

# 10/29/2012: State of the Big Ten, Volume 71 (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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Last weekend proved to be as good as any that the faithful in Bloomington, Ind., have had in a long time.

It began Friday morning (Oct. 26) when the AP released its preseason poll for the 2012-13 college basketball season. Like the USA Today/Coaches preseason poll, the Indiana Hoosiers found themselves ranked No. 1 in the country.

The optimism surrounding Tom Crean's basketball program is warranted. Sophomore center Cody Zeller opted to return for his sophomore season and on Monday, he was one vote short of being named a unanimous preseason all-American (he garnered 64 of the possible 65 votes). Zeller was also named the Big Ten's Preseason Player of the Year.

In fact, the Hoosiers have all five starters from last year's squad that reached the Sweet 16 back, plus they brought in Crean's best recruiting class since he took over in 2008. The hype around Indiana is very real and rightfully so.

But perhaps as significant is what took place on the gridiron one state over the following day. Indiana's football Hoosiers left Champaign, Ill., with a 31-17 win over the Illinois Fighting Illini. It snapped a five-game losing streak overall

where four of the five losses came by a combined 10 points. The victory was also Kevin Wilson's first in Big Ten play as Indiana's head coach, and it snapped an 11-game losing streak the Hoosiers had against conference foes.

And don't look now, but should Indiana beat a reeling Iowa squad at home on Nov. 3, it sets up a game next week at Memorial Stadium against Wisconsin where the winner controls its destiny towards playing in the Big Ten Championship Game. That game, by the way, is being played at Indianapolis' Lucas Oil Stadium (or approximately an hour away from Bloomington).

This dynamic is interesting in the sense that most figured if anyone could stand in Wisconsin's way of playing in the Big Ten title game (since neither Ohio State and Penn State can), it would be Indiana's other Big Ten team, Purdue. But instead, the Boilermakers have gone into a downward spiral, while the Hoosiers finally broke into the win column after coming so close in recent weeks against quality teams such as Ohio State and Michigan State.

What Wilson is doing this year is kind of remarkable. This is a team that added new wrinkles to its offense this offseason and lost quarterback Tre' Roberson to a season-ending injury in its second game of the season. In fact, Indiana was where highly-touted in-state recruit Gunner Kiel was going to play before de-committing last year and ultimately winding up at Notre Dame. When he first committed, Kiel was being viewed as a possible savior of Hoosier football.

But these quarterback issues – and right now, Indiana plays two of them – haven't completely crippled Indiana's firepower offensively. This is a team that had a 17-0 lead against Michigan State and scored 49 points in its loss to Ohio State.

Now maybe the talk of this team winning six games or even playing up the road in Indianapolis on Dec. 1 is unrealistic. It sounds that way when considering that Indiana hasn't played

in the Rose Bowl in over 40 years. But the fact that this discussion is even taking place is an indicator that the Hoosiers are trending upward and will be able to regularly compete for bowl games under Wilson.

Keep in mind also that this current nucleus is relatively young. He's starting to get more of his guys in the style of play he wants to use. If Wilson continues to mold Indiana into a team that could regularly compete for conference crowns, his name will become a hot commodity anytime a big-time coaching job has a vacancy to fill.

Things are looking bright in the Hoosier State and could continue to get brighter over the coming weeks and months.