

10/7/2013: State of the Big Ten, Volume 101 (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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Last weekend, the Minnesota Golden Gophers played at Michigan without their head coach Jerry Kill with them on the sidelines. He wasn't with them in Ann Arbor because he had suffered a seizure just before the team left Minneapolis. This was the second seizure Kill has suffered since this season began and the fifth documented seizure he has since becoming Minnesota's head coach in 2011.

Kill publicly revealed last year he has epilepsy and has since been open about dealing with it, along with other past health issues he overcame long before taking over the Golden Gopher football program. There was also a report that Kill had recently had his medication adjusted by doctors, which likely led to his latest seizure.

Many outside the program are wondering why and how he could still be coaching given his condition. Three weeks ago, Minnesota athletics director Norwood Teague held a press conference to reiterate his backing of Kill as the Golden Gophers' head coach. This was the right thing for him to do and those suggesting he needs to stop coaching because of his condition are misguided.

Kill's condition is something he has learned to live with and

is going to continue to live with for the rest of his life. The seizures aren't anything new and they're going to continue to occur well beyond the day he's no longer coaching Minnesota. In fact, a seizure he had while coaching at Southern Illinois led to a proper cancer diagnosis from doctors who were checking his health then.

Because Kill has managed to live his condition, so has Minnesota. There's a protocol in place for every episode he has, so it's not as if the Golden Gophers are continually being caught off guard whenever an episode does occur. His assistants have been working with him long enough that they know how their roles change whenever Kill does have a seizure.

When it was realized he wouldn't be with the team at Michigan, defensive coordinator Tracey Claeys assumed Kill's coaching duties over the weekend and there wasn't any hesitation on his part to do so.

If Kill is qualified to handle coaching Minnesota – and make no mistake, he absolutely is – then the fact he deals with epilepsy shouldn't honestly matter. If his condition was such that he shouldn't coach, that's a decision his family would probably suggest he'd make and one that he would probably be cognizant enough to make. The fact that his family continues to stick by him and what he does for a living is all one needs to know.

It's one thing if questions about what's he getting paid to do surface. If Gopher fans have concerns about his in-game strategy or matters of player personnel, that's their prerogative as fans. But if/when the day comes that Kill's job comes into question, him being an epileptic shouldn't factor into any future decisions made by Teague and given what Teague has said, it doesn't appear they will.

Kill has made Minnesota a far better football program than it was when he first got there. As long as he's continuing to do

that, there's no reason for anyone to say he shouldn't do his job.