

12/12/2011: State of the Big Ten, Volume 46 (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 a downward spiral that lasted three-plus seasons, Tom Crean just might have finally resurrected Indiana basketball from the dregs on the Big Ten.

The Hoosiers pulled off their biggest win of the Crean era on Dec. 10, when guard Christian Watford's game-winning 3-pointer as time expired propelled Indiana to a 73-72 win over top-ranked Kentucky at Assembly Hall. As a result, the Hoosiers now sit at 9-0 and entered the top 25 for the first time since Crean took over in 2008, sitting at 18th in this week's AP poll.

Much like in football when Michigan is good, the Big Ten is better in basketball when Indiana is good. The state lives and breathes the game of basketball. Even when the Hoosiers were reeling over the past three years, Assembly Hall was still one of the most intimidating college basketball atmospheres in the country. The team was bad, but the students and fans continued to support the program.

Let's remember, Crean initially walked into a sticky situation when he left Marquette in 2008 to take over for the disgraced Kelvin Sampson. He had to literally build the program back from scratch, and to the credit of Indiana fans, they knew

being patient with Crean was necessary in order for the Hoosiers to ever return to being a legit Big Ten contender year in and year out.

Now entering Crean's fourth season in Bloomington, he finally has his guys and his team in place. The biggest prize – literally – is freshman center Cody Zeller, who will probably be the league's Freshman of the Year this season. The fact that Indiana managed to land a highly-touted in-state recruit like Zeller even in the midst of an uneventful period of time speaks volumes to the efforts Crean puts into recruiting.

It will only get better for Indiana. Next year, the Hoosiers have what many consider to be a top-5 recruiting class coming in, on top of the pieces already in place.

As far as this year's team is concerned, it's more than Zeller. Players like Watford and guard Jordan Hulls, who might be as lethal a 3-point shooter as there is in the Big Ten, are now upperclassmen. They know the system Crean put in place. They know what he wants to do night in and night out and they have the leadership that resonates with younger, talented players like a Victor Oladipo or Will Sheehey.

Now is Indiana the best team in the Big Ten? That label probably still fits Ohio State right now. But the Hoosiers are one of only two unbeaten teams in the conference at the moment (the other is Illinois, who is 10-0). Indiana is definitely a team that is capable of finishing in the league's upper half this season and being in a prime position to play in the NCAA Tournament. Yes, that's now a realistic expectation for this program again given the way it has started this season.

That is why the Hoosiers' win over Kentucky this past weekend is so significant. The progress Indiana fans were hoping to see under Crean is finally occurring, and the results of this progress are eye-opening to say the least.

Meanwhile, it appears Assembly Hall just became an even more

challenging arena to play in for the opposition now.

Parker to retire following Insight Bowl

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Iowa defensive coordinator Norm Parker will retire following the Hawkeyes' game against No. 19 Oklahoma in the 2011 Insight Bowl on Dec. 30. Parker has served as defensive coordinator during all 13 seasons of head coach Kirk Ferentz's tenure.

Parker coached from the press box during all 12 of the Hawkeyes' games this season after missing the majority of 2010 following amputation of his right foot as a result of complications from Diabetes.

Parker said the following in a statement released Sunday evening:

"I would like to announce that the 2011 Insight Bowl will be my last game as a football coach at Iowa. I would personally like to thank Gary Barta, Kirk Ferentz, the coaches, and players at Iowa, along with the fantastic fans. It has been a great time, one that myself and my entire family greatly appreciate.

"I would also like to thank the office staff, the equipment people, and a special thanks to the medical staff, as I used them enough. The entire Hawkeye community has been great.

"My wife Linda, and all the members of our family, were very

pleased to be members of the Hawkeye family. We truly enjoyed our time here. After 48 years of doing something I love, it is time to enjoy some time with the grandkids. Go Hawks!"

The following statement was also issued Sunday by Ferentz:

"Norm's contributions to our team the past 13 years are deeply appreciated, as he has had a tremendous impact on our program. As I have said publicly on many occasions, Norm is a superb defensive coach and has served as a strong role model and mentor for all of our players and our entire staff."

No timetable has been set for when a replacement for Parker will officially be named.

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By Brendan Stiles

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For the first time in its history, the Big Ten has itself 10 teams that will play in bowl games this winter. It isn't the first time the conference has had 10 teams bowl-eligible, but not all 10 teams that qualified in 2007 were privileged with a 13th football game that season.

