

10/3/2011: State of the Big Ten, Volume 36 (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 first weekend of conference play is complete, and let's just say nothing turned out pretty on Oct. 1.

There was one really good game in the Big Ten last weekend, with Illinois overcoming a 28-10 deficit to defeat Northwestern, 38-35. It was a great game to watch, but it was also marred by an ugly incident when Illinois defensive lineman Jonathan Brown was caught kneeling a Wildcat player in the groin. Now to Illinois head coach Ron Zook's credit, he has taken the action of suspending Brown one game for his actions, and the Big Ten issued a release Monday morning saying it had approved of Zook's decision. Again, great game, but ugly situation.

Then there was Michigan's 58-0 domination of Minnesota in "The Big House." For Golden Gopher fans, that game had to be painful to watch. It had all the makings of a blowout as Michigan quarterback Denard Robinson came in averaging as many yards of total offense as Minnesota. Once the Wolverines went ahead, they didn't look bad.

What made it worse for the Golden Gophers is that their head coach Jerry Kill was able to come back and join the team in Ann Arbor last weekend after having visited the Mayo Clinic to

deal with seizures he had been having last month. Having to watch his team give that poor of an effort couldn't have made things any easier for Kill.

The game between Penn State and Indiana in Bloomington last weekend was darn near unwatchable. Penn State did manage to win this game 16-10, but it was ugly from start to finish. The Nittany Lions still don't seem to be set at quarterback, and every time it looked like the Hoosiers would be able to do something, they took a step back.

As unwatchable as that game was though, Michigan State's 10-7 victory over Ohio State wasn't that much better. It was a good victory for Mark Dantonio and the Spartans to get, but that was honestly a game from Michigan State's vantage point that it could have won by more.

Meanwhile, Ohio State looked decent defensively, but to call the Buckeye offense anemic is being kind. ABC's Sean McDonough described it as "staggeringly pathetic" during the telecast. Michigan State did come into the game with a stout defense, but for Ohio State to not only fail to muster 200 yards of offense, but not be able to do anything with the football, was somewhat shocking to watch.

Finally, there was the highly-touted match-up of two top 10 teams in Nebraska and Wisconsin that took place at Camp Randall Stadium in Madison. For a little while there, it looked like a decent game. But the Badgers were able to build on their lead just before halftime and absolutely manhandled the Cornhuskers in the second half. Needless to say, it wasn't the Big Ten debut Nebraska fans were anticipating.

As a whole, the Big Ten has plenty of time to bounce back, but it's hard to argue right now with anyone that does take jabs at the conference in terms of its overall strength in football.