

11/19/2012: State of the Big Ten, Volume 74 (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.

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On July 1, 2014, the University of Maryland will officially become the 13th member of the Big Ten Conference after its application to join the conference was approved by its Council of Presidents and Chancellors on Monday.

This move became official Monday and another one might become official Tuesday with Rutgers University reportedly seeking to join the Big Ten in 2014 as well. Once again, this conference has sent shockwaves nationally.

But unlike Nebraska's addition in 2010, there are some major differences at play here. When Nebraska joined, the Big Ten needed one more school in order to be allowed to conduct a championship game in football. Nebraska was added in large part because of its tradition of a major football power in the Big 8, which later became the Big 12.

Adding Maryland and Rutgers isn't being done for these purposes. The championship game is set and won't be going away anytime soon. This is strictly financial. From the Big Ten's vantage point, expanding to the East allows it to reach into giant U.S. markets like Washington, D.C. and New York City. Getting the Big Ten Network on platforms across those two cities only makes the conference brand stronger than it

already is.

Although Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany had said on multiple occasions he was content with 12 schools being part of the conference, this was really only a matter of time. Maryland and Rutgers need the financial stability the Big Ten can provide and if the Big Ten was ever going to expand, these were two of the schools that met its select criteria.

And guess what? This isn't over. The domino effect is continuing and there's no reason to think the notion of super conferences featuring 16 teams each won't become a reality, especially with a college football playoff being in place by 2014 (which oh by the way, is when these two schools would be joining).

Delany hinted at the league expanding to nine-game conference schedules in football and playing close to 20-22 games in basketball. Now, it's going to eventually need to do both those things.

Here's the biggest piece to the equation and why these moves could become major pay-offs for Delany and the Big Ten: Whether or not people actually attend these games, in this day and age, doesn't compare to the impact being watched nationwide does.

Even if folks in D.C. don't care about Maryland or people in New York don't care about Rutgers, the folks in those cities who care about college sports in general now have another option at their disposal for watching games, one that is as powerful as there is.

In this day and age, people all across the country will take notice of a product if it's good enough. It doesn't matter if it's Ohio State, Iowa or Maryland. A good football team or a good basketball team playing on national television is going to be watched on TV and other mobile devices that allow games to be streamed. The attention will still be there, if not

increase. That's why BTN has, in part, been successful.

This is a move that benefits the Big Ten, Maryland, and will benefit Rutgers assuming it does join as expected later this week. The pros outweigh the cons, which is why the trigger was pulled Monday on Maryland.