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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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Five days from now, one of college football's biggest rivalries reconvenes when No. 3 Ohio State and Michigan tangle in "The Big House." For the Buckeyes, there's plenty at stake and this is something that will be examined further next week.

As for the Wolverines, this is the team that this space will focus on here. Because right now, things appear to be a mess up there in Ann Arbor, Mich.

The 2013 season started out promising for Michigan after it opened up 5-0. It didn't necessarily look impressive reaching that 5-0 mark, but a win's a win. Even after losing in four overtimes to Penn State, the Wolverines beat Indiana at home the following week and entered their Nov. 2 showdown against Michigan State at 6-1 and ranked higher than the Spartans.

But then came November. Then came the humiliation Michigan received from its in-state rival. Then came the Wolverines' first loss in "The Big House" during the Brady Hoke era on Nov. 9 to Nebraska. Michigan did pull off a miraculous win at Northwestern that took a last-second field goal for the ages and three overtimes and holding a 21-7 lead at Iowa last weekend, things appeared to get back on track.

Yet the Wolverines' second half against the Hawkeyes could only be described as disastrous. A lot of that has to be credited to Iowa's defense, which held Michigan to just 45 yards of total offense in that second half. But 45 total yards? Michigan? That's a major issue.

Here are the Wolverines sitting at 7-4 entering their annual showdown with Ohio State and they're probably looking at 7-5 after Saturday, which would include a 3-5 mark in Big Ten play. For some teams like an Iowa or Minnesota, winning 7-8 games this season has to be viewed a success. By Michigan's standards, it can't be viewed that way.

Last season was one that turned out to be very predictable. Michigan went 8-5, but the eight wins came in games it was expected to win and the five losses were games the Wolverines were expected to lose. This season has been a step back, which is kind of remarkable considering how much was said about Michigan being able to implement more of what offensive coordinator Al Borges wanted to do upon arriving in Ann Arbor with Hoke.

Michigan might still end up in a game like the Buffalo Wild Wings Bowl, presumably against Texas and former defensive coordinator Greg Robinson. This isn't to say Hoke or anyone on his staff shouldn't be retained, but if given the parameters that surround a program like Michigan, it's fair to say Hoke might be on the hot seat in 2014.

The Wolverines might not be favored to win the Big Ten's East Division next season, but in terms of talent, Michigan's the one team that will be capable of hanging with Ohio State. One thing Hoke has done tremendously well is recruit. Those high-caliber high-school players he's bringing in are about to become upper-classmen. By this point in time, Michigan should be considered a heavy favorite to win the Big Ten, yet might not be in Year Four.

A busy offseason awaits Hoke and his staff in Ann Arbor. If the offense continues to regress like it has – and it's worth mentioning that Devin Gardner was granted an extra season of eligibility, so he'll be back in 2014 – then the Wolverines are going to continue struggling and changes might need to be made. Some of this is on coaching, some of it on the players.

Maybe it changes for the better on Saturday, or in Michigan's bowl game, or next year. Or maybe it never changes and the offense remains complacent. Either way, the pressure's growing on Hoke because fans up there are going to become more impatient with more performances like the ones the Wolverines have had in November.