

COMMENTARY: Shake-up with new Big Ten bowls unnecessary (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

One month after announcing a new partnership beginning in 2014 with the Pinstripe Bowl, the Big Ten made two more bowl alliances official Monday by announcing agreements with the Pac-12 to compete in both the Holiday and Kraft Fight Hunger Bowls.

The Holiday Bowl is played annually in San Diego, Calif., while the Kraft Fight Hunger Bowl – currently played at AT&T Park in San Francisco – will be held down the road at the new Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara beginning in 2014, when the six-year deal begins.

The one caveat revealed with the Holiday Bowl agreement specifically is that no team will play more than twice in the game over the six-year span that deal is in effect. In other words, the Big Ten is going to have more of a say than ever before with regards to which Big Ten teams play in what bowl games.

While Delany deserves credit for being able to tie the conference in with bowl games played in more ideal locations such as the state of California, the Big Ten taking control from the bowls seems unhealthy if these bowl games are going to continue on once the new College Football Playoff replaces the current BCS structure after this upcoming 2013 season.

Yes, there's the "fatigue" factor of schools' fan bases not wanting to go to the same bowls or same destinations in

consecutive years. But unless the league is going to be cut and dry about who goes where (i.e. Big Ten champion goes to the Rose Bowl, Big Ten runner-up goes to the Capital One Bowl, third place goes to Holiday Bowl no matter what, etc.), the decisions of who goes where should be made solely by those running the bowl games.

They're not intentionally trying to anger fan bases by bringing certain teams back over and over again. They're looking for the best possible match-ups. With stipulations like what's being done with some of these bowls the Big Ten is now aligning itself with, that decision-making power is being taken away and quite honestly, that shouldn't be the case.

Let's say for argument's sake Wisconsin goes to the Holiday Bowl in 2014 and 2017. If the Badgers can be a viable candidate for the Holiday Bowl again in 2018, why should the game be prevented from taking Wisconsin a third time if it helps present the best possible match-up that particular season?

There's also a new wrinkle Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany revealed Monday afternoon that the Big Ten is going to set up tiers for its bowl selection process. The first tier would consist of the Holiday, Capital One and Outback Bowls, the second tier would feature games such as the Pinstripe and Kraft Fight Hunger. Now what if there's a season where the conference is top heavy enough that whoever finishes fifth, for example, suddenly ends up in a "second-tier" game because of something like the new arrangement with the Holiday Bowl? It's a hypothetical, but not impossible to consider.

In theory, what the Big Ten and other conferences are wanting to do makes sense. But it's easier said than done. And let's be honest – if you're a team that doesn't win your conference and take part in the college football playoff, does it really make that much of a difference if you end up going to the same bowl multiple times over a 5-6 year span?

There was a time where bowl games were considered “a reward.” But there are so many of them today that when a coach of a 6-6 team is saying, “Any bowl is a good bowl,” or “We’re thrilled to be in the Bowl,” it rings hollow. Unless one has some sort of association with the city of Detroit, being there for a bowl game in late December sounds less than ideal.

That being said though, fans shouldn’t direct anger at a bowl if their 6-6 or 7-5 team ends up in said bowl game twice in a row or three times out of four years and neither should media whose job it is to cover said 6-6 or 7-5 team. As long as the bowl system still exists, there’s always going to be something.

One last thing to consider is this – travel. While going to places like Florida and California in late December/early January sound like fun, it’s also not going to be any cheaper for fans to travel to these places. Even New York City around New Year’s Eve is going to be a chore.

No matter how much “freshness” is emphasized in bowl selection order, there’s no guarantee of a school that plays in four different bowl games over four years selling out its entire ticket allotment simply because, “Hey, it’s not Orlando two years in a row.” Not to mention that as long as ticket prices continue going up at most of these schools playing in these bowl games, fans are probably going to have to prioritize how much money they spend watching their favorite school even more than they already are doing now.

The Big Ten having more say in who plays where isn’t going to change perception or reality. The perception right now is the conference is inferior to others in football and the reality is unless the quality of play drastically improves, the conference dictating who goes where might actually lead to worse match-ups as opposed to better ones.

As long as a bowl system remains in place, bowls (presuming

they're not being operated like the Fiesta and Insight Bowls once were) should be allowed to handle their business in terms of who they invite to their respective games. The repeat trips shouldn't be a referendum on the bowls, but rather on the football programs involved.