

1/2/2012: State of the Big Ten, Volume 49 (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.

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A significant agreement made last week between the Big Ten and Pac-12 could have an enormous impact on the landscape of college athletics in 2012 and beyond.

On Dec. 28, the two conferences reached an agreement where its members will now take part in annual games against one another in the bulk of their marquee sports. Of note, Big Ten teams will start having at least one Pac-12 team on their football schedules beginning in 2017, and in basketball, there will be at least one game a Big Ten team faces a Pac-12 team, much like what has existed since 1998 with the Big Ten/ACC Challenge.

Keeping it with these two sports, this is a landmark decision being made in football. The two conferences already have their champions meeting every year in the Rose Bowl, including Monday's game between Big Ten champion Wisconsin and Pac-12 champion Oregon. Both conferences now have 12 members, so from that standpoint, this is feasible.

This will, however, have a major influence on future scheduling. With this in place, it's hard to envision the Big Ten continuing on with the idea of playing nine conference games (which is why the year 2017 is worth mentioning here, as

this was the year the nine-game league slate was going to go into effect). It should be noted though that the Pac-12 currently has a nine-game conference schedule as well.

One thing that seems quite obvious is how little influence the coaches and ADs had on this agreement. Make no mistake – this was business done strictly between two commissioners, Jim Delany and Larry Scott, that both ought to feel good about their conferences' futures without having to consider expanding in the near future like the SEC and ACC have.

But the coaches' non-influence is worth mentioning because other than California, most of the schools in the Big Ten aren't recruiting West. Suddenly, there are now games being played in places like Corvallis, Ore., Pullman, Wash., and Salt Lake City, Utah, none of which are places one will see Kirk Ferentz or Mark Dantonio visiting for recruiting purposes anytime soon.

There's also the Notre Dame factor, and this agreement could inevitably force the Fighting Irish's hand. Notre Dame plays five schools – Michigan, Michigan State and Purdue from the Big Ten, and Stanford and USC from the Pac-12 – on an annual basis. The three games against the Big Ten usually take place early in the season, but the games against those two Pac-12 schools are played in South Bend in October and out in California during November. With the Big Ten and Pac-12 doing this, one has to think these annual games are going to be in September.

Now with basketball, this is intriguing in the sense that, as mentioned before, the Big Ten already has this sort of set-up with the ACC with the Big Ten/ACC Challenge every year. Unless the Big Ten makes it so every team is guaranteed one home and one road between the two games every year, there could be years where travel can become an issue for schools like Nebraska or Penn State that don't put the same amount of resources into basketball as they do a sport like football.

Then there are schools like Iowa and Wisconsin that have guaranteed in-state games played every season and now will have even tighter restrictions on how they're able to schedule.

In theory, this is an innovative idea being agreed to by Delany and Scott and there's no reason to think this agreement can't ultimately prove beneficial to both the Big Ten and Pac-12. But with that said, this is going to be difficult in practice, at least early on. It will have an impact, in one way or another, on all 12 schools (for both conferences).

It's worth experimenting with, but it's also fair to question how much of a positive effect this will have long-term on football, basketball, and many other sports.