

2/17/2014: State of the Big Ten, Volume 120 (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

After pulling a stunning 60-51 upset of No. 9 Michigan State over the weekend, Nebraska has suddenly put itself in the discussion of being a possible bubble team for the NCAA Tournament.

Yes, the Cornhuskers. In just the second year of the Tim Miles era, Nebraska is sitting at 6-6 in the Big Ten with two-thirds of its league schedule complete and given the remaining schedule, there's a possibility now of the Cornhuskers playing their way in.

Nebraska plays four of its final six regular season games at Pinnacle Bank Arena. The following teams still to visit Lincoln are Penn State, Purdue, Northwestern and No. 16 Wisconsin. While the Nittany Lions and Boilermakers both have wins over the Cornhuskers already to their names, Nebraska is currently in a better position than both. It also has beaten Northwestern once already and the match-up with Wisconsin is the lone regular season game against the Badgers.

Meanwhile, the two road games are Illinois and Indiana, two teams the Cornhuskers have already beaten.

But there's more to it than the schedule. Let's consider what

Nebraska has already done besides doing the unthinkable inside the Breslin Center. It also has wins already over Minnesota (who it only played once) and Ohio State.

Two of their non-conference losses came on the road at Creighton (currently ranked 11th) and Cincinnati (currently ranked seventh). Three of the Big Ten losses have been to No. 20 Michigan twice (including the lone home game Nebraska has lost all season) and at No. 15 Iowa in a game where the Hawkeyes were held to their lowest point total to date this season.

The Cornhuskers also have a star in Terran Petteway, who redshirted last season after transferring to Nebraska over from Texas Tech. Petteway is currently the Big Ten's second-leading scorer behind Indiana's Yogi Ferrell and he has become a serious candidate to be first-team all-Big Ten after the regular season concludes on March 9.

Nebraska has a very real shot at finishing with a winning record in Big Ten play after being considered by most preseason to finish dead last in the conference. The job Miles has done with that team is nothing short of remarkable considering how little it had last year and how much in shambles the program was before he arrived from Colorado State.

Miles has turned "Nebrasketball" into a worthwhile product that attracts fans and TV viewers alike. Now throw in how it's winning road games at places like Michigan State and it's becoming clear that the Cornhuskers deserve to be taken seriously.

Whether or not Nebraska actually makes the NCAA Tournament remains to be seen because even with the easier sledding ahead, the Big Ten has proven to be a brutal conference this season. At the very least, the Cornhuskers are a team that has the capability of making a deep NIT run should they not be

among the Field of 68. But by being in a position where it has won five of its last six, Nebraska has a chance to potentially make it 11 of 12 heading into the Big Ten Tournament and should that occur, the Cornhuskers would absolutely merit being a NCAA Tournament team.

Keep an eye on what's happening there in Lincoln. Not just in terms of this season and whether or not Nebraska's able to play its way in, but also with the long-term in mind, knowing that as long as Miles is in charge, the Cornhuskers are going to warrant discussion.

2/10/2014: State of the Big Ten, Volume 119 (premium)

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Last week featured the date prominently known as National Signing Day, a day where high-school football players sign letters of intent to play at schools and their coaches can finally talk about them publicly.

What made this year's edition of National Signing Day significant is that every discussion centering around the Big Ten included its two newest members that will officially be

part of the conference later this year – Maryland and Rutgers. As far as football goes, the states of Maryland and New Jersey have always been prevalent in the Big Ten recruiting landscape and will be even more so now with the additions of these two programs.

If either newbie is going to show it can succeed in the Big Ten, both Randy Edsall and Kyle Flood will need to demonstrate they can recruit well in their own states. Edsall was able to do so this year as the Terrapins' 2014 class ranks in the middle of the Big Ten and he was able to land two of the top in-state prospects there was in Maryland this year.

Flood, on the other hand, might have a harder time for two reasons. For one, he saw 12 players de-commit from his program before National Signing Day (some of those 12 players even flipped from Rutgers to other Big Ten schools). The other is New Jersey gets recruited more heavily by other Big Ten teams than Maryland does.

