

# 10/24/2011: State of the Big Ten, Volume 39 (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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From the Big Ten's vantage point, last weekend's game in East Lansing, Mich., between Wisconsin and Michigan State probably couldn't have been scripted better.

"College GameDay" was in town to promote the game, and it offered perhaps the most unforgettable finish of the 2011 college football season thus far when Michigan State quarterback Kirk Cousins' hail mary pass was caught off a deflection by wide receiver Keith Nichol for a touchdown, giving the Spartans a 37-31 victory.

It almost wasn't a touchdown though. In fact, Nichol was originally ruled down at the Badgers' 1-yard line and the play was reviewed. Had the call stood, the game would've gone to overtime. Instead, it was correctly determined that Nichol broke the plane and it was reversed to a Michigan State score. Again, this needs to be emphasized: The referees got the call correct.

There has been talk about whether the call should have been reversed and the definition of the word "indisputable" was discussed. Some would argue the call never should have been reversed because there wasn't indisputable evidence suggesting Nichol broke the plane. The replay clearly suggested he did,

and as much as it might disappoint Wisconsin fans, the correct call was made and it's a good thing it was.

What last Saturday's game showed is that instant replay has become valuable to the game of college football. Unlike the NFL, every play can be reviewed, and it's good that a bang-bang play such as this can be reviewed in order for the correct ruling to be made. The officiating crew from this game ought to be commended for doing their jobs.

Just think of the ramifications here if that play had stood as called. There would be national pundits out there that would be questioning Wisconsin's legitimacy had the Badgers won and gone on to an undefeated season and earned a spot in the national championship. Michigan State could have still prevailed in overtime, but there could have also been another controversial call in the overtime(s) that could have also impacted the outcome of this game.

Michigan State also deserves credit here because following a timeout by Wisconsin when it was 2nd-and-21, the Spartan offense made plays to pick up a first down and continue to drive, setting up that final throw by Cousins.

From Wisconsin's perspective, it's a painful defeat. But the Badgers' hopes of winning the Big Ten still remain, and who knows? These two teams could very well be meeting again on Dec. 3 in Indianapolis for the inaugural Big Ten Championship Game. Both teams are certainly capable of getting there.

At the end of the day, the final play is what everyone will remember. Which is why the referees correcting themselves and making the right call was absolutely necessary in this situation, and really is necessary in every situation such as this.