

Big Ten football, Christensen, J-Hawk ads

Written by Jim Ecker

Monday, 08 September 2014 19:20 -



Somebody needs to conduct a serious analysis of what's happened to Big Ten football.

With all the attention paid to Maryland and Rutgers joining the league and the expanded Big Ten "footprint," there doesn't seem to be much attention being paid to the quality of the product on the field.

Ohio State, Michigan State and Michigan all lost non-conference games Saturday. They all lost to quality opponents, but they were losses nonetheless. Ohio State fell to Virginia Tech, Michigan State lost to Oregon and Michigan got embarrassed by Notre Dame, 31-0.

Northwestern lost to Northern Illinois, a good program from the MAC, and the Iowa Hawkeyes nearly lost to Ball State, just a week after the Hawkeyes struggled to beat Northern Iowa.

A week ago, Wisconsin lost to LSU.

Michigan State is the highest-ranked team from the Big Ten in the AP poll this week at No. 13, which tells you what voters around the country think of the once-proud conference.

There is a natural tendency in the local media to cheer for the home team, but the people who cover University of Iowa football might want to take an objective view of the Hawkeyes from time to time and quit predicting great things until they actually show something on the field.

Kirk Ferentz is a terrific coach with a proven track record, but let's see them do something special on a Saturday this year before getting all gooey-eyed.

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What's gone wrong with Big Ten football? Generally speaking, the teams with the best players win the biggest games. That would be a good place to start.

Cedar Rapids native Chad Christensen had an impressive season with the Cedar Rapids Kernels this season. Some players struggle when they play pro ball in their home town, but Christensen shook it off and was able to establish himself with the Twins organization.

Christensen hit .272 with nine homers and 73 RBIs this season, which is a solid year in anyone's book. He also stole 30 bases and showed he can play first base and anywhere in the outfield, making him a valuable commodity.

Christensen tapered off a little during the end of the grueling 140-game season that's filled with long bus rides, but he hit .316 in the Midwest League playoffs with two homers and five RBIs while delivering in the clutch.

Christensen starred at Cedar Rapids Washington High School and was a two-time All-Big Ten selection as a shortstop and outfielder at the University of Nebraska. He'll undoubtedly get promoted to Fort Myers in the High-A Florida State League in 2015 for the next stop in his pro career.

Christensen was a class act with the media all season, always willing to talk but modest all the way. For anyone who knows Chad, that was no surprise.

Many high schools in the state are facing tough financial times, forcing them to get creative with how they go about raising money.

Nonetheless, it was a little startling Friday night to hear all those commercials on the Public Address system during Jefferson's football game against Prairie at Kingston Stadium.

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There was a steady diet of plugs for businesses that support the J-Hawks. It was a nice tribute to the companies who help Jefferson in a variety of ways, and heaven knows the three Cedar Rapids district high schools - Jefferson, Washington and Kennedy - need help after each school had to chop \$20,000 in salaries for extracurricular activities this year.

Let's hope high school athletics don't follow the major colleges, where everything from the opening kickoff to sideline reports are "sponsored" by companies during radio broadcasts. Sometimes it seems like the announcers have to squeeze the play-by-play in between the ads.

Washington and Kennedy are not airing commercials on the P.A. system at Kingston during their home games, according to their athletic directors, but the day may be coming.

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