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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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It's mid-February, which usually means in the world of college basketball, plenty of discussion and dissection will take place regarding bubble teams and which resumes warrant an appearance in this year's NCAA tournament.

One of the teams that is going to be discussed heavily here in the coming weeks is Illinois. The Fighting Illini are currently 16-9 and are in a four-way tie for seventh place in the Big Ten with a 5-7 conference record.

It seems that this discussion is taking place on a regular basis now when it comes to Illinois. That might not be a great sign for its head coach, Bruce Weber.

The Fighting Illini are an interesting case study here. Two years ago, they didn't merit being in the NCAA tournament, and as it turned out, Illinois was in the NIT back in 2010. Last year, the Fighting Illini were a No. 9 seed and did beat UNLV in the second round before falling to top-seeded Kansas.

This season, Illinois has racked up wins against the two teams that currently sit atop the Big Ten – Michigan State and Ohio State. However, the amazing thing is that those also happen to be its two most recent victories. Back on Jan. 19, the

Fighting Illini were sitting alone in first place of the Big Ten when they lost 54-52 at Penn State, who was alone in last place at the time and is currently tied for last place right now with Nebraska.

Since then, the Fighting Illini have been reeling. They've lost games to Northwestern, who prior to last week, hadn't won at Assembly Hall since 1999 when Illinois was the worst team in the conference. There have also been losses to Wisconsin at home, Minnesota, Indiana, and Michigan.

Looking at Illinois' remaining schedule, it has a huge home game coming up against Purdue on Feb. 15. Win that, and the Fighting Illini might be O.K. come March. Lose, and there's a distinct possibility of there maybe being two wins in the rest of the way. That would result in a 7-11 Big Ten mark and an overall record of 18-13 entering the Big Ten tournament.

Here's the thing, though: Even if Illinois reaches the NCAA tournament, Fighting Illini fans have already questioned Weber's job security. Given the fact Illinois has a new athletics director in Mike Thomas that wasn't hesitant about relieving Ron Zook of his coaching duties after six straight losses to close out the 2011 football season, Weber's seat is warmer than usual.

This is a program that ought to be able to land top recruits out of Chicago on a regular basis, yet that isn't always the case. And while it might not have been with "his players," Weber did coach Illinois to an appearance in the national championship game back in 2005, where it lost to North Carolina.

Weber has shown he can win with enough talent, and while the Fighting Illini entered this season with a slightly different look from a year ago in terms of player personnel, there's still talent on this team. Junior guard Brandon Paul is one of the league's top scorers and it'd be a shock at this point if

he wasn't first-team all-Big Ten. Meyers Leonard is being projected by some – perhaps foolishly – to be a lottery pick if he decided to leave early for the NBA.

But with the talent comes results, and if the results aren't showing improvement, there's going to be incentive to not retain Weber. Illinois has to be careful if it goes this route though. Letting go of Weber won't change things if his successor can't perform any better recruiting the Chicagoland area. That has been and will always be the key area for Illinois, especially the city.

These next few weeks are going to be very telling when it comes to the Fighting Illini – both in terms of how this season ends and how the program's future will be shaped. Because either way, decisions – tough decisions – will need to be made.