Some of New Jersey's top high school players are joining the Big Ten. But instead of becoming Scarlet Knights, they're becoming Wolverines, Buckeyes and Nittany Lions instead. They're joining teams that are going to share a division with Rutgers going forward. This is not a good sign for Flood or Rutgers, which seems to have different bits of drama unfold every week in Piscataway.

Think about the schools that would probably be on a similar level to Rutgers. Schools like Iowa, Maryland, Minnesota, Nebraska, Ohio State, Penn State and Wisconsin that like Rutgers, are the only Big Ten programs in their respective states. All seven of them have proven they can land their top in-state players without issue. Rutgers hasn't reached that point yet and will struggle in the Big Ten until it does. That's just a fact.

Recruiting is the lifeblood to successful college football and

basketball programs and last week was a major reminder of that. Now that Maryland and Rutgers are about to become members of the Big Ten, it's important to look at what they're able to do right now because it's going to say a lot about them in the future. Both played in bowl games last season, but right now, only one looks stable and that's despite having a major deficit in its athletics department.

Regardless, the first seasons for both the Terrapins and Scarlet Knights will be intriguing to watch unfold this coming fall. It's those years that follow which don't have an intrigue level established yet.

Five Hawkeyes to participate in 2014 NFL Combine

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Five former Iowa football players – two offensive, three defensive – have been invited to and will participate in the 2014 NFL Combine being held later this month at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis, Ind. This news was first reported by [Frank Cooney of NFLDraftScout.com](#).

All three of Iowa's linebackers – Christian Kirksey, James Morris and Anthony Hitchens – were invited, as were tight end C.J. Fiedorowicz and offensive lineman Conor Boffeli. Kirksey and Fiedorowicz also participated in the Senior Bowl held last month in Mobile, Ala.

Workouts at the NFL Combine begin Feb. 22, which is the date

both Fiedorwicz and Boffeli are scheduled to work out along with the other tight ends and offensive linemen to receive invites. The three linebackers will conduct their workouts in Indianapolis on Feb. 24.

No official date has been set yet for Iowa's Pro Day in Iowa City, but it is typically held in late March. The 2014 NFL Draft takes place May 8-10.

Iowa football recruiting: Class of 2014

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – The Iowa Hawkeyes' 2014 recruiting class consists of 19 players – 18 that were recruited out of high school and one player who transferred from a junior college. Eighteen of the 19 recruits signed National Letters of Intent on Wednesday and Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said the last one is expected to become official on Thursday.

This is the official list of recruits sent out by Iowa on Wednesday of those who have signed national letters of intent to play for the Hawkeyes.

(UPDATE: The last addition to the 2014 recruiting class came Thursday as expected from running back Markel Smith. This list is now updated to include him.)

Mick Ellis K 5-9, 190 lbs. *Allen, Texas*

Jalen Embry DB 6-0 184 lbs. *Detroit, Mich.*

Terrence Harris DE 6-3 250 lbs. *Englewood, N.J.*

Parker Hesse LB 6-3 215 lbs. ***Waukon, Iowa***

C.J. Hilliard RB 5-10 185 lbs. *Cincinnati, Ohio*

Josh Jackson DB 6-1 170 lbs. *Lake Dallas, Texas*

Marcel Joly DB 5-11 180 lbs. *Hyattsville, Md.*

Dillon Kidd P 6-1 210 lbs. *Deerfield Beach, Fla. (El Camino CC)*

Lucas LeGrand OL 6-5 260 lbs. ***Dubuque, Iowa***

Aaron Mends LB 6-0 200 lbs. *Kansas City, Mo.*

Matt Nelson DE 6-8 255 lbs. ***Cedar Rapids, Iowa***

Ben Niemann LB 6-3 205 lbs. *Sycamore, Ill.*

Jameer Outsey DE 6-3 225 lbs. *Somerset, N.J.*

Keegan Render OL 6-4 315 lbs. ***Indianola, Iowa***

Jay Scheel WR 6-1 180 lbs. ***Mount Auburn, Iowa***

Markel Smith RB 5-11 210 lbs. *Kirkwood, Mo.*

Miles Taylor DB 6-0 185 lbs. *Washington, D.C.*

Omar Truitt DB 5-11 180 lbs. *Fort Washington, Md.*

Tyler Wiegers QB 6-4 215 lbs. *Lake Orion, Mich.*

[2014 Class](#)

