

4/1/2013: State of the Big Ten, Volume 93 (premium)

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By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

To only have one Big Ten team represented in this year's Final Four probably wasn't what Commissioner Jim Delany envisioned for his conference this season. But after a season full of incredible contests night after night, one Big Ten team remains – Michigan.

Not only are the Wolverines still alive and well unlike the rest of their Big Ten brethren, but Michigan's chances appear to be decent with a match-up against a fellow No. 4 seed in Syracuse in the Final Four, then (should it win) getting the winner of Louisville vs. Wichita State.

It probably shouldn't be too surprising to see the Wolverines get this far. After all, Michigan at one point this season was ranked No. 1 nationally. But over the course of the last two months, to see this team be the only one from the Big Ten still standing is remarkable.

This is a team that caught numerous bad breaks over the final month of the regular season. The Wolverines lost a game to Wisconsin where a 3-pointer from half-court had to be made in order to force overtime. They also blew a double-digit lead on the road against Penn State.

Yet on the season's final day, Michigan had a chance to create a four-way share for the Big Ten crown and missed doing so by inches. Literally, by inches. Instead, the Wolverines finished tied for fourth and because of that aforementioned loss to Wisconsin, didn't have a first-round bye in the Big Ten Tournament and ended up losing to the Badgers again in Chicago.

But here's what makes Michigan special. For one, the talent on this roster is by far the best John Beilein has had in his six-year tenure up in Ann Arbor. There isn't really anything to add to the list of accomplishments for guard Trey Burke, who might probably end up being named National Player of the Year. But the Wolverines are getting big performances from big players.

Whether it's Burke or Tim Hardaway, Jr., or Glenn Robinson III or Nik Stauskas or Mitch McGary (who is on an absolute tear right now), this is a team with big-time players that are stepping up in crucial moments.

And looking at the résumés of the four Final Four teams this weekend, Michigan's is solid across the board. First, it had to knock out Nate Wolters and South Dakota State, then ended up thrashing VCU in a game many thought could be the best of the entire tournament.

Then came the Sweet 16, with Burke hitting that 3-pointer to force overtime with top-seeded Kansas before Michigan pulled away with the win. Finally, this past weekend, the Wolverines pulverized Florida much like they did VCU one week earlier.

Michigan might not end up winning its first national championship since 1989 next week, but the Big Ten has to feel good about this being the school representing it in the Final Four. It's a good story and one that will be told for many years in Ann Arbor should the victors indeed be valiant in Atlanta.

Greenwood honored at Heart of Gold Gala

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Every year, the American Heart Association holds an annual event at Kinnick Stadium called the Iowa City Heart of Gold Gala. At this event, thousands of dollars are raised through auctions that go towards cardiovascular research being done by the organization.

Its 2013 Gala took place Friday evening and this year's event hit home with the Iowa football program.

Former Iowa football players such as Pat Angerer, Mitch King, Joe Conklin and Taylor Herbst were among those on hand Friday to not help raise money and awareness for the American Heart Association, but also show support towards Brett Greenwood, who was selected as the Gala's Hawkeye Heart Hero honoree.

More than 18 months have passed since Greenwood suffered what was later discovered as an anoxic brain injury back in Sept. 2011, something he's still rehabilitating from today. Greenwood was honored at the Gala and was originally scheduled to appear publicly at the event. While he was unable to attend, his girlfriend and both of his parents were on hand.

Greenwood's absence wasn't going to keep his former teammates from showing up though. Angerer was contacted by Greenwood's girlfriend about being the Gala's guest speaker and said he "jumped at the chance" and called it, "the biggest honor of his career being able to speak on Brett's behalf."

Once Angerer was on board, he began contacting teammates about showing up. King said once he got Angerer's call, he made it a priority to be back for someone he grew to respect during their three years as teammates together and beyond.

"He was a quiet individual and he kept to himself a lot, but you knew as soon as he walked in the door, he was going to work hard until the day he left the university," King said. "You got to respect a person like that. He kept his backyard clean. He wasn't a guy out causing trouble or causing ruckus.

