

# 10/1/2012: State of the Big Ten, Volume 67 (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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Ohio State might not be allowed to participate in the Big Ten Championship Game or in any bowl game this season. But after the first five weeks of the 2012 football season, the Buckeyes are playing like the best team in an otherwise down-trodden Big Ten.

Defeating Michigan State 17-16 in East Lansing last weekend was significant for Ohio State, not only in the short term but the long term as well. Entering their showdown at home against No. 21 Nebraska on Oct. 6, the Buckeyes are the highest-ranked Big Ten team of the three who are currently ranked, sitting at No. 12 in this week's AP poll. With Saturday's game taking place in the Horseshoe – not to mention it being a payback game for Ohio State after it blew a 21-point lead against the Cornhuskers in Lincoln last season – the Buckeyes should be capable of winning.

Then their next four games are as follows – at Indiana, vs. Purdue, at Penn State, vs. Illinois. While Purdue and Penn State will likely be tough games, they're not going to be any tougher than the game Ohio State played last weekend or is playing this weekend.

Basically, what I'm getting at is the Buckeyes could very well

be 10-0 by the time they go into Camp Randall Stadium to play Wisconsin – the team that might wind up benefiting from Ohio State's postseason ban – on Nov. 17. If there weren't sanctions in place, this scenario would lead to the Buckeyes being discussed as a national title contender, and in essence, them playing for a national title might have led to the Big Ten getting two teams in BCS bowls again this season. Just look back at the last time Ohio State played in the BCS National Championship Game: An Illinois team that was 9-3 was selected to play in the Rose Bowl, where it got hammered by USC.

If this were the case, the Big Ten wouldn't be as heavily criticized like it currently is. Look at Florida State, who is currently ranked third nationally right now. The ACC isn't shaping up to be nearly as good as expected entering this season between teams like Virginia Tech and North Carolina State struggling and Clemson only having its stud wideout Sammy Watkins for two games thus far. But because the Seminoles have handled their business to this point, games that looked challenging earlier in the season now look more likely to be sure wins for Florida State. And make no mistake – if Florida State runs the table, it will be playing in Miami on Jan. 7.

Going back to Ohio State though, yes, it's not a good look for the conference when its best team can't even play in the Big Ten title game or represent the conference in the Rose Bowl. But what Urban Meyer has done thus far has only reinforced the belief that the season endured by the Buckeyes last year was an aberration. Ohio State's only going to get better and better.

If the Buckeyes do run the table (or at the very least, end up being the only Big Ten team that finishes with double-digit victories this season), they will be the preseason favorite to win the Big Ten in 2013. Not only that, but come next August, Ohio State will probably be a top 5 preseason team.

With Meyer around, it'll probably stay that way over the long haul. His immediate success is telling because at some point, the rest of the conference has to keep up or watch the Buckeyes be regarded as the Big Ten's cream of the crop under Meyer like it was over the past decade under Jim Tressel.

If and when this conference starts getting talked about in a more positive light nationally, Ohio State's success (along with Michigan's success under Brady Hoke) will likely be the reason why.