

# 2/4/2013: State of the Big Ten, Volume 85 (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*

Iowa and Nebraska have both made their intentions known to the Big Ten about keeping their annual football game played on the Friday after Thanksgiving as it has been for the past two seasons since Nebraska became a conference member. While this is something that would still need to be finalized by the conference later this month, the big development from this past week is both schools wanting it to remain as is.

There was never a doubt on Nebraska's end about wanting this game to remain as is. The Cornhuskers have been a prominent part of college football played on "Black Friday" since its Big Eight days when it annually played Oklahoma on that date and then Colorado later on as the conference expanded into what is now known today as the Big 12. Simply put, this has been a Nebraska tradition that was welcomed into the Big Ten and one the school doesn't want to see going away anytime soon.

That wasn't always the case with Iowa, however, and the debate about what day of the week this game would be played on came based off concerns coming from Iowa City shortly after Kinnick Stadium played host to last season's Black Friday game.

Right now, the only guarantee would be this year's game in

Lincoln being played on Nov. 29 instead of Nov. 30 should the Big Ten approve of the joint proposal being put together by both schools' athletics directors. That's because the recent additions of Maryland and Rutgers – which will be effective in 2014 – will cause the conference to re-configure its schedules for next year and beyond.

In other words, until a new 2014 schedule is finalized and divisions are reshuffled, there's no guarantee that Kinnick Stadium hosts another Black Friday showdown unless the Big Ten keeps Iowa and Nebraska together in one division and continues to schedule them for games against each other at season's end.

If Iowa's willing to be on board for the 2013 game being played on a Friday, then it ought to be doing everything possible to ensure it keeps Nebraska as its final regular season opponent every season going forward so all parties can be satisfied. This is an opportunity for the Hawkeyes to market themselves to a national audience on a holiday where their game is the only Big Ten game happening that day.

The fans have made clear they want this and the football program should be advocating for as much exposure as possible. Even right now, when things around Iowa City look bleak after the Hawkeyes finished 2012 with a 4-8 record that included six straight losses to end the season, any exposure Iowa can get is going to be of benefit.

This is something that also helps in recruiting as well for both programs, especially if they're able to keep the game on ABC every season like it has been each of the past two years. If Iowa wants to become more relevant again and stay that way in the near future, this is one step that ought to be taken and kudos to those involved in making sure this game continues as it has.

Iowa's rivalry with Nebraska will never reach the same proportions nationally as the Big Ten's most storied rivalry,

Michigan/Ohio State. But keeping their game on Black Friday allows those on the outside to associate both the Hawkeyes and Cornhuskers with something on a national scale.

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## **1/28/2013: State of the Big Ten, Volume 84 (premium)**

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By Brendan Stiles

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All season long, the talk in the world of college basketball has been how the Big Ten is viewed by many to be the toughest conference on a national scale. On Feb. 2, the league gets an opportunity to showcase itself in a manner that doesn't occur often.

Indiana and Michigan were both considered back in October to be the two top contenders to win the Big Ten and thus far, both teams have lived up to the billing. The two are tied atop the standings with 6-1 marks and are currently ranked in the top 3 nationally. Which is why Saturday evening has the potential to be special.

These two squads will meet inside Indiana's Assembly Hall, in front of a nationally televised audience on ESPN. Michigan enters ranked No. 1 in the AP poll for the first time since

the "Fab 5" era 20 years ago. That alone warrants plenty of headlines as it speaks to the job John Beilein has done in six years as the Wolverines' head coach.

Then there are the Hoosiers, who were the preseason No. 1 and enter this contest ranked third in both the AP and Coaches Polls. They have yet to lose on their home floor.

Saturday night has the potential to be one of the best college basketball games this entire season, in any conference. Both squads feature sophomores that are worthy candidates for National Player of the Year honors (Trey Burke for Michigan and Cody Zeller for Indiana). Both have a plethora of NBA talent in their arsenals.

With all due respect to Michigan State, who might very well have the Big Ten's Coach of the Year right now in Tom Izzo, the Wolverines and Hoosiers are the two best teams in this league. They'll meet again on the final day of the regular season in Ann Arbor and that will probably hold greater significance down the road.