"You could count on Brett for anything, whether it was on the field or off the field. He was a great guy, a great teammate and I think Brett was one of the smarter football players that I played with."

Conklin and Angerer both recalled competing against Greenwood in high school before they all became teammates at Iowa, as all three hailed from the Quad Cities area.

"We always had a fun little rivalry," said Conklin, who played alongside Greenwood in the Iowa secondary for three seasons. "But when we got up to Iowa, I played with him and I played behind him. He was just a great guy to be in the same room with and learn from, be able to bounce ideas and the kind of scouting reports back and forth off each other.

"He's just a great teammate and guy and I have the utmost respect for him. I'm so glad to be here for him."

Both King and Conklin said they've had limited contact with Greenwood. Conklin said he'd get updates through family friends regarding Greenwood's health and has recently been able to be in touch with him more frequently as a result of Friday's Heart of Gold Gala. As for King, he said he has been able to get updates through other channels, whether it was Greenwood's girlfriend or through the coaching staff at Iowa.

Angerer, who will be entering his fourth season in the NFL

this fall playing linebacker for the Indianapolis Colts, said he saw Greenwood this past Thursday (March 28) and that it was their first encounter with each other since Greenwood's accident first took place.

"It was real refreshing seeing him [Thursday] and seeing his strength and just watching him," Angerer said. "He has still got that same squirrely personality. It's tough because he can do so much with his life.

"There are still a lot of positives left that he can do and the sky's the limit with him. It still is."

For these guys, the opportunity to reunite to Kinnick Stadium (albeit in a different capacity) was one worthwhile, especially with many others that came out to show the same love for Brett Greenwood they had for him when they played together for the Hawkeyes.

"He may never really understand how much of an impact he has on people," Angerer said. "But he's just such an inspiration for everybody. Just a flawless person."

3/27/2013: Iowa spring football notebook



Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz discusses the start of spring practices during his press conference held Wednesday, March 27, 2013, at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City.

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – During the opening remarks of his press conference Wednesday, Kirk Ferentz sensed the questions coming. His team has begun its spring football period and the biggest storyline surrounding the Iowa Hawkeyes is at the game's most important position.

James Vandenberg, who took every snap as Iowa's signal-caller last season, is no longer at the helm and the QB competition is as deep and as open as it has ever been since Ferentz first took command in 1999.

Sophomore quarterback Jake Rudock was listed as the starter on the spring 2-deep released Wednesday. But since he hasn't yet played in a single game for the Hawkeyes, a 3-way battle is taking place between him and a pair of QBs who redshirted in 2012 – junior Cody Sokol and freshman C.J. Beathard. Sokol transferred to Iowa last year after playing two seasons at Scottsdale Community College in Arizona, while Beathard was a late addition to the 2012 recruiting class.

“We really like all three guys,” Ferentz said. “All three of them have some things about them that really intrigue you and make you feel good. They've got good football mentalities. They like the game, they like each other and I think they are all respected by their teammates.

“It's going to be obviously interesting to watch it.”

Ferentz said while Rudock is listed first-string, all three quarterbacks are expected to get first, second and third team reps during the 15 practices Iowa has between now and April 27, when it conducts its open practice at Kinnick Stadium.

“We’re going in really with a truly open mind,” Ferentz said, adding that there’s no definitive timetable for when a starter will be named. “Whenever the picture becomes clearer, that is when we’ll move on it. A lot of times, it goes a long ways.”

Introducing the YB

One of the wrinkles that came as a result of Greg Davis taking the reigns as offensive coordinator last year was the use of multiple tight ends, as the position was considered a strength of the offense. Over the course of the 2012 season, Iowa’s opening drives began to feature less use of a fullback and more use of multiple tight ends.

If the 2-deep released Wednesday really proves to be an indication, Iowa will continue to go the direction of starting two tight ends as opposed to what it has traditionally done in years past under Ferentz, using one tight end and one fullback.