This can be viewed in many ways and be attributed to many causes. It could be viewed as a sign that there are too many bowl games out there (35 of them to be precise). It could also be interpreted as a testament to the competitiveness those 10 teams had when playing each other.

There are basically five things that need to be noted: Michigan getting a BCS at-large, Michigan State falling to the Outback Bowl after losing the Big Ten Championship to Wisconsin, Ohio State facing Florida, the fall of Penn State in the bowl order, and Illinois getting an at-large.

Michigan, who went 10-2 this season, needed to finish in the top 14 of the final BCS Standings released Dec. 4 and ended up 13th with an invitation to the Sugar Bowl to play Virginia Tech, who also received an at-large bid. This again speaks volumes of what Brady Hoke has managed to do over the course of one year since becoming the Wolverines' head coach.

As a result of Michigan getting a BCS spot, the team who appeared to get shafted was Michigan State. Despite winning the Legends Division outright and just falling short in what was an epic Big Ten title game, the Spartans were leaped by Nebraska in the bowl order and find themselves in the Outback Bowl facing Georgia, who also lost its conference championship game over the weekend. It's a shame because Michigan State was clearly one of the league's best teams, but this is also something that's bound to happen more and more now like it has with other conferences that have title games.

Ohio State finds itself facing Florida in the Gator Bowl, and while the Urban Meyer storyline will be rampant for the next month, this match-up pales in comparison to the last time these teams met. The Gators, who were coached by Meyer, trounced the Buckeyes 41-14 in the 2007 BCS National Championship Game despite Ohio State being a heavy favorite. Five years later and these teams meet with identical 6-6 records and with new coaches (Ohio State interim Luke Fickell

will step aside for Meyer following the bowl).

The Buckeyes were one of three teams to leapfrog over Penn State despite the Nittany Lions winning a share of the Leaders Division and finishing with a 9-3 overall record. Their fall to the TicketCity Bowl, which is seventh in the Big Ten bowl order, was a direct result of the fallout and negative publicity that has surrounded the Penn State program since a Grand Jury Report revealed multiple counts of sexual abuse towards children made by a former assistant coach. Is it unfair for the current players that didn't do anything wrong? Probably. But this was speculated to happen for weeks, so it isn't a surprise that it did.

Finally, there's Illinois. The Fighting Illini started the season 6-0, but lost their last six games to finish .500 and Illinois, as a result, dismissed head coach Ron Zook last week. While they didn't land a spot in any Big Ten bowl, the Fighting Illini will be playing in the Kraft Fight Hunger Bowl against a UCLA squad dealing with similar turmoil as well.

With 10 bowl teams, the Big Ten better be ready for the scrutiny that could come its way if the struggles that showed up in last year's bowl lineup rear their ugly heads again this winter.

Big Ten football TV schedule: 2011-12 bowl season

Below is a list of the 10 bowl games this winter featuring Big Ten teams. Here is where and when you can watch each of these contests this winter:

Dec. 27:

Little Caesars Pizza Bowl – Purdue vs. Western Michigan (at Detroit, Mich.), 3:30 p.m., ESPN

Dec. 30:

Insight Bowl – Iowa vs. No. 19 Oklahoma (at Tempe, Ariz.), 9 p.m., ESPN

Dec. 31:

Meineke Car Care Bowl of Texas – Northwestern vs. Texas A&M (at Houston, Texas), 11 a.m., ESPN

Kraft Fight Hunger Bowl – Illinois vs. UCLA (at San Francisco, Calif.), 2:30 p.m., ESPN

Jan. 2:

TicketCity Bowl – No. 24 Penn State vs. No. 20 Houston (at Dallas, Texas), 11 a.m., ESPNU

Outback Bowl – No. 12 Michigan State vs. No. 18 Georgia (at Tampa, Fla.), 12 p.m., ABC

Capital One Bowl – No. 21 Nebraska vs. No. 10 South Carolina (at Orlando, Fla.), 12 p.m., ESPN

Gator Bowl – Ohio State vs. Florida (at Jacksonville, Fla.), 12 p.m., ESPN2

Rose Bowl – No. 9 Wisconsin vs. No. 6 Oregon (at Pasadena, Calif.), 4 p.m., ESPN

Jan. 3:

Sugar Bowl – No. 13 Michigan vs. No. 17 Virginia Tech (at New Orleans, La.), 7:30 p.m., ESPN

***All times listed are Central Standard Time.**

Iowa returns to Insight Bowl to face Oklahoma



The Iowa Hawkeyes will play No. 19 Oklahoma in the 2011 Insight Bowl on Dec. 30 at Sun Devil Stadium in Tempe, Ariz.