TRANSCRIPT: [Coach Ferentz – 02 05 14](#) (courtesy UI Sports Info.)

2/3/2014: State of the Big Ten, Volume 118 (premium)

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The biggest headline last week not only in the world college football, but all of college sports, came from Northwestern. A group of players led by former quarterback Kain Colter went through the formal procedures last week to get student-athletes recognized as employees and allow them to form labor unions.

For now, nothing is going to happen. The NCAA has already come out and made clear that its student-athletes aren't being recognized as university employees. But in a day and age where there is constant conversation about paying players, particularly those playing sports like football and basketball, the story doesn't stop here. This is only an issue that will continue to be discussed in the future.

Now that Colter and some of his former teammates at Northwestern have taken such steps, one has to wonder what happens if their efforts prove successful. Not now obviously, but over the long haul. It's the sort of thing that could shape the future of college sports.

Whether or not student-athletes should get paid is such a hot button issue that there are plenty of arguments on both sides of it. Here's the reality regardless of one's viewpoint. Those who attend school on athletic scholarships get everything taken care of for them – tuition, room and board, meals, etc.

Conversely, the amount of time these same student-athletes spend studying full time and working on their athletic craft is much greater than any regular individual attending college might realize. That's not to make excuses for them. It's a reality.

Colter and his posse are well intended in the sense that they're not pursuing this to get back at Northwestern, but rather the NCAA. They want a voice.

If they get that voice though, it opens up a Pandora's box that no one is ready for or has established a resolution for. The reason nothing has happened yet is because there's so much gray area and so much uncertainty that exists by going down a foreign path like this.

The reason why amateurism continues to exist, no matter how much of a farce it appears to be, is because it's all the NCAA has ever known. Until people associated with the NCAA are willing to roll the dice on something like this, nothing will change. Just look at the College Football Playoff starting next year. If it didn't already exist at the FCS level, it probably would've never materialized at the FBS level.

Two big questions need to be answered though before student-athletes ever get paid like being proposed. One is obviously how that money gets distributed between revenue and non-revenue sports because this doesn't work if every student-athlete doesn't get a piece of the pie. The other question is what happens when the IRS gets involved since the whole goal of what Colter and other Northwestern players are seeking right now is unionization? What happens when the IRS wants a

bit of that money that would supposedly be handed to players like Colter?

There are so many layers that need thorough discussion. Colter should be respected for continuing to push dialogue about this issue because it's something that weighs on the minds of everyone in college sports. But until the time is taken to address everything one-by-one, nothing will happen and this is why no one should foresee anything happening anytime soon.

1/27/2014: State of the Big Ten, Volume 117 (premium)

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Four weeks into league play, no team has impressed more than the Michigan Wolverines.

After beating in-state rival Michigan State 80-75 over the weekend, Michigan now remains the Big Ten's only unbeaten team in league play at 7-0. By emerging victorious over the then-No. 3 Spartans in East Lansing, the Wolverines became the first team since the 1986-87 Iowa Hawkeyes to win three consecutive games against top 10 teams.

As a result of that, Michigan saw itself skyrocket from 21st

in last week's AP poll to 10th in the latest poll released Monday. To put this into perspective, the Wolverines weren't even ranked nine days ago when they left Wisconsin a 77-70 winner over the then-No. 3 Badgers.

