

# 9/9/2013: State of the Big Ten, Volume 97 (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

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

A lot was made in the days leading up to last Saturday's game between Michigan and Notre Dame about how the rivalry between the two winningest college football programs ends for the foreseeable future next year in South Bend, Ind. The Fighting Irish and Wolverines met for the final time in the Big House, with the latter prevailing 41-30.

It's a shame these two teams can't continue to play every year, but it's understandable why they won't be with the Big Ten going to nine games in 2016 and Notre Dame's alignment with the ACC taking effect next year. There's a bigger issue at hand though that goes beyond this singular rivalry.

With the Big Ten expanding its league schedule to nine games, there are three options at hand. One is college football allowing 13 regular season games, four of which would be non-conference. This would allow annual rivalries like Michigan vs. Notre Dame and others to continue being that. The concern is how much is too much though with conference championships and a new playoff starting next year because if this happens, there could be a team playing up to 16 games in a season (like the NFL).

Assuming the number of games remains at 12 though, here are

the other two options. The first is being dead set on seven home games every year, which most athletics directors would probably elect to do. This is what a school like Iowa is dead set on. By doing this, it doesn't leave much wiggle room if an annual non-conference rivalry is kept because those other two games have to be at home and are likely coming against schools that have to be paid 6-7 figures to show up and play.

Or, there's being willing to only play six home games a year and take the gamble of playing a neutral site game and/or an additional road game, which allows for better match-ups and a better brand. Seeing how more people find themselves preferring to watch a game on TV versus spending hundreds of bucks to go see one in person, this isn't necessarily a bad option.

Michigan only had six home games last season – playing at Notre Dame and against Alabama down in Arlington, Texas. Michigan's a school that has the biggest stadium in college football and had the biggest attendance ever for a game just this past weekend. Playing only six home games and missing out on 100,000-plus fans paying for an additional home game didn't seem to phase the school much, did it?

Iowa plays at Iowa State this coming Saturday. This is an in-state rivalry played every year and the Cyclones already play a nine-game Big 12 schedule. There are three options for Iowa going forward – keep this game and bank on playing two home games that just won't sell out in this day and age, don't play this annually and risk angering both fan bases, or be more open to playing just six games at Kinnick Stadium if the opportunity to play a neutral site game against a quality opponent presents itself.

What would get more media attention throughout the offseason and only increase once game week arrived – Iowa playing a Sun Belt conference opponent at Kinnick, or playing a game in St. Louis or Kansas City against a school like Arkansas, or

playing a game in Texas against any one of those Big 12 programs? The fact of the matter is no team from a conference like the Pac-12, SEC, Big 12 or ACC is going to just make a trip to Iowa City and not expect a return game at its stadium. Not being able to occasionally improvise your annual budget here and there isn't going to be of any long-term benefit for a school like Iowa. Sure, you get seven home games, but the amount of attention placed on your program won't be as much. It's low-risk, low-reward.

It stinks that Michigan and Notre Dame won't play every year going forward, but whether it continued or not wasn't and won't keep Michigan from continuing to build its brand nationally. As mentioned, it showed willingness to play multiple games away from Ann Arbor and that garnered national respect.

This is something that's only going to continue being an emphasis of discussion in the years to come, but there's no bad time to discuss it, either.