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

For the second straight year, the Iowa Hawkeyes find their season culminating with a trip to the Insight Bowl. This time around though, the opponent has a familiar face to it and the circumstances of how Iowa ended up back in this game are different.

The Hawkeyes will face No. 19 Oklahoma (9-3) on Dec. 30 at Sun Devil Stadium in Tempe, Ariz. The Sooners are led by head coach Bob Stoops, a former Iowa defensive back who was also a

finalist for the Hawkeye coaching gig when Kirk Ferentz was picked to replace Iowa icon Hayden Fry. In fact, Stoops played at Iowa while Ferentz was an assistant under Fry and the two are very close friends.

If both coaches had their way, this game would never happen as long as they both roamed their respective teams' sidelines. But on Sunday, Ferentz seemed fully aware of having to put that friendship aside for one evening, just as he had to on two occasions before when Iowa played a home-and-home while Bob's younger brother Mike Stoops was its coach.

"It's not anything I look forward to, but there are worse things to do, too," Ferentz said. "It's better than staying home. I know that."

Then there's the dynamic of how this match-up between Iowa and Oklahoma came about. The Big Ten saw a series of unforeseen events greatly impact its bowl order. As expected, the conference received two BCS bids with Wisconsin playing in the Rose Bowl after beating Michigan State in the Big Ten Championship Game over the weekend, and Michigan found itself as an at-large and will play in the Sugar Bowl as a result. Nebraska was then selected to play in the Capital One Bowl, and Big Ten runner-up Michigan State will be in the Outback Bowl.

The Insight Bowl, which rotates every other year with the Gator Bowl in the Big Ten order, was in prime position to take a 9-3 Penn State squad that won a share of the Big Ten's Leaders Division. However, the child sex abuse scandal that came to light over the past month at Penn State and ultimately led to the dismissal of Joe Paterno as its head coach played a major role in the Insight Bowl not selecting the Nittany Lions.

As a result, 7-5 Iowa, 6-6 Ohio State and 6-6 Northwestern (all of whom lost to Penn State this season) all were selected

ahead of Penn State, with the Insight Bowl opting to give the Hawkeyes a return trip to Tempe to face the Sooners later this month.

“Whenever I’m talking to bowl reps, we focus specifically on Iowa, Iowa’s fans, Iowa’s tradition and Iowa’s coaching staff,” Barta said. “So we didn’t talk at all about any other teams.”

Meanwhile, Oklahoma finds itself in this game after losing what was essentially a Big 12 title game to in-state rival Oklahoma State over the weekend, as a win would’ve given the Sooners their second straight Big 12 crown and earned them a trip to their fourth Fiesta Bowl in six years. Instead, Oklahoma limps into this game off the 44-10 drubbing it received from the Cowboys, as well as defeats at the hands of Texas Tech and Baylor this season.

The Sooners are also without their leading rusher (running back Dominique Whaley) and their leading receiver (Ryan Broyles). The loss of Broyles is the most significant, as Oklahoma is 1-2 since he tore his ACL in a win over Texas A&M. Before the injury, he had 83 catches for 1,157 yards receiving.

But even without Whaley and Broyles, the Hawkeyes will find themselves having to deal with another highly-touted quarterback this year in Oklahoma’s Landry Jones. The junior has thrown for 4,302 yards this season, as well as 28 touchdown passes and 14 interceptions, five of which have come since losing Broyles.

“It’s going to be an imposing task for us,” Ferentz said.

With the Big 12 being the designated home team for this game, Iowa will wear its white jerseys for this game while Oklahoma wears its home crimson.

Kickoff is scheduled on Dec. 30 for 9 p.m. Central Standard

Time, and the game will be televised nationally on ESPN.

2010-11 BIG TEN BOWL SCHEDULE:

Little Caesars Pizza Bowl; Detroit, Mich.

Tuesday, Dec. 27, 2011; Purdue (6-6) vs. Western Michigan (7-5); 3:30 p.m. CST; ESPN

Insight Bowl; Tempe, Ariz.

Friday, Dec. 30, 2011; Iowa (7-5) vs. Oklahoma (9-3); 9 p.m. CST; ESPN

Meineke Car Care Bowl of Texas; Houston, Texas

Saturday, Dec. 31, 2011; Northwestern (6-6) vs. Texas A&M (6-6); 11 a.m. CST; ESPN

Kraft Fight Hunger Bowl; San Francisco, Calif.

