

2/6/2012: State of the Big Ten, Volume 54 (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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Last week saw the spectacle known as Signing Day come and go, as 17-18 year old kids across the country signed on to play college football in 2012.

According to numerous recruiting outlets, the Big Ten's top class was that of Ohio State's, which speaks volumes to what Urban Meyer has already accomplished in just slightly more than two months on the job. It also speaks volumes when considering that the Buckeyes have a postseason ban lying ahead of them next season.

Two of Ohio State's more recent commitments in the final days consisted of one kid who was committed to Mark Dantonio and Michigan State, and the other being committed to Bret Bielema and Wisconsin. This is significant and worth noting because last year's inaugural Big Ten Championship featured the Badgers and Spartans.

Both Dantonio and Bielema voiced displeasure over the recruiting tactics done by Meyer, which really shouldn't surprise anyone given how he had coached for six seasons in a conference as cutthroat as the SEC was when he was at Florida and still is today. Is it right? Maybe not. But at the same time, it's not anything that can vented over publicly.

First off, both coaches critical of Meyer here have had recruits over the years they acquired at the last minute from other Big Ten schools. It happens all the time in college football. With Signing Day being more prominent than ever, it's worth reiterating that until the kid actually signs on the dotted line, he doesn't have to stick to his original commitment.

Just because a kid is committed to Michigan State or committed to Wisconsin for 6-7 months doesn't mean anything until the letter of intent is signed.

The other factor that needs to be considered here is this – Ohio is such a prominent state in recruiting, and it's the most important recruiting state in the entire Big Ten. Once the Buckeyes get their pick of the litter, almost every other Big Ten program is scouring the state for high school players rated anywhere between 2-4 stars that they think can be difference makers down the road. Many kids from Ohio grow up Ohio State fans, even if they end up attending a school like Michigan State or Wisconsin.

Now should Meyer be making a regular habit out of getting kids to change their commitments to Ohio State from other Big Ten brethren like Dantonio or Bielema? Probably not. But he's still allowed to recruit whoever he likes, as do the other 11 Big Ten coaches, and especially if the kid being targeted is from the state of Ohio in his case.

The other big storyline was with the NCAA wanting to start making scholarships good for four years. Nine of the 12 schools have adopted these new forms of scholarships – the ones who didn't were Indiana, Minnesota and Purdue. Over the long run, the four-year scholarships are the way to go. Why those three schools that stick to one-year scholarships are doing so is fair to question and be critical of, because it really doesn't make sense. As flawed as the term "student-athlete" might be when it comes to football nowadays, this is

at least a start back in the direction the NCAA wants its programs heading.

This is something that will be worth watching over time, because when it comes down to it, four-year scholarships make complete sense in today's world of college football, and really, college sports as a whole.