

# 12/9/2013: State of the Big Ten, Volume 110 (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*

This might sound a bit bizarre, but the Big Ten is going to benefit long-term from what took place in Indianapolis over the weekend.

Michigan State put the finishing touches on a surreal season last Saturday, defeating Ohio State 34-24 in the Big Ten Championship Game. This is the first time since the 1987 season that the Spartans will be playing in the Rose Bowl, where Stanford awaits them.

Some might argue this hurt the perception surrounding the conference currently, and for the time being, maybe it has. Losing that game cost the Buckeyes a chance at not only playing for the national title, but preventing the SEC from being able to attempt landing its eight consecutive crystal ball on Jan. 6. Ohio State instead is playing in the Orange Bowl against Clemson, which isn't a terrible consolation prize, yet also not what Urban Meyer and his team had in mind this season.

Folks in the South are probably boasting over the fact that Auburn was able to get into the national title game against Florida State following an entire week of debate about whether a 1-loss SEC team should jump an undefeated Big Ten team like

Ohio State. For those in Big Ten country, let them.

Michigan State winning Saturday is beneficial for the future of the Big Ten. It really is. Because now it's no longer "Ohio State and everybody else." That perception is gone at a critical time with Maryland and Rutgers joining the Big Ten next year and the league realigning its divisions East and West.

This game that happened Saturday won't be a future Big Ten title game. The Spartans and Buckeyes are going to share the same division and probably continue butting heads for the foreseeable future unless Michigan's able to flex its muscles like it traditionally has. Ohio State might still play in each of the next five Big Ten title games, but now there's more thought given to the idea that maybe Mark Dantonio is building something in East Lansing that's worth following on a national level.

That in essence is also going to create opportunities for whoever emerges in that West Division, because teams like Wisconsin and Iowa and even Minnesota all had decent 2013 seasons.

And let's say Michigan State beats Stanford on New Year's Day. Sure, it's not beating a SEC team. But the Pac-12 was considered for most of the season to be as good (if not better) than the SEC and to have the Big Ten's best team be able to beat what the Pac-12 offers will help create a different perception surrounding the conference. Teams like Ohio State and Wisconsin have had chances in recent seasons to become the face of the Big Ten over recent years, but aside from one Rose Bowl win by the Buckeyes in 2010 haven't been able to deliver.

Jim Delany might not see one of his teams come away with that crystal ball next month. But the sentiment about the Big Ten now has a chance to be altered in a more positive light over

time and it's going to be intriguing to see whether Michigan State's present success ends up being a sign of things to come.