But it's not just the fact that Michigan has played like it has the last four weeks. Looking at the Big Ten race long-term, no team has itself better situated for the home stretch than the Wolverines do. They already have road wins over Minnesota, No. 24 Wisconsin and No. 7 Michigan State, plus they recently won a home game over Iowa, who is currently ranked 15th. Michigan might not play a tougher road game the rest of the season than the one it just played at Michigan State and that's something that should give it confidence going forward.

Other than a two-game stretch where they play Iowa again and then Ohio State on the road back-to-back, the Wolverines' remaining schedule is predominantly featured with games inside Crisler Center. Having won all the road games they've already won is something that will prove beneficial when the season is complete.

There are two other things to talk about here when it comes to Michigan. First is the head coaching job done by John Beilein. It's no secret he's a good coach and it never was a secret how good he is. After all, this is the same program he just coached to an appearance in the national championship game nine months ago.

But when variables such as losing both Trey Burke and Tim Hardaway, Jr., early to the NBA and losing sophomore center Mitch McGary to a season-ending back injury are factored in, it makes the job Beilein is doing this season remarkable. This is a team that lost four games (three of which came to really good teams) during non-conference play and looked like nothing more than a middle-of-the-pack Big Ten team when the month began.

Then there's the player who did return, Nik Stauskas. As long as the Wolverines continue this pace and find themselves winning the Big Ten regular season crown, Stauskas is the Big Ten Player of the Year and by a significant margin. He's the Big Ten's best player on the Big Ten's best team.

When his team has needed him in crunch time the last few weeks, the Canadian sophomore has delivered for Michigan. That leadership role Burke had at this time last year has carried over to Stauskas, who has proven this year to be more than just a 3-point threat.

Whether or not Michigan is capable enough of returning to the Final Four for the second straight season remains to be seen, but one thing has become clear now. The Wolverines just might be the team to beat now in the Big Ten. They might not be the best team, but they've jockeyed themselves into a better position now than anyone else in the league can claim to have and that's something that will be significant in the final days and weeks before the Big Ten Tournament.

1/20/2014: State of the Big Ten, Volume 116 (premium)

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As far as the conference's state in basketball is concerned, the Big Ten currently features a trio of top 10 teams, proving the league is still among the nation's best in the sport.

Two of those teams are expected. Michigan State is currently third as it sits alone in first place at 6-0 in Big Ten play despite being enamored with injuries. Wisconsin's start to the season enabled the Badgers to reach this point and they're now ranked ninth even after losing a pair of conference games last week to Indiana and Michigan (now ranked 21st).

Then there's Iowa. Yes, Iowa. The Hawkeyes moved up four spots in this week's AP poll, six spots in this week's Coaches poll and find themselves ranked 10th in both polls. As far as the AP poll is concerned, this is Iowa's first top 10 ranking since the 2001-02 season.

That season ended with incredible disappointment for Hawkeye fans, as Iowa went from being ninth nationally when the calendar turned to 2002 to completely missing the NCAA Tournament altogether and unceremoniously being bounced from the first round of the NIT by LSU.

This is a much different circumstance. In fact, it's nothing short of remarkable how it only took Fran McCaffery four years to change the culture of Iowa basketball. When he took over in 2010, the Hawkeyes were in the Big Ten cellar. Now, they've become the league's cream of the crop.

At 15-3, Iowa is off to its best start since 1997-98, another season that ended with the disappointment of winding up in the NIT and losing in the first round to Georgia. It would take a monumental collapse by the Hawkeyes to be mentioned any further in the same sentence as either the 1997-98 or 2001-02 squads.

Right now, this is the story of the Big Ten season. It's not because Iowa has come out of nowhere to do what it's doing, but rather because the expectation of taking that next step as

a program (at least to this point of the season) has been met. Sure, the Hawkeyes won a couple of Big Ten Tournaments under former head coach Steve Alford. But again, this has a different feel to it entirely.

