

10/10/2011: State of the Big Ten, Volume 37 (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 biggest story to come out of Oct. 8's Big Ten games was what unfolded inside Nebraska's Memorial Stadium.

In a game where Ohio State came into Lincoln short-handed and somewhat deflated by what transpired in its Big Ten opener the week prior against Michigan State, the Buckeyes jumped out to a stunning 27-6 lead on the 14th-ranked Cornhuskers. Then Nebraska regained momentum it wouldn't seize, scoring 28 unanswered points to defeat Ohio State, 34-27.

Right now, the Buckeyes sit at 3-3 overall, and at 0-2 in the Big Ten, find themselves in a deep hole in the Leaders Division.

The offensive display against Michigan State that Sean McDonough described during the fourth quarter of that game as "staggeringly pathetic" was bad enough. But blowing a 21-point lead in a game where the entire country is watching might prove even more crippling to this team.

It has become clear over the past few weeks that Ohio State just isn't a good team this season. After the Michigan State loss, Buckeye fans held out a little hope that maybe with the return of four suspended players – including running back Dan

Herron and wide receiver DeVier Posey – it still had a chance of finishing this season on a respectable note.

Except more allegations were discovered and neither Herron nor Posey were allowed to play against Nebraska last weekend. Now combined that with a 21-point lead evaporating and freshman quarterback Braxton Miller having to leave the game in the third quarter due to a knee injury, and this program at the moment is a train wreck.

Looking ahead to the second half of Ohio State's season, the Buckeyes might struggle to reach 6-6 now. They play on the road this week against an undefeated Illinois squad that is 16th in the AP poll. Then following a bye week, Ohio State concludes the month of October with a home game against Wisconsin, who is currently ranked fourth.

November's slate features games at home against Indiana, at Purdue, the home finale against Penn State, and the always highly-anticipated regular-season finale at Michigan. Right now, Indiana and Purdue appear to be winnable games, but beyond that, it gets complicated.

Those other four teams are currently a combined 22-1, with the one loss being Penn State's 27-11 loss at home to Alabama, who is currently ranked second nationally. Upon further review, a 5-7 season is looking more and more realistic right now in Columbus.

This program has faced enormous scrutiny (and rightfully so) over this calendar year, and now this season has begun spiraling out of control. The way Ohio State lost that game to Nebraska was the last thing Luke Fickell and his current staff needed to have happen. That kind of loss could potentially have damning effects on the rest of this season, and if Miller is out for any significant amount of time, the Buckeye offense is going to struggle being mediocre.

Ohio State's situation and the fallout that likely stems from

this (particularly from the last two weeks) is worth paying close attention to because it will impact the Big Ten's state in the near future.