

# 10/15/2012: State of the Big Ten, Volume 69 (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

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

The Purdue Boilermakers sit at 3-3 overall and 0-2 in the Big Ten at their halfway point of the 2012 season. While Purdue still has an outside shot of becoming bowl-eligible for the second consecutive season under fourth-year head coach Danny Hope, the Boilermakers saw their odds of representing the Leaders Division in the Big Ten Championship Game diminish greatly this past weekend after losing 38-14 at home to Wisconsin.

Purdue wasn't expected to win either of its first two Big Ten games against Wisconsin, or against Michigan, who beat the Boilermakers 44-13 at Ross-Ade Stadium back on Oct. 6. It's not that Purdue didn't beat these teams at home, but rather how it got embarrassed on its field by both teams.

When the 2012 season was about to begin, the Boilermakers were the trendy pick to dethrone Wisconsin in the Leaders Division. Coming off a 2011 season where it beat Western Michigan in the Little Caesars Bowl combined with the number of starters returning on both sides of the football, this year's squad was supposed to be the best one yet under Hope.

Add in the fact that both Ohio State and Penn State are currently dealing with postseason bans and this season looked

to be the best shot Purdue had at playing in a Big Ten Championship Game anytime soon. With the Badgers looking pedestrian during the month of September, the opportunity was ripe for the picking.

Instead, it was Wisconsin jumping out on Purdue and not looking back. The Badgers essentially have a three-game lead on the Boilermakers (among eligible teams in the Leaders Division), meaning Wisconsin would only have to win three of its remaining five games to secure a second consecutive trip to Indianapolis.

Now the question for Purdue moving forward is just how much more will it actually be able to accomplish under Hope? If this season's any indication, Ohio State is going to become a perennial power in the Leaders Division next year and beyond. Also, Wisconsin isn't going away anytime soon and even a program like Indiana that is currently on the rise under Kevin Wilson is only going to get better.

Can the Boilermakers become a team that can win 8-9 games on a regular basis and at least be in the thick of things year in and year out? It's hard to answer this question with a "yes" response. If the answer isn't a definitive "yes," then Purdue's a program that's going to have some serious soul-searching to do here in the near future.

Make no mistake about it: Hope's seat is getting warmer by the minute. Perhaps even worse is that if the dwindling attendance at this past weekend's game against Wisconsin is an indicator, apathy is really starting to sink in towards this football program. This isn't a program that's going to compete with the likes of an Ohio State or Wisconsin year in and year out. This is why 2012 was such an important season for the Boilermakers both in the present and looking ahead to the future.

If this season starts to completely spiral out of control, Hope might not make it to 2013, even though he just recently

signed a contract extension this past offseason. If this season does managed to be salvaged with a second consecutive bowl appearance, then more pressure will be placed on Hope entering 2013.

Right now, Purdue is at a crossroads and the future doesn't appear to be promising. How the Boilermakers respond in the here and now could potentially dictate the direction of this program for years to come.