

3/3/2014: State of the Big Ten, Volume 122 (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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There was quite a stir in Big Ten country over the past week when there were rumors surfacing about the league contemplating a move where football games would be played on Fridays. Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany squashed those rumors recently by saying scheduling Friday Big Ten games isn't going to become a norm anytime soon (if ever).

But it wasn't the rumors itself that were fascinating. After all, there are other conferences like the ACC and Pac-12 that have no issue playing games on Fridays. What was fascinating was seeing how vehemently opposed fans of all 12 (soon to be 14) schools were to the idea even being proposed in the first place.

Right now, there is one Big Ten football game played on a day other than Saturday and that's when Iowa and Nebraska meet annually on Black Friday. Seeing how that's technically considered a holiday (or at least it falls on a holiday weekend anyway), this obviously won't be done away with. But the discussions weren't so much about that as they were, say, having a Friday night game in October between Purdue and Penn State.

This is what made fans lash out at the idea of games being

played on any other day besides Saturday. The other argument that was made was hearing those who said Fridays should be reserved for high-school football. Perhaps they should be, but that's not keeping other aforementioned leagues from scheduling Friday games themselves. They look at it as an opportunity to gain a national audience.

In principle, the Big Ten is probably wise sticking to Saturdays. At the very least, it's sticking to its constituencies. But as mentioned before in this column long ago, the idea of weekday games is something that's only going to get brought up again and again until it happens and that's regardless of what fans think.

The reality is this – money is at the epicenter of decisions such as this. The Big Ten has its own network that could carry a Friday night game should the conference so choose to schedule one. This is the direction other conferences following the Big Ten's lead on creating its own channels are going to do.

What's keeping the Pac-12 Networks from one day having a Friday night game between Oregon State and Colorado? What's keeping the SEC from having a Friday night game between Kentucky and Ole Miss on its new network? The answers to those questions won't seem as obvious 5-10 years from now if those networks flourish like BTN has.

Think about it. If the Big Ten really wanted, that Purdue-Penn State game in October could be scheduled for a Friday night if the conference wanted that platform to lure in new viewers. Again, it probably won't happen anytime soon. But who's to say it won't someday be done.

Sure, fans might not like it. But it's not as though fans and their tailgating priorities are being placed front and center on schools' agendas to begin with. The media would probably hate it because that would mean tighter deadlines that

particular week. But no one really cares how it impacts reporters.

If a profit can be made, an investment will someday happen and quite honestly, the Big Ten might need to consider giving this further thought if for no other reason than it allows the conference to keep up with the joneses. Games in prime time (no matter what day of the week) are going to be of benefit to college football programs and the Big Ten and its members are no exception.