But this one in Bloomington's going to be special. Assembly Hall is far and away the best college basketball environment in the Big Ten and is among the best in the entire country. Indiana sold out home games in Tom Crean's early seasons when the Hoosiers were in complete rebuild mode. Now the crowds there are becoming an even greater factor for Indiana as it continues ascending into a legitimate Final Four-caliber squad.

It may only be one game, but again, this is going to be a night where the spotlight is on the Big Ten. The last time it had this type of spotlight was when Ohio State played Wisconsin in 2007, and that game proved to be a slugfest.

Both Michigan and Indiana like to run and are capable of dropping 80-90 points on anyone at any given point. Now maybe this ends up being more of a low scoring game because of

familiarity and because both teams have made strides defensively. But with the firepower both teams have, the ingredients that every casual observer of college basketball likes are in place.

How this game unfolds might not only define how these two teams are perceived the rest of the season, but it might very well define the Big Ten as a conference, especially after a week where numerous teams struggled to score 50 points in contests. These are the teams at the top, so they're the ones being placed under the microscope first and how well they fare will be significant in how the conference gets judged come March.

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## **1/21/2013: State of the Big Ten, Volume 83 (premium)**

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All last week, Iowa City was abuzz with the 20th anniversary of Chris Street's death approaching and how the Iowa men's basketball program would honor its late icon.

On Jan. 19, which marked the anniversary, the Hawkeyes defeated Wisconsin, 70-66. They did so even though the Badgers

entered that game alone in first place of the Big Ten.

On that night, Street was celebrated in numerous ways. Iowa players warmed up wearing white T-shirts that had his last name and number on the back. The school conducted a halftime ceremony where a video about him was shown and his family was recognized. Right before tip-off, the team took his jersey and draped it over a seat at the end of the Iowa bench. All classy ways of paying homage.

Afterwards, word broke of Iowa wanting to honor Street by putting his last name on the back of every game-worn jersey. This was an idea the school pursued the NCAA about, but was ultimately shot down.

In all honesty, this is one of those instances where it would've best served all parties had it not been revealed. While the argument is valid for the NCAA acting cold-hearted, its rationale, at least based off what Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery said, is sort of understandable.

As far as Iowa's concerned, it was able to pay tribute in an appropriate fashion – from before the game with the warm-up shirts, to draping the bench chair with his jersey. Everything the Hawkeyes did was classy. Not to mention the fact that the uniforms that were worn featured “CMS40” on them like the ones worn when Iowa played Michigan in 1993 nearly two weeks after Street's death.

Putting his last name on every player's jersey would've been neat. But think back to when Iowa honored Nile Kinnick in 2004 with the throwback uniforms honoring the 1939 squad he won the Heisman Trophy playing for. Did the Hawkeye football team all have “Kinnick” on the back of its uniforms that afternoon? No.

Here's the other thing to keep in mind as well – if the Hawkeyes really wanted to have “Street” on the back of every uniform Saturday night, what honestly was stopping it? Iowa could've disregarded the NCAA if it wanted. It's not like

Saturday's game would've been halted because of the uniforms, and it's not like the NCAA had a representative on site that could've interrupted the game saying it wasn't allowed.

Sure, there would be consequences from disregarding the NCAA altogether. But the majority of the public would've overwhelmingly sided with Iowa here had the NCAA said anything critical after the fact. It wouldn't have been the first time someone disregarded the NCAA and it will likely happen again at some point in time with some other school.

This story surfacing now, in a way, takes away from what that night was all about. Instead of the talk nationally being about everything Iowa did, it was about what it wasn't able to do. It's a good lesson for both parties. If Iowa wants to do anything like that again, it should just do it. Meanwhile, the NCAA might want to reconsider its stance on this for future reference, even just a little bit.

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## **1/14/2013: State of the Big Ten, Volume 82 (premium)**

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By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

The evening of Jan. 19 will be nothing short of emotional in

Iowa City when the Iowa Hawkeyes tangle with the Wisconsin Badgers. Not because these teams have a rivalry that has in recent years become heated, but because of the significance of that night.

