didn't seem as though the weather was ever going to clear up around the area later that evening, and the Wolverines were playing another Michigan school that will probably be making future visits down the road to Ann Arbor, unlike Tennessee Tech visiting Iowa City.

What did seem strange about what all took place this weekend was that these weather delays didn't seem to occur nearly as often before, then all of sudden, a whole bunch of them took place.

School administrators should be commended for thinking about the safety of the players, coaches and fans, first and foremost. But if this trend is going to continue to occur as weather gets worse this fall, one has to wonder whether some sort of universal plan could be in place. Games being automatically delayed 30 minutes minimum is a start, but is this something where the Big Ten (or the NCAA for that matter) can establish a clear cut-and-dry policy?

Something like this ought to be considered if safety is as important as everyone says (and hopefully thinks) it is. Especially considering that the Big Ten is mostly made up of schools across the Midwest, where weather can change constantly from one day to the next.

The other benefit a conference-set policy would have is it would give the coaches a chance to better prepare their players in the event any future games get delayed due to weather. One comment Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz made after

his team's game that stands out is the uncertainty with knowing how long everyone will be kept in the locker room.

If a set policy is made, it gives the coaches a chance to inform their players immediately on a timeline, then update them as it goes.

Again, there's nothing wrong with how Iowa or Michigan handled their respective situations. But considering the extreme differences between how the two games were handled, one has to wonder if this is something that would be discussed down the road.