The odds of the Hawkeyes actually winning the Big Ten regular season crown remain slim. Unbalanced scheduling has more to do with that than anything else, really. Iowa plays three of its next four on the road (starting with that Michigan squad that just re-emerged in the AP top 25 on Monday). The Hawkeyes play Michigan twice, Michigan State twice, Illinois twice, at Indiana, at Minnesota and rematches at Carver-Hawkeye Arena against No. 17 Ohio State and Wisconsin.

In other words, they have a brutal slate still ahead of them. If Iowa somehow is able to win this league, it will have earned every bit of it facing this gauntlet.

That being said, there might not be a scarier team at the Big Ten Tournament come March. Michigan State won it two years ago, but teams like the Spartans that are regularly accustomed to playing in NCAA Tournaments don't put as much into winning conference tourneys. Conversely, a team like Iowa will go into that event as motivated as it has ever been. Then add in the type of depth McCaffery will have to work with playing three games in three days (something the Hawkeyes already did this season at the Battle 4 Atlantis) and the ingredients are there.

A lot still has to be determined, but if the season ended today, McCaffery would be the Big Ten's Coach of the Year (either him or John Beilein). Devyn Marble has arguably been the best player in the conference this season as well and would at the very least be first-team all-Big Ten.

As challenging as these next few weeks might be, there's a lot to like about this team and what's it capable of going forward.

Former DC Parker passes away

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Former Iowa defensive coordinator Norm Parker died Monday morning. He was 72.

According to a release sent out by the UI, Parker was at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics at the time of his death.

Parker was hired from Vanderbilt shortly after Kirk Ferentz became Iowa's head coach in Dec. 1998 and served 13 seasons as the Hawkeyes' defensive mastermind. Under his tutelage, a total of 24 Iowa defensive players to play under him were drafted by NFL teams between 2000-2012.

"Norm played a major and key role in any on the field success we experienced during his 13 years as our defensive coordinator," Ferentz said in a statement Monday. "More important and valuable is the strong and positive impact he had on our players, staff, support staff and fans, everyone he interfaced with during his 15 years in Iowa.

"Norm was an excellent football coach. Beyond that, he was a tremendous spouse, father and cherished friend to many."

Parker had his right foot amputated as a result of diabetic complications during the 2010 season. He announced his retirement in December 2011 before coaching his final game, which was Iowa's 2011 Insight Bowl match-up against Oklahoma.

His coaching career began in 1965 at St. John's High School in Michigan. From there, Parker went on to coach at eight

different Division-I football programs during his career, including Minnesota, Illinois and Michigan State.

Parker is survived by his second wife Linda, four children and six grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his first wife, Ginger, and son, Jeffrey. His funeral will take place Jan. 17 at St. Mary Catholic Church in Chelsea, Mich., and a memorial service in Iowa City has also been scheduled for a date still to be determined.

1/13/2014: State of the Big Ten, Volume 115 (premium)

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For the second time in three years, Penn State found itself hiring a new football coach. It made an enormous splash over the weekend hiring James Franklin away from Vanderbilt, where he had been the coach for four seasons.

During his time in Nashville, Franklin was taking the Commodores to heights unforeseen and that's what will be expected of him coaching what he called his "dream job" during his introductory press conference. His passion for coaching, as well as his passion for selling the university, was on

clear display upon first arriving in State College and has remained there.

The good news for Franklin is his predecessor, Bill O'Brien, left the cupboard somewhat full before leaving Penn State to become head coach of the NFL's Houston Texans. Franklin inherits a sophomore-to-be quarterback in Christian Hackenberg that will be considered by many to be the Big Ten's top signal-caller in 2014. The Nittany Lions also received a boost late last year when the NCAA reduced some of the sanctions it initially levied against Penn State back in July 2012.

Two things will be intriguing to watch unfold over the next few years. One is how Franklin handles the pressure of coaching at Penn State versus coaching at Vanderbilt. Because even though the Commodores are a SEC team, they were never really known for their football before Franklin got there, at least historically speaking. In contrast, Penn State has always been considered one of college football's blue-bloods, and that was even before it joined the Big Ten back in 1993.

