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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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As crazy as this might sound, the Big Ten needs No. 14 Nebraska to win the conference title game being played Dec. 1 in Indianapolis. Yes, needs.

The conference is in an unfortunate predicament here because its best team, which was 12-0 Ohio State, is bowl-ineligible this season. Had this not been the case, all the talk this week would be about the Buckeyes being one victory away from meeting top-ranked Notre Dame in the BCS National Championship Game and in the process, completely shutting out the SEC altogether.

But instead, there's the Cornhuskers, who clearly proved themselves to be the Big Ten's second-best team and best alternative for Ohio State. Yes, Wisconsin has a chance to make history itself Saturday night by making its third consecutive trip to Pasadena for the Rose Bowl.

Except here's the problem. The Badgers weren't even the second-best team in the Leaders Division, let alone the best. In fact, Wisconsin possesses a 7-5 record and comes into this championship bout on a two-game losing streak, with both defeats coming in overtime to Ohio State and Penn State.

Yes, the Badgers shouldn't have to apologize for being the beneficiaries of sanctions levied against both Ohio State and Penn State. But the fact of the matter is if Wisconsin were to beat Nebraska this weekend, no one outside of Madison is going to take the Big Ten seriously if its Rose Bowl participant is 8-5, even with those five defeats coming by a combined 19 points.

This might still be the case even if the Cornhuskers win, but at least at 11-2, they'll be viewed as a worthy participant of playing in the Rose Bowl. Heck, if this weekend's game featured Nebraska and Ohio State, the Cornhuskers would likely be playing in Pasadena regardless if Ohio State winning meant the Buckeyes were 13-0 and playing for a national title.

There's also the matter of the entire Big Ten bowl picture. If Nebraska wins, it's pretty simple. The Cornhuskers smell roses, Michigan would probably go to the Capital One Bowl and a 9-3 Northwestern would probably get picked for the Outback Bowl over a 7-6 Wisconsin coming off three straight defeats. The Badgers would then be in the Gator Bowl and then Michigan State, Minnesota and Purdue would round out the rest.

If Wisconsin makes a third straight Rose Bowl appearance though, it gets tricky. Nebraska just played in the Capital One Bowl last year, but there's also the worry of rematches not only in Orlando, but in the other two Florida bowls as well that would be involving the Wolverines and Wildcats.

This Big Ten Championship Game already lacks luster without the league's best team. Add in that the Cornhuskers and Badgers met in Lincoln back on Sept. 29, a game Nebraska won 30-27, and it's just not as appealing as it was a year ago when Wisconsin played Michigan State.

Should the Badgers win Saturday night, they would've earned the right to play in Pasadena against either No. 8 Stanford or No. 17 UCLA on New Year's Day. But the invisible asterisk will

always be there with them. That wouldn't be the case with Nebraska. It's as simple as that.

A team winning six straight games en route to a conference title holds more legitimacy, legitimacy that the Big Ten needs if it doesn't want to continue being perceived as a laughingstock in the college football world.