

9/6/2010: State of the Big Ten, Volume 2 (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

One week into the 2010 college football season, the Big Ten has to feel good about itself with teams compiling a 9-2 overall record.

Three of those programs to win last week are three of the most storied college football programs nationally – Michigan, Ohio State, and Penn State. On Sept. 11, the Big Ten – and more specifically, these three teams – will be in the spotlight.

Michigan travels to South Bend, Ind., to renew its annual rivalry with Notre Dame. Ohio State will tangle with Miami (Fla.) at The Horseshoe in the first meeting between the two teams since the Buckeyes won the 2003 Fiesta Bowl. Penn State heads to Tuscaloosa, Ala., to revive a past rivalry with Alabama, who is the defending national champion.

Let's be honest – the Big Ten is going to be judged heavily on how the Wolverines, Buckeyes, and Nittany Lions all perform in five days. Sure, Iowa plays an annual foe in Iowa State at Kinnick Stadium as well, but that game pales in comparison nationally to those other three contests.

Not only are Michigan, Ohio State, and Penn State all iconic college football programs, but so are the teams they are

facing. That's what makes Sept. 11 a big day for the conference.

The Wolverines are facing a Fighting Irish squad trying to revitalize itself under new head coach Brian Kelly. Not only that, but for a non-conference rivalry, this Michigan-Notre Dame game is as good as it gets. The Wolverines have won 878 games in their history, more than any other Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) team. Meanwhile, the Fighting Irish have won 838 games.

Since 1978, these two programs have faced each other every September sans a two-year hiatus during the 2000 and 2001 seasons. Prior to the Big Ten expanding, the two schools had signed a deal back in 2007 that would allow this rivalry to continue on an annual basis through 2031. In fact, next year's meeting in Ann Arbor, Mich., will be the first-ever night game held inside The Big House.

Both programs have been on the decline the past few seasons, but with both sitting at 1-0 entering this week's match-up, this game could potentially make one season and break the other.

Moving on to Ohio State's game with Miami, it is probably a bigger game for the Hurricanes than it is the Buckeyes. Miami is a program that has climbed back up the college football ladder, and a win in Columbus would vault the Hurricanes into a legit national championship contender for the first time in years.

As for Ohio State, this is easily the most challenging non-conference game it has in 2010. While Miami is attempting to become a name to be reckoned with in college football again, the Buckeyes already are that force.

A loss to the Hurricanes wouldn't destroy dreams of a sixth consecutive outright or shared Big Ten crown, but it would give Ohio State that "black eye" it seemed to finally fend off

last January after defeating Oregon in the 2010 Rose Bowl.

Lose this game, and the Buckeyes could still spend a second straight New Year's Day in Pasadena, Calif. But all the negativity and doubt that recently surrounded Ohio State nationally would resurface.

A win over Miami would likely make the remainder of the Buckeyes' 2010 season a two-game season with road contests at Wisconsin on Oct. 16 and Iowa on Nov. 20. Of these three marquee match-ups on Sept. 11, this is the one the Big Ten has the best chance of winning.

Finally, we have Penn State and Alabama. As stated before, Alabama won the 2010 BCS National Championship Game, and will come into this game as the nation's top-ranked team. Its head coach, Nick Saban, once coached five seasons in the Big Ten at Michigan State.

This match-up between the Nittany Lions and Crimson Tide is as "old school" as it gets. The two programs played each other every season from 1981-1990, back when Penn State was still an independent. They also met in the 1979 Sugar Bowl, an Alabama victory that still haunts the Penn State faithful to this day.

The Nittany Lions will be an underdog entering this game. But should Joe Paterno's squad leave Bryant-Denny Stadium with an upset win, it would give Penn State the confidence it might need to enter hostile Big Ten environments such as Iowa and Ohio State later in the season.

A win in this game would also give the Big Ten some bragging rights on the SEC in 2010, after Northwestern defeated Vanderbilt last weekend, 23-21.

Any time Michigan, Ohio State, or Penn State plays in a marquee college football game, it peaks the interest of the hardcore college football fan. When all three play these sorts of contests all on the same Saturday, it becomes make or break

for the Big Ten.

The other seven Big Ten teams playing on Sept. 11 could all prevail, but if the Wolverines, Buckeyes, and Nittany Lions all lose, the national criticism towards the conference will be enormous. This will be the case, even though Ohio State is the only one of these three playing at home and against a lower-ranked opponent.

Sept. 11 is an important date for the conference. Any success that Michigan, Ohio State, or Penn State has this coming weekend will be what the Big Ten needs in order to remain an elite conference, if not become the elite conference in college football.

Big Ten divisions announced (updated)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com



Iowa AD Gary Barta reacts to Wednesday's announcement of Big Ten

divisions

The Big Ten divisions for football in 2011 and beyond are out, and to the delight of Iowa athletics director Gary Barta, it worked out as well as he had hoped for the Hawkeyes.

