

8/27/2012: State of the Big Ten, Volume 62 (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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It's amazing to think that it has been five years now since the Big Ten Network was officially launched. Back in 2007, there were so many questions as to whether or not a television network that focused specifically on one conference could stand the test of the time. It was clear the Big Ten had a plan in place, but so many things had to materialize in order for BTN to become the network it is today.

All across Big Ten campuses, there were disputes between BTN and cable providers throughout the Midwest. The cable providers wanted to know why they should have a channel that was considered to have niche programming be a part of their basic lineups. For example, it was nearly a full calendar year before Mediacom, a cable provider that serves states such as Iowa, came to agreement with BTN about adding the channel. So for a full calendar year, those in Iowa who didn't have satellite or another cable provider that did carry BTN were out of the loop on Iowa football and men's basketball games.

What's even more amazing to think about now though is seeing how BTN has managed to adapt over the years and become more well-renown. On one hand, some of the simple things about the network haven't changed. BTN's most prominent names like Dave Revsine, Mike Hall, Rick Pizzo, Gerry DiNardo, Howard Griffith

and Jimmy Jackson have been there since Day One.

Yet it also seems that through BTN, every single one of those aforementioned names have been reasons why the quality of programming has improved. For instance, BTN's football coverage has grown significantly over the last five years. From the amount of shows, to the fact that guys like Revsine, DiNardo and Griffith have been able to tackle enormous off-the-field stories such as what has transpired in recent years at both Ohio State and Penn State.

Now this isn't to say there haven't been failures. One of the things BTN attempted to combat the whole "niche programming" stigma was to provide educational programming featuring each of the Big Ten universities. Just recently, it realized those shows weren't getting any ratings, so they were ditched.

But there's three things that may have defined the network's success more than anything else: 1. The fact that non-revenue sports are being televised. Sports like field hockey and gymnastics aren't going to get the ratings football or basketball get, but the dedication shown by BTN towards every sport the conference is involved in speaks volumes. 2. The fact that all 12 schools are benefiting financially from all the revenue being brought in. 3. The fact that other conferences like the Pac-12 and SEC are now forming their own networks, following the lead set by the Big Ten.

On Aug. 30, BTN turns five years old. It's amazing to think how far it has come from the network that was barely being watched due to cable disputes to what it is today, a network that has proven its worth in numerous fashions.