Saturday, Dec. 31, 2011; Illinois (6-6) vs. UCLA (6-7); 2:30 p.m. CST; ESPN

TicketCity Bowl; Dallas, Texas

Monday, Jan. 2, 2012; Penn State (9-3) vs. Houston (12-1); 11 a.m. CST; ESPNU

Gator Bowl; Jacksonville, Fla.

Monday, Jan. 2, 2012; Ohio State (6-6) vs. Florida (6-6); 12 p.m. CST; ESPN2

Outback Bowl; Tampa, Fla.

Monday, Jan. 2, 2012; Michigan State (10-3) vs. Georgia (10-3); 12 p.m. CST; ABC

Capital One Bowl; Orlando, Fla.

Monday, Jan. 2, 2012; Nebraska (9-3) vs. South Carolina

(10-2); 12 p.m. CST; ESPN

Rose Bowl; Pasadena, Calif.

Monday, Jan. 2, 2012; Wisconsin (11-2) vs. Oregon (11-2); 4 p.m. CST; ESPN

Sugar Bowl; New Orleans, La.

Tuesday, Jan. 3, 2012; Michigan (10-2) vs. Virginia Tech (11-2); 7:30 p.m. CST; ESPN

Grant to transfer

(Editor's note: This was originally posted Dec. 1 and has since been updated)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Iowa wide receiver Marcus Grant and offensive lineman Dan Heiar will both be leaving the UI and the football program following the conclusion of the 2011 fall semester, head coach Kirk Ferentz said in a statement released Friday.

Grant [announced via Twitter late Thursday evening](#) his decision to leave the football program and transfer closer to home. It should be noted that Ferentz bars current players from tweeting in-season. Meanwhile, Ferentz's statement said Heiar will leave school to "pursue other interests."

Grant, a true freshman, appeared in five games for the Hawkeyes this season and had one catch for 12 yards, which came in Iowa's 34-7 win over Tennessee Tech in the season-opener on Sept. 3. Heiar, who like Grant was a member of the

2011 recruiting class after transferring from Iowa Western Community College, didn't play in any games this season. Last April, Heiar was hospitalized following a single-vehicle accident that led to drunken driving charges during the summer, according to official documents.

With the departures of Grant and Heiar, Iowa has now lost three members of its 2011 recruiting class. Defensive end John Raymon left school during the middle of the season.

12/1/2011: Talkin' Hawks podcast (Championship Week edition)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Every Thursday during the 2011 football season, *HawkeyeDrive.com* will feature "Talkin' Hawks," a podcast to get you ready for the Hawkeyes' upcoming game and other college football action.

Once again, former Iowa defensive back [Chris Rowell](#) (2005-09) joins me during the final segment to help recap Iowa's 20-7 loss to Nebraska, look at what lies ahead for the Hawkeyes, preview Saturday's Big Ten Championship Game between Wisconsin and Michigan State, and give his thoughts on all the games featured in this week's [HawkeyeDrive.com Pick 'Em](#).

There will be one more edition of the "Talkin' Hawks" podcast, which will be posted later this month following the announcement of Iowa's bowl destination.

This week's podcast is approximately 90 minutes long. Enjoy.

[Talkin' Hawks podcast \(Championship Week edition\)](#)

*Intro sound byte credit to my former Daily Iowan colleague Ryan Young for putting that together.

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By Brendan Stiles

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One of the worst kept secrets recently in college football was finally revealed publicly Monday when Ohio State introduced Urban Meyer as its new head coach to replace interim man Luke Fickell. Meyer's decision to coach the Buckeyes came less than a year after announcing he was retiring from coaching, citing both health reasons and wanting to spend more time around his family.

This is a big-time hire for Ohio State, a program that was caught not obliging by the rules and found itself essentially forcing out a coach in Jim Tressel that won the school a national championship and brought the Buckeyes to six other BCS bowl appearances of record (Ohio State vacated its Sugar Bowl win over Arkansas last season).

There is irony in this hiring of Meyer, who won two national championships at Florida, one of which came at Ohio State's expense in the 2007 BCS National Championship Game. But there is also some sense in this hire, as Meyer is an Ohio native and was once a Buckeye assistant in the 1980s under former coach Earle Bruce.