While the two divisions haven't been named yet, Iowa does know now who it will be in a division with, as well as its 2011 and 2012 schedules, all of which were formally announced by the Big Ten on Wednesday.

The Hawkeyes will play in a division with Michigan, Michigan State, Minnesota, Nebraska, and Northwestern. From Barta's perspective, it worked out well in the sense that Iowa kept two of its three main rivals.

"If you go back from the very beginning, if you had told me it would have turned out the way it did, I don't know that we could have come out with a better outcome for the Big Ten, but also from Iowa's perspective," Barta said outside Carlos O'Kelly's in Iowa City shortly after an appearance on "Hawk Talk with Kirk Ferentz." "I think it accomplishes everything we would like it to."

As a result, however, the Hawkeyes' rivalry with Wisconsin (which had been protected) will no longer be annual. Iowa's 2011 and 2012 schedules will feature interdivisional games against Indiana, Penn State, and Purdue. The Hawkeyes and Boilermakers will be "protected" rivals, meaning they will always play every season under this new format.

There is a bit of irony here, as Iowa and Purdue do not play each other in 2010.

As for why the divisions weren't split right down the middle geographically, Barta said "it was never going to work out that way."

"We put everything on the table. We talked about everything,"

Barta added. "But quickly, we realized it was probably going to have to split, not just East to West, not just North to South, but a mixture of balance."

In addition to Wisconsin no longer being in Iowa's near future, neither will Illinois nor Ohio State. As a matter of fact, the Hawkeyes and Fighting Illini will now go the entire first term of President Barack Obama's presidency without facing each other. Illinois won the last meeting on Nov. 1, 2008, three days before Obama was elected.

Barta also announced the Hawkeyes' non-conference slates through 2014 should not be affected by the changes in scheduling. This is important to note because Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany stated the earliest that the conference would pursue a ninth game would be in 2015.

As far as the Big Ten schedules look, Iowa will have a bye week in 2011 before opening conference play on Oct. 8 of that year against Penn State. The Hawkeyes will then play four of five at home before finishing the season with two straight road games against Purdue and Nebraska.

Iowa and Nebraska will meet in the season finales of both 2011 and 2012.

"We continue to look forward to the inclusion of Nebraska into the Big Ten and we, as Hawkeyes, look forward to competing with them every year," Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said in a statement released Wednesday.

The Hawkeyes will open Big Ten play in 2012 with Minnesota at home in the battle for Floyd of Rosedale after playing two straight against the Golden Gophers at TCF Bank Stadium in Minneapolis.

Barta also took the time to mention what he considered "misinformation" being sent around nationally about the Big Ten looking into preserving competitive balance by splitting

Ohio State and Penn State apart from Michigan and Nebraska. Those four programs are in the top seven for all-time victories in Division-I.

“We got great consideration in this whole process,” Barta said. “We had equal voice. It was a transparent and open discussion. It was great discussion.

“I never once felt like somehow, Iowa was being left out. Somebody asked me that about two or three weeks ago, and I was sort of puzzled by the comment because that just isn’t the case.”

The final result may not be what some Hawkeye fans were hoping for, but both Barta and Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany feel the best interests of the conference as a whole have been met.

“While we understand that no final alignments could possibly satisfy all of our constituents, we believe that we have achieved a very exciting result,” Delany said in a statement released by the Big Ten on Wednesday.

[Iowa’s complete 2011 and 2012 schedules](#)

8/30/2010: State of the Big Ten, Volume 1 (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

With all the news regarding Nebraska joining the Big Ten in 2011 and how divisions are going to be divided once the conference expands to 12 teams, the Big Ten appears to be at a crossroads.

A topic that will be brought up heavily over the course of the next couple of weeks is scheduling. With the college football season officially starting in three days, this is a good time to explore one component of scheduling that may start to evolve in the Big Ten.

Three teams – Indiana, Minnesota, and No. 2 Ohio State – open their seasons Thursday night. Now, the Golden Gophers are playing at Middle Tennessee State. But both the Hoosiers and Buckeyes are playing at home. Indiana plays host to Towson, while Ohio State welcomes Marshall to The Horseshoe.

It should be noted that the Hoosiers opened their 2009 season with a home game on a Thursday night against Eastern Kentucky. But now with the Buckeyes also taking part in starting their home slate two days earlier than normal, the trend of games featuring Big Ten teams being played on Thursdays might just continue to evolve.

Right now, the Big Ten does not feature its conference games played on a day other than Saturday. In fact, it is the only BCS conference that is not doing this in 2010. Once the Cornhuskers join the Big Ten and give it 12 teams, there is no reason to think this would not change over time.