Jan. 19 also happens to be the 20th anniversary of one of Iowa City's saddest days and probably the saddest day in the history of the Iowa basketball program. It was on this date in 1993 that Hawkeye forward Chris Street was killed in an accident that took place off Highway following a team function at the Highlander Inn.

With the Hawkeyes playing at home that evening, Iowa has a halftime ceremony planned that includes a tribute video. Past winners of Iowa's Chris Street Award will also receive recognition during this ceremony.

One thing head coach Fran McCaffery has talked about in the past is the way Iowa genuinely pays tribute to the late Street and his family. He mentions how it's sad and reminds people of a heartbreaking tragedy, but at the same time, gives those who knew Street and loved him the opportunity to celebrate his life and what he stood for.

This is something not only Iowa, but any school that has ever dealt with similar tragedies should be commended for. Dealing with death isn't a strong suit for anyone, let alone a group of 18-22 year olds who treat each other like family from the moment they arrive on campus moving forward. But as awful as Street's death was and still is today, this is an opportunity Iowa has to embrace one of its own and to do it right.

Moments like this shouldn't be forgotten, no matter how much they hurt. Street's death was big enough that anyone with any connections to Iowa remembers exactly where they were when the news first broke. Plenty of those stories will be told this week, but they'll probably be told along with stories about Street from those who knew him, stories about growing up with



him or meeting him in class or hanging out with him one night downtown. These stories will be told by those who had their lives touched by Street in a manner that hearing his name makes them crack a smile, even if that smile is complementing sadness.

As Street's name lives on in Iowa, the one thing Hawkeye fans will hopefully take away from Saturday night is it's always good to remember those who have impacted their lives positively in some way, shape or form. Street has been dead for almost 20 years, yet his name is as symbolic with Iowa basketball now as it was in 1993 when he was killed.

That's a legacy worth remembering. That's what fans should remember about him as they enter Carver-Hawkeye Arena that night. The same thing can be said for any other school's fans whenever they deal with a tragedy themselves. There's no right way for dealing with tragedy, but there is a right way to remember those who lost their lives. It appears Iowa is going out remembering Street in the right way and that's something that'll be emotional to see Saturday night, but also good to see as well.

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## **Hawkeye trio to play in inaugural all-star game**

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

Three seniors from last year's Iowa football team – quarterback James Vandenberg, offensive lineman Matt Tobin and cornerback Greg Castillo – have been selected to participate

in the inaugural Raycom College Football All-Star Classic. The game is scheduled to take place at 2 p.m. Central in Montgomery, Ala., and will be televised nationally on CBS Sports Network.

Vandenberg comes off a senior campaign where he compiled 2,249 passing yards, seven touchdowns and eight interceptions. Tobin started all 12 games for the Hawkeyes last season along the offensive line, including the last five at left tackle following a season-ending injury to Brandon Scherff. Castillo recorded two interceptions in 2012, one of which came in the second overtime of Iowa's 19-16 win over Michigan State on Oct. 13.

In addition to these three, Iowa also has three representatives in the East-West Shrine Game being played that same afternoon – cornerback Micah Hyde, center James Ferentz and wide receiver Keenan Davis.

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## **1/7/2013: State of the Big Ten, Volume 81 (premium)**

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By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

On this date one year ago, Penn State was introducing Bill

O'Brien as its new head football coach. Monday, O'Brien held a press conference in response to speculation surrounding his future and made his intentions of coaching Penn State in 2013 clear.

Last week brought about seven head-coaching vacancies in the NFL and O'Brien acknowledged reports that he interviewed for openings with the Cleveland Browns and Philadelphia Eagles. At his press conference, he talked about the NFL being the highest level in the coaching profession.