Listed on the 2-deep as “YBs” (Y-back; the equivalent of an H-Back) are sophomore tight ends Jake Duzey and Henry Kreiger-Coble. Both saw significant playing time last season and Kreiger-Coble even caught a touchdown pass from Vandenberg in Iowa’s 42-17 loss to Michigan last season.

But even though the YB position has arrived, Ferentz said he wouldn’t completely rid of fullback. In fact, he even said how sophomore Macon Plewa has switched over to fullback after playing linebacker and that junior Mark Weisman would get looks at the fullback position as well.

“Obviously the goal is to get your best 11 out there,” Ferentz said. “I envision us playing with a fullback. I envision us

with two tight ends at times. Also three wides, that type of thing, the things that we've done in the past. It's just a matter of seeing what we can piece together."

Weisman's looks at fullback would also provide Iowa with the opportunity to have both him and junior running back Damon Bullock on the field at the same time, something that only occurred during the beginning of last season before Weisman became a household name.

"If you could have those two guys out there, I think it gives us a little bit more fire power, which is something we lacked last year for sure," Ferentz said.

Adapting to coaching changes

With Wednesday marking the first day of spring practices, it also marked the first opportunity for changes among the coaching staff to truly be observed.

Last month, Iowa hired three new assistants in wide receivers coach Bobby Kennedy (previously at Colorado and Texas, where he worked with Davis), co-linebackers coach Jim Reid (previously the defensive coordinator at Virginia) and running backs/special teams coach Chris White (previously an assistant with the Minnesota Vikings).

The one change that could prove noticeable right away is White overseeing special teams. He'll be assisted with the duty, but White is the main person in charge of special teams as opposed to the duties being split between former assistants Lester Erb and Darrell Wilson.

"The good thing is he comes in with a fresh eye," Ferentz said about White. "He doesn't have any preconceived notions about anybody. Anybody is going to have a chance to get on the punt team right now, the kickoff team.

"I think really, the bottom line on all of that stuff is not

so much team as just us doing a better job.”

One thing Ferentz said he has noticed since bringing the new batch of assistants on board is how communication has become a necessity in order for the entire staff to be on the same page. He also said though that while some things need tweaking, he doesn't anticipate what he called, “any radical differences.”

“The things that we thought were important 14 years ago, to me, they are still important,” Ferentz said. “That is really going to be the foundation of what we try to be as a football team.”

Open practice in Des Moines not finalized, but likely

Ferentz said the details haven't been finalized. However, the Iowa spring prospectus confirmed [a report last month from KCCI-TV's Andy Garman](#) that the Hawkeyes are planning an open practice for April 20 that would take place at West Des Moines High School's Valley Stadium.

Should this indeed take place, one of the factors is Iowa having a four-and-a-half week period to conduct spring practices this year. Ferentz said by having one of the 15 practices Iowa is allowed to have elsewhere (in this case, West Des Moines), it allows the monotony of spring football to be broken up a little. He also mentioned being able to give back to those in Central and Western Iowa who typically make the trek to Iowa City for any of Iowa's past open practices.

“Certainly, the Des Moines population basis is important to us,” Ferentz said. “So maybe our way of saying, ‘Thank you,’” Ferentz said.

3/27/2013: Kirk Ferentz press conference transcript

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Below is a PDF from the Iowa sports information department featuring the complete transcript from Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz's spring football press conference on Wednesday in Iowa City:

[Coach Ferentz – 3 27 13](#)

2013 Iowa spring football 2-deep

OFFENSE:

WR 4 Smith, 17 Hillyer

LT 68 Scherff, 73 Ward

LG 59 Boffeli, 58 Simmons/50 Clark

C 63 Blythe, 57 Gaul/58 Simmons

RG 78 Donnal, 65 Walsh

RT 70 Van Sloten, 64 Croston/74 Keppy

TE 86 Fiedorowicz, 82 Hamilton

QB 15 Rudock, 19 Sokol/16 Beathard

WR 11 Martin-Manley, 23 Cotton

RB 45 Weisman/5 Bullock, 33 Canzeri

YB 87 Duzey, 80 Krieger-Coble

DEFENSE:

DE 95 Ott, 98 Hardy/94 McMinn

DT 97 Cooper, 67 Johnson

DT 71 Davis, 56 Ekakitie

DE 79 Alvis, 94 McMinn/91 Venckus-Cucchiara

OLB 20 Kirksey, 39 Perry

MLB 44 Morris, 52 Alston

WLB 31 Hitchens, 36 Fisher

LCB 19 Lowery, 28 Fleming

SS 21 Law, 37 Lowdermilk/12 Gair

FS 5 Miller, 37 Lowdermilk/12 Gair

RCB 27 Lomax, 7 Draper

SPECIAL TEAMS:

P 98 Kornbrath, 15 Mullings

PK 96 Meyer, 1 Koehn

LS 61 Kreiter

3/25/2013: State of the Big Ten, Volume 92 (premium)

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By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Last week, it was Northwestern firing its men's basketball head coach. On Monday, Minnesota announced the dismissal of Tubby Smith, who had served as the Golden Gophers' head honcho for the past six seasons.

Smith getting fired isn't a complete shock to anyone who has followed the Big Ten closely, as it seemed inevitable. Even though Minnesota made the NCAA Tournament for the third time under Smith this season and even won a game over UCLA before losing over the weekend to Florida, there was enough smoke coming out of the Twin Cities here.

Like they had each of the past two seasons, the Golden Gophers went through a February swoon. The last two years could be pinpointed by injuries to players like Al Nolen and Trevor Mbakwe and transfers like Devoe Joseph, who finished his playing career at Oregon. A similar regression took place this winter, except this time, the excuses weren't there.

Yes, Minnesota made the NCAA Tournament. But considering how the Golden Gophers were at one point a top 10 team this season, the fact that they managed to finish below .500 in the Big Ten falls on Smith and his coaching staff. Losing games to teams like Northwestern and Nebraska and games like the ones

against Iowa and Ohio State where it was turnover after turnover are what did him in.

On the outside, it seems foolish that a team that made the NCAA Tournament would fire its head coach for something that wasn't an NCAA violation of some sort. But look closer at the state of the Minnesota basketball program and it was clear the time to make a change was now.

Two things said by athletics director Norwood Teague stood out from the school's press conference Monday afternoon. The first thing is that he didn't make the decision to fire Smith on Monday. This indicates the decision was made long before rumblings ever saw the light of day in Minneapolis.

The second thing (and more important point, really) was that Teague said Minnesota wouldn't be using a search firm, which is what Northwestern is doing right now with its ongoing coaching search. Considering that Teague came to Minnesota from VCU, the dots are pretty easy to connect here.

Make no mistake here. Teague's Plan A is VCU head coach Shaka Smart and he isn't going through this process right now if he didn't think he had a good shot of luring Smart out of Richmond, Va. Now this doesn't mean Smart will leave VCU, but there's no question he'll at least listen to the guy who gave him his first big opportunity in the business.

If Teague whiffs on Smart, at least Minnesota fans can take solace in the fact that he's trying because the ball's about to be in Smart's court here. Since a search firm isn't being used, this hire – Smart or not Smart – is being made soon. It has to. The longer this drags out, the more foolish Teague and Minnesota would look.

A lot still has to occur for the Golden Gophers to be a perennial contender of any sort in the Big Ten and no matter who replaces Smith, they're in for a long season next year. But this is a start for Minnesota. For Teague, this is a

chance to make that first big hire that will define him as the school's athletics director. There's no reason to think he hasn't done his due diligence.

3/18/2013: State of the Big Ten, Volume 91 (premium)

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By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

A 13-year era came to a halting conclusion over the weekend when Northwestern decided to fire its head men's basketball coach, Bill Carmody. The decision came two days after the Wildcats were eliminated by Iowa in the first round of the Big Ten Tournament and finished 13-19 with nine straight losses to end the season.

The decision to rid of Carmody has been a hot topic of discussion in the Northwestern community, in part because he arguably had as much success there as any coach the school has ever had. Keep in mind, the Wildcats have never played in the NCAA Tournament and prior to this season, Northwestern had made three straight NIT appearances under Carmody.