The other thing that will be interesting to watch is Penn State's recruiting. With the scholarship reductions continuing to evaporate, one would think it's only a matter of time before the Nittany Lions start bringing in highly-touted classes again year in and year out. Franklin talked about being committed to recruiting the state of Pennsylvania, as well as the entire Eastern seaboard.

If he finds success with the latter, then Penn State's going to be in excellent hands. That's because the Eastern seaboard consists of states like Maryland and New Jersey, which feature a pair of FBS programs that will become official members of the Big Ten later this year. If Franklin finds success recruiting the areas that Maryland, Rutgers and other Eastern schools need to thrive on in order to succeed, the Nittany Lions suddenly become an annual player in the Big Ten's East Division.

On the surface, it seems as though Penn State hit a home run in hiring Franklin. The only concern might have to do with patience and how much of it Nittany Lion fans will have should Penn State show signs of struggle early in Franklin's tenure, much like it did in the beginning stages of O'Brien's two brief seasons.

The key for Penn State in the short term is continuing to tread water like it has the past two seasons. A few more 7-8 win campaigns between now and when all the sanctions are completely gone should buy Franklin enough time with the fans to gain their trust and provide evidence that he was the guy for the job. Once 2016 comes around, that's probably when the pressure first begins to mount. Until then, Franklin's in a good position and so might be Penn State.

1/6/2014: State of the Big Ten, Volume 114 (premium)

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In his team's 75-71 loss to No. 4 Wisconsin on Sunday, Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery found himself picking up two technical fouls in the second half and being ejected. This marked the second time in his coaching tenure with the

Hawkeyes that McCaffery had been ejected from the game (the other occurrence coming in an 80-60 loss to Northern Iowa during the 2011-12 season).

McCaffery said he was intentionally seeking the first technical foul, which was called with Iowa leading Wisconsin 41-39 at the under-12 timeout. But he didn't walk away and re-compose himself. Instead, he unleashed even more of a fury and was given a second technical, ejecting him altogether.

Since the game's conclusion, McCaffery has spoken publicly twice and released a statement through the UI, as did Iowa athletics director Gary Barta. No public reprimand has been handed down by the Big Ten as of late Monday afternoon, but one could still suffice.

As far as a suspension goes because contact (whether inadvertent or not) with an official did occur, that's a whole different debate. Even though McCaffery has been given a reprimand for on-court behavior from the Big Ten before (when he slammed the chair at Michigan State), the odds of him actually being suspended for a game (presumably No. 20 Iowa's next contest on Jan. 9 against Northwestern) appear slim.

Here's the bigger issue – what type of impact will McCaffery's behavior have going forward. There's a fine line that needs to be distinguished. If the matter is him defending his players and sticking up for them (even when he's wrong), that's one thing. To jeopardize their chances at success is another and the latter is what occurred in Madison on Sunday. There's no debating that point.

McCaffery isn't going to change who he is. That would've already happened two years ago if any sort of repercussion was going to influence how he acted going forward. He might not get ejected from another game again this season, but to sit here and say he needs to avoid getting technical fouls at all costs is just unrealistic. At some point this season, he'll

get more of them. Every coach probably gets at least 2-3 per season.

He might take a different approach in complaining about calls to officials. He might not. Every game is going to be its own independent variable because the officiating changes from game to game like the opposition and game plans do as well. But his overall approach isn't going to change and honestly, it shouldn't. That's not to defend what he did, but it's not as if he should morph into the exact opposite of what he was brought in to be at Iowa.

This could also potentially have an impact on recruiting. Even if he's more calm and more upbeat whenever the cameras are on McCaffery most of the time, there could still be negative recruiting used against him and against Iowa in light of this. It shouldn't be something that's the ultimate factor in a kid's decision, but it could be a potential factor.

It'll be interesting to see what sort of ramifications this has not just on McCaffery and Iowa moving forward, but also on other Big Ten coaches and their respective programs.