In order to stay relevant in the college football landscape, Ohio State needed to make a move like this with Meyer available. As nice a guy as Fickell might be (and it's worth noting Fickell will remain as a defensive assistant on Meyer's staff next season), 6-6 isn't going to cut it in Columbus. Even if the Buckeyes go and win the Gator Bowl, or whatever bowl they wind up playing in, this was a year to forget both on the field and off of it.

Suspensions of players such as Dan "Boom" Herron and DeVier Posey hurt this team early on, as Ohio State had a pretty garbage offense during the first half of the season. Even when the Buckeyes would win a game like they did at Illinois, they had to do so by running the ball 51 times out of 55 plays from scrimmage.

That game, and the 33-29 win over Wisconsin two weeks later, are what salvaged Ohio State's season and probably made it possible for Fickell to stick around on Meyer's staff. Because even though the Buckeyes lost their last three games, they were at least competitive in all of them, and could have easily won all three of those games as well.

In other words, they never quit. Even last weekend in a 40-34 loss to Michigan, Ohio State hung in until the game's final minutes.

Even more significant was the development of freshman quarterback Braxton Miller, who will thrive in Meyer's offense. Anyone who doesn't think this is fooling themselves. Part of the reason Ohio State put itself in a position to even

play in a bowl this year is because of Miller's development from a raw freshman to one that could make plays both in and out of the pocket.

The biggest thing will be recruiting. Can Meyer lock down the state of Ohio at a time when the Buckeyes are and could still be vulnerable while other Big Ten rivals are all strong and in position to take top recruits from that state? Can Meyer bring talent he could have gotten at Florida had he remained there and bring that up from the Sunshine State to Columbus. That all remains to be seen, but this is where someone like Meyer could and should distinguish himself from other coaches in this conference.

At the end of the day, this is a good hire for Ohio State, and it's a hire that's only going to make the Big Ten stronger. Especially if Brady Hoke continues to have the success he had this season over the years to come up in Ann Arbor. Anytime Michigan and Ohio State are both strong, the Big Ten will be in the spotlight. Fair or not, that's the way it is and has been for years.

That's what should be expected over time with Meyer making this move.

McNutt headlines group of Hawkeyes honored by conference

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Iowa senior wide receiver Marvin McNutt was selected as the first-ever recipient of the Richter-Howard Receiver of the Year Award given to the Big Ten's top wideout on Monday, and was also named first-team all-Big Ten along with Illinois' A.J. Jenkins, the conference announced.

McNutt led the Big Ten in both receiving yards (averaging 105.8 yards per game) and touchdown receptions, hauling in 12 of them to set a new single-season record at Iowa. He also became Iowa's all-time leader in receiving touchdowns and receiving yards.

Joining him as a first-team honoree was junior offensive tackle Riley Reiff and senior cornerback Shaun Prater, who was a coaches' choice.

Second-team honorees included sophomore running back Marcus Coker, senior offensive guard Adam Gettis, senior defensive tackle Mike Daniels, senior defensive end Broderick Binns and junior cornerback Micah Hyde. Coker, Gettis and Daniels were all selected by the coaches, while Binns and Hyde were both chosen by the media.

Among those recognized for honorable mention were senior offensive tackle Markus Zusevics, senior punter Eric Guthrie, junior center James Ferentz, sophomore linebacker James Morris, and senior linebacker Tyler Nielsen. All but Nielsen were recognized by both coaches and media, while Nielsen was a media honorable mention.

BIG TEN ALL-FIRST TEAM:

WR Marvin McNutt (Both)

OT Riley Reiff (Both)

CB Shaun Prater (Coaches)

BIG TEN ALL-SECOND TEAM:

RB Marcus Coker (Coaches)

OG Adam Gettis (Coaches)

DT Mike Daniels (Coaches)

DE Broderick Binns (Media)

CB Micah Hyde (Media)

BIG TEN HONORABLE MENTION:

C James Ferentz (Both)

OT Markus Zusevics (Both)

LB James Morris (Both)

P Eric Guthrie (Both)

DE Broderick Binns (Coaches)

CB Micah Hyde (Coaches)

OG Adam Gettis (Media)

DT Mike Daniels (Media)

LB Tyler Nielsen (Media)

CB Shaun Prater (Media)

2011 Big Ten football TV schedule: Week Fourteen

Every week, we will post the TV schedule for all games featuring Big Ten teams. Here is where and when you can watch

them this week:

Dec. 3:

2011 Big Ten Championship Game: No. 15 Wisconsin vs. No. 11 Michigan State (at Indianapolis, Ind.), 7 p.m., Fox

***All times listed are Central Standard Time.**