There was also some controversy in that the Wildcats' season fell apart in large part because of injuries. Northwestern

lost its best player, Drew Crawford, to a season-ending injury and also lost Jared Swopshire to a season-ending injury right when the nine-game losing streak began. By season's end, the Wildcats were a shell of the team some thought it had the potential to be when the season began.

Yet it seemed painfully obvious as the season winded down that this was the direction Northwestern would go. In what ended up being his final game, Carmody coached like someone about to lose his job, burning timeouts left and right and not just taking players out when they got into foul trouble.

Now that athletics director Jim Phillips has made this move, attention shifts towards hiring a new coach, someone that could achieve what Carmody and no one else before him has. This is going to be complicated in the sense that Northwestern won't be in a position to upgrade facilities anytime soon. It's also a challenge in that Northwestern has higher academic standards than the majority of Big Ten schools being the conference's only private university, so recruiting challenges are also different and unique from other teams.

Whatever route Phillips takes, he needs to hit this hire out of the park. It's not so much the Wildcats needing a Pat Fitzgerald clone to take over, but they need to hire someone as their basketball coach with similar traits to that of their football coach. Someone who will express vibrant enthusiasm toward turning Northwestern into a contender and could be active in the university community.

All it takes is to look at recent hires made by other Big Ten schools to show this trend is one that would pay off long term. Schools like Iowa (Fran McCaffery), Penn State (Patrick Chambers) and Nebraska (Tim Miles) have all gone this route. Penn State suffered a serious injury like Northwestern did this past season, but the future there is bright.

It might take some time, but the right hire can have success

at Northwestern. For all of his faults, Carmody came awfully close to winning with what was in front of him there. There's no reason to think someone else can't do it, so long as Phillips makes a smart hire.

3/11/2013: State of the Big Ten, Volume 90 (premium)

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By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

The Big Ten handed out postseason honors Monday for men's basketball and in what was considered to be a hotly-contested two-man race between Michigan's Trey Burke and Indiana's Victor Oladipo for Big Ten Player of the Year, it was Burke receiving the consensus honor. Both players were also unanimous choices by both the coaches and media for first-team all-Big Ten accolades.

These types of awards lead to plenty of water cooler discussion and are made with the intent of picking one winner above the rest. The reality here is either one of Burke or Oladipo had enough of a case to win the award and had they been co-receipients, there probably wouldn't have been much argument.

Burke held an edge statistically, which ultimately played a factor in him getting the nod over Oladipo. During Big Ten play, the Wolverine point guard led the conference in scoring, averaging 20.2 points per game. He finished second behind Ohio State's Deshaun Thomas in overall points per game by an average of 0.7 point. Again, this is a point guard and without question the best point guard in the country.

In addition to his scoring, Burke led the Big Ten in assist-to-turnover ratio, another mark of a marquee point guard.

From a numbers standpoint, Burke had a clear edge. But the eyeball test makes a great case for Oladipo.

To the surprise of very few, Indiana won the Big Ten this season and did so outright after beating Michigan on March 10, 72-71. Here's the best argument that can be made for Oladipo and why any vote his way would've been warranted: When the Hoosiers needed plays in crunch time, he delivered.

Think back to every exciting finish Indiana had this season. Oladipo was the one making the plays that had everyone talking at night's end. Even when the Hoosiers lost to Illinois, Oladipo made a huge block off an Indiana turnover just before the Hoosiers' defensive breakdown in the final seconds. When Indiana needed a play late, they had someone to count on.

Was he hurt by the fact he played alongside another bonafide Big Ten player in Cody Zeller? Maybe. But Oladipo was the guy who made Indiana go and the Hoosiers don't win the Big Ten this season without his efforts in those late-game situations.

Both of these players would be lottery picks if they left after this season – Burke's a sophomore, while Oladipo is a junior. Both were exciting to watch, especially over the last two months.

It'll be interesting to see how votes for various National Player of the Year awards will shake out over the next few

weeks, because it wouldn't at all be surprising if both players split some of those honors, if not share a few.

