

# 11/11/2013: State of the Big Ten, Volume 106 (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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Stanford's 26-20 victory over Oregon on Nov. 7 sent shockwaves across the college football landscape. It also may have potentially proven costly for the Big Ten.

Prior to last week's contest in Palo Alto, Calif., the Ducks were in line to play No. 1 Alabama in the BCS National Championship Game. As a result, Florida State – the beneficiary of Oregon's loss – would've had to settle for the ACC's slot in the Orange Bowl. The likelihood of the Seminoles playing a team like No. 14 Michigan State or No. 17 Wisconsin here looked very good, assuming either or both teams reached at least 10 wins (and in the Spartans' case, win the Legends Division). Stanford would've been in the Rose Bowl regardless, just replacing Oregon.

Now though, the Big Ten's odds of getting two BCS teams has become much slimmer. Yes, No. 3 Ohio State is sitting right there now if either Florida State or Alabama slips up before the season ends. But the chances of either doing so appear very unlikely, at least if this past weekend has given any indication. Assuming the Buckeyes don't catch either and still have to settle for the Rose Bowl, now the probability exists of an 11-1 Oregon taking that Orange Bowl spot the Big Ten thought it had before and playing Clemson, who would be the

ACC team replacing Florida State.

One of the following three things is going to have to happen now for either a 10-2 Wisconsin or 11-1 Michigan State (entering the Big Ten title game against Ohio State) to make a BCS bowl. The first scenario is obvious – if the Buckeyes end up in the national title game. Then one of these teams would be a virtual lock to replace Ohio State in the Rose Bowl. This is obviously the best case scenario for the Big Ten, having the Buckeyes play for a national championship and having two of its teams playing in Pasadena less than a week apart.

The second scenario would only apply to Michigan State, which is beating Ohio State in the Big Ten Championship Game. That would obviously put the Spartans in Pasadena, and then a 12-1 Ohio State suddenly becomes an option for the Orange Bowl as opposed to an 11-1 Oregon, or even say a 10-2 Clemson if the Orange Bowl went against the grain and didn't pick an ACC team in place of the Seminoles.

Finally, the third scenario would consist of both Northern Illinois and Fresno State failing to get through their seasons undefeated. If one of these two teams goes undefeated and finishes in the top 12 of the final BCS standings, it has to be given one of the three at-large spots in play. Right now, Fresno State is 14th in the BCS Standings, while Northern Illinois is 15th. This is why many current bowl projections list Fresno State in the Fiesta Bowl and UCF in the Sugar Bowl (remember that the AAC champion is assured a BCS at-large this season).

If none of these three scenarios pan out, then the Big Ten is probably just sending its champion to the Rose Bowl and that's it. There are only seven bowl-eligible teams from the conference at the moment and unless Northwestern beats Michigan this weekend, it'll probably stay that way, meaning the Big Ten wouldn't fill its entire allotment. This will likely be the case regardless of whether there's a BCS at-

large since there are eight bowl tie-ins.

But considering how the Big Ten handles bowl payouts through equal revenue sharing, there's a major monetary difference between having a team like Iowa play in the Heart of Dallas Bowl versus a team like Wisconsin playing in the Orange Bowl – which obviously has a much bigger payout – and not having a team playing in Dallas on New Year's Day.

Before this major shake-up in Palo Alto occurred, the Big Ten seemed to be in a decent position to have two BCS teams. It would've been even better now for the Big Ten had Oregon won since Notre Dame's loss over the weekend at Pittsburgh all but assures the Fighting Irish won't be picked for a BCS at-large.

Four weeks remain and any one of those three aforementioned scenarios can still occur. But the bowl positioning is now tighter and the Big Ten trying to avoid two straight years without a BCS at-large team after putting two teams in BCS games for each of the previous seven years prior is now in more jeopardy than before.