O'Brien feeling this way about coaching is fine if that's how he really feels. But what that comment did was open a Pandora's Box for Penn State while its football program continues to deal with the sanctions delivered to it last summer. Now every year, his name's going to continue to come up whenever there's a coaching vacancy in the NFL and his comment now casts doubt as to whether he'll ultimately see Penn State through everything it's dealing with. Before last season started, he was given a four-year extension to his original contract, which now expires in 2020, four years after the Nittany Lions' postseason ban gets lifted.

When he was first hired by Penn State, O'Brien's integrity was considered a significant factor. As the Nittany Lions went through an 8-4 season last year, fans began to embrace O'Brien much like they did his predecessor. Likewise, O'Brien has given off the vibe of being loyal to Penn State and more specifically, to his players and coaching staff.

With that being said though, his reputation took a hit this past week. Yes, he may not have been offered either job he interviewed for, but his name coming up led to Penn State recruits questioning whether that loyalty still existed. And when considering how this program already has scholarship reductions to deal with and current players still being allowed to leave anytime between now and the start of fall camp, NFL speculation surrounding O'Brien is only going to do

further damage to future recruiting classes he does assemble at Penn State.

O'Brien sat in front of reporters Monday in State College saying how it isn't about money and that he's all about making structural changes to the program that could benefit it long-term. Both of those things might indeed be true. But what if those structural changes don't happen or aren't able to happen? Is this a ploy he's going to continue using?

Penn State fans might not have anything to worry about right this minute as far as O'Brien's tenure with the Nittany Lions is concerned. But this is going to come up again next year and if O'Brien stays around in 2014, it will come up again in two years. When this does becoming a recurring topic every January, he's not going to have anyone to blame but himself.

Will O'Brien stay at Penn State for the foreseeable future and at least through the postseason ban? The odds of him doing so are still higher than if he doesn't. But it's no longer as much of a certainty.

Basically, it comes down to this: If he leaves Penn State, he leaves. If that day comes sooner than expected, there's a time and place for him to pursue those NFL aspirations. It just wasn't right now, not while Penn State's image remains fragile.

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## **Miami assistant reportedly joining Iowa staff**

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

D.J. Hernandez, who was an offensive graduate assistant at Miami (Fla.), [revealed on Twitter late Thursday evening](#) he will be the newest assistant on the Iowa coaching staff, taking over tight ends. Hernandez is the brother of current New England Patriots tight end Aaron Hernandez, who had Brian Ferentz as his position coach in 2011.

Hernandez joins the Hawkeyes after reports surfaced Thursday that wide receivers coach Erik Campbell was on his way out of Iowa City. No new wide receivers coach has been officially announced by the UI, but the tight end group Hernandez will take over was coached last season by David Raih, a former Iowa quarterback who had served as a graduate assistant before being promoted last year when head coach Kirk Ferentz reshuffled his staff.

\*Be sure to visit *HawkeyeDrive.com* for further updates.

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## **Reports: Campbell no longer on Iowa staff**

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

Erik Campbell is no longer an assistant coach on Kirk Ferentz's coaching staff, a source confirmed via text Thursday afternoon to *HawkeyeDrive.com*. Campbell's departure was first reported by [Rob Howe of Hawkeye Insider](#), who quotes an oral commit in Iowa's 2013 class saying he was recently notified by Iowa coaches that Campbell was no longer with the program.

Campbell joined Iowa as its wide receivers coach in 2008 after serving a similar role under Lloyd Carr at Michigan, where he played collegiately. When Campbell came to Iowa, his predecessor – Lester Erb – moved over to running backs coach, which became vacant following the 2007 season after then-Iowa assistant Carl Jackson announced his retirement.

Under Campbell's tutelage, the Hawkeyes had a pair of wide receivers – Derrell Johnson-Koulianos and Marvin McNutt – who both rewrote record books. McNutt, in particular, went on to be a sixth-round draft choice last year of the Philadelphia Eagles, becoming the first Iowa wideout since Kahlil Hill in 2002 to be taken in the NFL Draft.

As of Thursday afternoon, no announcement has been formally made by the UI and Campbell [remained listed in the UI's directory](#). However, Campbell has also [taken to Twitter](#) to thank Iowa fans who wished him well with his future endeavors.