Again, both had valid cases. And who knows? Maybe they'll meet again Saturday afternoon in Chicago. That would be quite a treat.

3/4/2013: State of the Big Ten, Volume 89 (premium)

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By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Already possessing at least a share of the Big Ten regular season crown, the No. 2 Indiana Hoosiers have two opportunities to win the conference outright this week, with the first coming Tuesday night at home against No. 14 Ohio State.

By no means has Indiana's success come as a surprise to anyone who has followed college basketball – and more specifically, the Big Ten – this season. The Hoosiers were ranked No. 1 preseason in both polls and a prohibitive favorite at the time to win the conference.

But considering what this program was going through when Tom Crean first became its head coach back in 2008, it's sort of

remarkable to see the progression made by Indiana these last few seasons.

The Hoosiers have a chance to win the Big Ten outright two years to the date that it lost a game at Illinois to finish 3-15 in the league – alone in last place – during the 2010-11 season. And it wasn't as though that season was an aberration for Indiana at the time, either.

The mess Crean inherited from former coach Kelvin Sampson can't be overstated. His first season in Bloomington, Crean won six games and only one of those wins came in Big Ten play. For three years, Indiana was simply abysmal in basketball.

Now a big part of the Hoosiers' turnaround has come in recruiting players like Victor Oladipo and Cody Zeller, both of whom will be first-team all-Big Ten and likely first-team all-Americans at season's end. Indiana made big strides last season reaching the Sweet 16, and again, the success this season was expected.

But for all that talent at Crean's disposal, that's not the only reason why the Hoosiers have gone from being a good team last year to likely being the favorite to win the national championship come Selection Sunday. The steps made from last season to this season specifically are a result of Crean's coaching.

Yes, he brought in a class of highly-touted freshmen, but Yogi Ferrell's the only one of them even starting. The core of this year's Indiana squad is comprised of upper-classmen such as Oladipo, junior Will Sheehey and seniors Jordan Hulls and Christian Watford – players who went through that losing early on in their careers.

They've all bought into what Crean has been selling in terms of knowing their niche and being elite. For example, Hulls is a lethal 3-point shooter. If he knocks down his average as far as 3-pointers made on a given night, he's doing his part.

Zeller and Oladipo are getting the most attention and rightfully so, but the Hoosiers are playing like a team and every individual guy – for the most part – has been consistent with doing their part. Sure, Indiana could lose on any given night in the NCAA tournament, but for those wondering why many media members are going to pick the Hoosiers to win it all, that consistency they've shown all season is why.

This is also a mentally strong team that Crean is coaching, primarily because of those core guys who aren't taking what they're doing right now for granted. That's something that will definitely bode well for Indiana later this month and in early April.

The turnaround done at Indiana isn't something seen everyday, especially in a sport like college basketball. Every elite program has a down season here and there, but the 180 done by the Hoosiers over the last few years is what has to make this even sweeter for Indiana fans along with those players and coaches who have put in the effort to turn everything around in Bloomington.

Hawkeyes, Huskers to continue Black Friday meetings

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Iowa and Nebraska will meet on Black Friday for the third consecutive season this November and will continue to meet on this date every year going forward, the Big Ten conference announced Tuesday afternoon.

Since Nebraska joined the Big Ten in 2011, the annual "Heroes Game" between the Hawkeyes and Cornhuskers has taken place on Black Friday, which is the day after Thanksgiving. The first meeting was Nov. 25, 2011, a game won by Nebraska 20-7 at Memorial Stadium in Lincoln. On Nov. 23 of last year, the Cornhuskers defeated Iowa 13-7 at Kinnick Stadium in Iowa City.

The 2013 meeting will now take place on Nov. 29. It was originally scheduled for Nov. 30 as the initial agreement between the two schools only spanned the last two years.

"This provides the student-athletes who have already lost the opportunity to spend the holiday at home with their families two days away from football," Iowa athletics director Gary Barta said in a statement. "In addition, the Friday television window provides great exposure for our program.

"We greatly appreciate the adjustments in schedules that our fans and those who help us stage the game in Iowa City every other year will have to make."