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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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Already possessing at least a share of the Big Ten regular season crown, the No. 2 Indiana Hoosiers have two opportunities to win the conference outright this week, with the first coming Tuesday night at home against No. 14 Ohio State.

By no means has Indiana's success come as a surprise to anyone who has followed college basketball – and more specifically, the Big Ten – this season. The Hoosiers were ranked No. 1 preseason in both polls and a prohibitive favorite at the time to win the conference.

But considering what this program was going through when Tom Crean first became its head coach back in 2008, it's sort of remarkable to see the progression made by Indiana these last few seasons.

The Hoosiers have a chance to win the Big Ten outright two years to the date that it lost a game at Illinois to finish 3-15 in the league – alone in last place – during the 2010-11 season. And it wasn't as though that season was an aberration for Indiana at the time, either.

The mess Crean inherited from former coach Kelvin Sampson

can't be overstated. His first season in Bloomington, Crean won six games and only one of those wins came in Big Ten play. For three years, Indiana was simply abysmal in basketball.

Now a big part of the Hoosiers' turnaround has come in recruiting players like Victor Oladipo and Cody Zeller, both of whom will be first-team all-Big Ten and likely first-team all-Americans at season's end. Indiana made big strides last season reaching the Sweet 16, and again, the success this season was expected.

But for all that talent at Crean's disposal, that's not the only reason why the Hoosiers have gone from being a good team last year to likely being the favorite to win the national championship come Selection Sunday. The steps made from last season to this season specifically are a result of Crean's coaching.

Yes, he brought in a class of highly-touted freshmen, but Yogi Ferrell's the only one of them even starting. The core of this year's Indiana squad is comprised of upper-classmen such as Oladipo, junior Will Sheehey and seniors Jordan Hulls and Christian Watford – players who went through that losing early on in their careers.

They've all bought into what Crean has been selling in terms of knowing their niche and being elite. For example, Hulls is a lethal 3-point shooter. If he knocks down his average as far as 3-pointers made on a given night, he's doing his part.

Zeller and Oladipo are getting the most attention and rightfully so, but the Hoosiers are playing like a team and every individual guy – for the most part – has been consistent with doing their part. Sure, Indiana could lose on any given night in the NCAA tournament, but for those wondering why many media members are going to pick the Hoosiers to win it all, that consistency they've shown all season is why.

This is also a mentally strong team that Crean is coaching,

primarily because of those core guys who aren't taking what they're doing right now for granted. That's something that will definitely bode well for Indiana later this month and in early April.

The turnaround done at Indiana isn't something seen everyday, especially in a sport like college basketball. Every elite program has a down season here and there, but the 180 done by the Hoosiers over the last few years is what has to make this even sweeter for Indiana fans along with those players and coaches who have put in the effort to turn everything around in Bloomington.