

3/11/2013: State of the Big Ten, Volume 90 (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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The Big Ten handed out postseason honors Monday for men's basketball and in what was considered to be a hotly-contested two-man race between Michigan's Trey Burke and Indiana's Victor Oladipo for Big Ten Player of the Year, it was Burke receiving the consensus honor. Both players were also unanimous choices by both the coaches and media for first-team all-Big Ten accolades.

These types of awards lead to plenty of water cooler discussion and are made with the intent of picking one winner above the rest. The reality here is either one of Burke or Oladipo had enough of a case to win the award and had they been co-receipients, there probably wouldn't have been much argument.

Burke held an edge statistically, which ultimately played a factor in him getting the nod over Oladipo. During Big Ten play, the Wolverine point guard led the conference in scoring, averaging 20.2 points per game. He finished second behind Ohio State's Deshaun Thomas in overall points per game by an average of 0.7 point. Again, this is a point guard and without question the best point guard in the country.

In addition to his scoring, Burke led the Big Ten in assist-

to-turnover ratio, another mark of a marquee point guard.

From a numbers standpoint, Burke had a clear edge. But the eyeball test makes a great case for Oladipo.

To the surprise of very few, Indiana won the Big Ten this season and did so outright after beating Michigan on March 10, 72-71. Here's the best argument that can be made for Oladipo and why any vote his way would've been warranted: When the Hoosiers needed plays in crunch time, he delivered.

Think back to every exciting finish Indiana had this season. Oladipo was the one making the plays that had everyone talking at night's end. Even when the Hoosiers lost to Illinois, Oladipo made a huge block off an Indiana turnover just before the Hoosiers' defensive breakdown in the final seconds. When Indiana needed a play late, they had someone to count on.

Was he hurt by the fact he played alongside another bonafide Big Ten player in Cody Zeller? Maybe. But Oladipo was the guy who made Indiana go and the Hoosiers don't win the Big Ten this season without his efforts in those late-game situations.

Both of these players would be lottery picks if they left after this season – Burke's a sophomore, while Oladipo is a junior. Both were exciting to watch, especially over the last two months.

It'll be interesting to see how votes for various National Player of the Year awards will shake out over the next few weeks, because it wouldn't at all be surprising if both players split some of those honors, if not share a few.

Again, both had valid cases. And who knows? Maybe they'll meet again Saturday afternoon in Chicago. That would be quite a treat.