\*Be sure to visit *HawkeyeDrive.com* for further updates.

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## **Trio of Hawkeyes in East-West Shrine Game**

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

Three former Iowa football players – cornerback Micah Hyde, center James Ferentz and wide receiver Keenan Davis – will participate in the 2013 East-West Shrine Game scheduled to take place Jan. 19 at Tropicana Field in St. Petersburg, Fla.

Hyde is coming off a senior season where he recorded 78 tackles and led the Hawkeyes with 14 pass break ups and three fumble recoveries. He had one interception that came in Iowa's 42-17 loss to Michigan on Nov. 17. Hyde was the lone Hawkeye player in 2012 to be named first-team all-Big Ten and was the winner of the Big Ten's Tatum-Woodson Defensive Back of the Year Award.

Ferentz receives an invite to this game after starting all 38 of Iowa's games over the past three seasons at center. Like Hyde, Ferentz was a team captain in 2012 and was recently named the Hawkeyes' offensive MVP at their awards banquet last month.

Davis was second on the Hawkeyes in receptions last season with 47 of them. He tied sophomore Kevonte Martin-Manley for a team-high 571 yards receiving in 12 games. Davis' lone touchdown catch of 2012 came in the Hawkeyes' 38-14 loss to Penn State on Oct. 20.

The East-West Shrine Game is slated for a 3 p.m. Central kickoff and it will be televised nationally by the NFL Network.

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## **12/31/2012: State of the Big Ten, Volume 80 (premium)**

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For all the negativity that surrounds the Big Ten around bowl season, at least in recent years anyway, there's potential for the conference to have a feel-good story of sorts New Year's Day.

One of the first bowls to kick off is the 2013 TaxSlayer.com Gator Bowl in Jacksonville, Fla. Representing the Big Ten in this game is No. 20 Northwestern, who went 9-3 this season.

The intrigue isn't so much the Wildcats being ranked or being a team that could've easily gone to the Big Ten Championship Game with a 12-0 record had they not squandered a trio of fourth-quarter leads. Northwestern has a chance to win its first bowl game since the 1949 Rose Bowl on Tuesday, and the odds of this happening appear realistic.

Yes, the Big Ten is playing the SEC and yes, the Big Ten has lost this bowl each of the last two years. But consider the circumstances. Two years ago, Michigan losing this bowl game ended up being the lasting image of Rich Rodriguez's tenure in Ann Arbor. Last year, Ohio State was in this game after one of its most disappointing seasons in school history and at a time where scandal surrounded it.

In Northwestern's case, there aren't any coaches in jeopardy. Pat Fitzgerald can probably keep that job as long as he desires. There also isn't any scandal surrounding this program.

On Tuesday, the Wildcats are playing a Mississippi State squad that quite frankly, they should beat fairly easily. Yes, Mississippi State went 8-4. But the Bulldogs didn't beat anyone with a pulse this season. They played three legitimate opponents in SEC play and got crushed by all three. Then they followed that up by laying an egg (pun intended) in the Egg



Bowl against in-state foe Ole Miss.

This is a huge opportunity for the Northwestern football program. On the surface, this is a chance for Fitzgerald and his team to get a monkey off its back, if you will, that has lasted for years. Fitzgerald has spent years preaching about being able to get a bowl win. This might be as good a chance as Northwestern gets.

As far as the long term, being able to win 10 games in a season at a place like Northwestern is impressive and can potentially lead to bigger things. The pieces are in place. Kain Colter and Venric Mark are just two of the players returning in 2013, and Mark was an All-American.

The Legends Division will probably remain stacked in 2013 like it was in 2012. But Northwestern showed it was capable of holding its own. The next step for the Wildcats will be proving they can beat teams like Nebraska and Michigan, but they've done it before. Heck, they won in Lincoln in 2011 with a team that maybe was more talented, but didn't show it in terms of wins and losses.

Winning the Gator Bowl could be a long-term springboard for Fitzgerald. That's why Tuesday's game is significant. It's real and people around the Big Ten might want to at least pay attention to what's going on in Evanston over the course of the next few years.