

# 3/10/2014: State of the Big Ten, Volume 123 (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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When Selection Sunday comes around this weekend, there should be seven teams from the Big Ten that get selected for the NCAA Tournament.

Now this is of course assuming none of the teams between 8th-12th win the Big Ten Tournament this week in Indianapolis. But the top seven teams in the league all deserve it. That includes Iowa. That includes Nebraska. That includes Minnesota.

Let's start with Iowa and get this straight now – the Hawkeyes will be dancing. Even if they were to inexplicably lose to Northwestern on Thursday in the first round of the Big Ten Tournament, Iowa has done enough to warrant a bid (more than it did last year when it ended up returning to the NIT). Wins over teams like Ohio State and Michigan will do that for you, especially when one of them wins the conference outright like the Wolverines did.

Now the Hawkeyes put themselves in a tough bind dropping to the No. 6 seed in this week's tourney. Had Iowa done enough to obtain a first round bye and only needed to play three games in three days to win the event, more people would be optimistic about the Hawkeyes' chances of winning and

assembling a run that could carry over into the NCAA Tournament. Nevertheless, Iowa remains a team to keep an eye on next week when it gets the opportunity to step out of Big Ten play.

Then there's Nebraska. The Cornhuskers sent shockwaves across college basketball over the weekend when they upset No. 9 Wisconsin at home. That win allowed Nebraska to finish fourth in the league outright and earn a first round bye (the Cornhuskers will play either Purdue or Ohio State on Friday). What Tim Miles has done with that program is nothing short of remarkable and at this point in time, "Nebrasketball" has done enough to get in.

Finally, there's Minnesota. Yes, the Golden Gophers still have a little work to do, but a win over Penn State on Thursday should be enough now. Even if Minnesota were to lose to Wisconsin in the quarterfinals, the Golden Gophers already have a win over the Badgers, as well as wins over the Buckeyes and Hawkeyes to their name. They also played teams such as Syracuse and Arkansas down to the wire back in November and have a better RPI and better strength of schedule than some of the other bubble teams being considered to be "in" at the moment.

There are these teams, then there are the perennials. Michigan won the Big Ten going away this season and saw both head coach John Beilein and guard Nik Stauskas get proper recognition from their peers. Wisconsin (even with the loss over the weekend at Nebraska) remains a threat to win the Big Ten Tournament and potentially be a 1 or 2 seed in the NCAA Tournament. The Badgers did more than enough out of conference on top of finishing second.

Everyone continues to talk about Michigan State. Now that the Spartans are back at full strength, it's time to see if they'll live up to that hype. Even Ohio State, who had a down season by its standards, is still going to be a threat this

week, as well as in the weeks to come.

The Big Ten remains the toughest conference in the country, even though other conferences like the Big 12, ACC and even the American have all narrowed the gap a little. Michigan and Purdue were really the only outliers in a league where everyone else won at least six games and lost at least six games and even then, they only separated (albeit in different directions) fairly recently.

It will be fascinating to not only watch this Big Ten Tournament this week, but how all seven likely tourney teams stack up with everybody else over the weeks ahead.