

# 3/24/2014: State of the Big Ten, Volume 125 (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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While this season isn't quite over yet with three Big Ten teams still playing in the NCAA Tournament, one thing has become clear over the past week regarding the conference's future. The drop-off between the past few years and the upcoming 2014-15 season will be quite evident.

Now that's not to say there won't be good teams. With the exception of losing Ben Brust, Wisconsin will bring back everyone else of importance and could be a preseason top 5 team come November. There's also a team like Illinois that should be able to use its recent NIT run as a springboard into 2014-15.

But the drop-off will be noticeable, mainly because of the players leaving or potentially leaving once this season ends. Indiana is the most obvious Exhibit A after what transpired Monday in Bloomington with three players being released from scholarships – and this is after Noah Vonleh declared he would leave for the NBA after a freshman season where he led the Big Ten in rebounding.

Ohio State loses Aaron Craft, but the Buckeyes have also seen Amadeo Della Valle opt to leave early so he can play professionally overseas and they are reportedly losing

LaQuinton Ross early to the NBA. Michigan State is probably losing Gary Harris on top of Adreian Payne graduating and who knows what will happen at Michigan over the coming weeks with players like Nik Stauskas, Glenn Robinson III and Mitch McGary.

Just from a talent perspective, there's going to be a decline and that's with the Big Ten adding both Maryland and Rutgers next season (although Rutgers isn't likely to bring much to the table right away in terms of talent). It's just a reality.

Last year was the best the conference had been in 20-plus years. This year has been the deepest the Big Ten has been in recent memory. Next year won't compare to either. It just won't.

A lot still has to happen over the next couple of months before any finalities can be made about individual teams. More players are going to transfer and some might even transfer in to some of these teams. But collectively speaking, there's a lot going away once this season ends two weeks from now in Arlington, Texas.

Two types of teams are best equipped for the short-term. One type is a team like Wisconsin or Michigan who boded well this year and will potentially return quite a bit next year. The other type is the team building off transfers. This is how Nebraska made the NCAA Tournament in two years under Tim Miles and how a team like Illinois (maybe Indiana depending on who comes in) will likely return to the dance in 2015.

The ones that stand pat – or at least appear to be standing pat – are the ones that decline. This is how Purdue has fallen and how Ohio State had as poor a year as it has had under Thad Matta.

If there's good news for some of these programs, it's that they have time to adjust their rosters accordingly. Otherwise, the middle of the pack is going to be loaded and will result

in teams faring worse than expected.