Here are five different Thursday night games that will air on ESPN this fall: Sept. 9 – Auburn at Mississippi State (SEC), Sept. 30 – Texas A&M at Oklahoma State (Big 12), Oct. 14 – South Florida at West Virginia (Big East), Oct. 21 – UCLA at Oregon (Pac-10), Oct. 28 – Florida State at North Carolina State (ACC).

In addition, on Oct. 7, Big Ten newcomer Nebraska will be playing a Big 12 game at Kansas State.

Granted, all of these are games airing on ESPN. But look at how all of the other BCS conferences are involved.

Even with the Big Ten Network, which launched three years ago today, this is something that could start happening on Thursdays. Not just the first week of September, but during the middle of the season when conference games are played.

Now consider all the hoopla the past couple of weeks about Michigan and Ohio State possibly being put into separate divisions and moving up "The Game" to the middle of the season.

Imagine the build-up if those two things happen, and the game is scheduled prime time for a Thursday night on ESPN or the Big Ten Network. Think of the exposure both teams would get. Think of how that would be the one sporting event in the spotlight that evening.

This thought has to be in the minds of those who support the idea of splitting the two up.

Before sweeping this idea under the rug, consider that Michigan is playing Notre Dame next season in the first-ever night game played at The Big House. In addition to that, consider that Ohio State is opening its 2010 season this Thursday night.

In a day and age where the almighty dollar is the biggest factor in play, having "The Game" on a Thursday night in October suddenly does not appear as far-fetched.

Now picture other Big Ten venues, like Beaver Stadium in State College, Pa. If Penn State had a Thursday night home game against someone like Ohio State, Nebraska, or even Iowa, that would have "WhiteHouse" written all over it.

Or how about Camp Randall Stadium in Madison, Wis.? Or even Kinnick Stadium in Iowa City, Iowa? Those environments are already insane for night games. One could only imagine what those stadiums would be like if they hosted a nationally televised Thursday night contest.

Last year, Nebraska athletics director Tom Osborne told NET Television the Cornhuskers were looking into having a Thursday night game at Memorial Stadium in 2010 (Nebraska does not have one this season, however). He mentioned a plus being the football team's preparation with having a bye week the week before, plus two extra days to prepare for the following opponent after that Thursday game.

With the season now going beyond Thanksgiving, as well as having an even number of Big Ten teams starting in 2011, this can be possible when putting future schedules together.

Maybe the Big Ten does not start scheduling Thursday games in 2011, or even 2012. It might even wait until the nine-game conference schedule is in place.

However, this is something that is more likely than not on the horizon for this conference. Seeing how other major conferences already do this, it is not crazy to think the Big Ten would not consider this.

With all the rapid change happening in the Big Ten right now, this idea is something fans should think about and probably prepare themselves for.

Links to all 8/2/2010 content

This is going to be something I start doing with all my content for those who maybe didn't see all of it earlier.

Here are links from everything I posted on Monday from the 2010 Big Ten Football Media Days in Chicago, Ill.:

Video:

[Ferentz opening statement](#)

[Ferentz Q&A with national media](#)

Column:

[Big Ten Media Days: Day One observations](#)

Audio:

[Todd Blackledge](#)

[Howard Griffith](#)

[Tom Osborne, Part One](#)

[Tom Osborne, Part Two](#)

– by **Brendan Stiles**

Welcome to HawkeyeDrive.com

Hello, Hawkeye fans, and thank you for visiting my web site, *HawkeyeDrive.com*.

My name is Brendan Stiles, and I hope my name sounds familiar

to many of you. Those who have heard of me know that I once worked at *The Daily Iowan*, which in my opinion is the best college newspaper in the country, for the last five years. I spent the past three years covering Iowa football, and this past year, also covered Iowa men's basketball. It was an opportunity that I am eternally grateful for.

With this site, it is my hope that I can continue to provide you, the fans, with even more of what I have to offer as an Iowa reporter. Here at *HawkeyeDrive.com*, I will attempt to keep this site up-to-date on a daily basis while giving you all what you're bargaining for. I will write stories, blogs, cover games, press conferences, anything that is happening that impacts either football or men's basketball at the University of Iowa. In addition to my craft as a writer, I will also provide you with video from certain events, as well, as special audio podcasts with those I try to interview.

In addition, those who subscribe to *HawkeyeDrive.com* will be allowed access into live chats I will conduct on this site on a regular basis. I will provide more detail in the page labeled FAQ on how to subscribe, how much it will cost, etc. For June and July, however, all content on this site will be posted free of charge, allowing you to see for yourself what I plan to do with this site.

I'll close with this: My No. 1 goal is to make sure that when you visit *HawkeyeDrive.com*, you leave getting more than you bargained for. It is my intent to put my Journalism degree and five years of professional experience at *The Daily Iowan* to use and dedicate my time and effort into providing you all with the best coverage of Iowa football and men's basketball that I possibly can.

Thank you for visiting. I hope you all make *HawkeyeDrive.com* a part of your daily routines.

– by Brendan Stiles