

8/14/2010: Iowa football notebook (Kids Day)

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HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – The Iowa Hawkeyes continued to follow their plan on Saturday during their annual Kids Day practice at Kinnick Stadium, even without the services of sophomore running back Brandon Wegher.

Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz spoke publicly for the first time about Wegher's situation on Aug. 13 during an appearance on ESPN Radio's "The Scott Van Pelt Show," confirming rumors that Wegher had left camp to tend to personal matters.

On Saturday, he elaborated a little further on Wegher's ordeal, but continued to keep the specifics under wraps.

"Right now, I think he just needs some time to sort some things out," Ferentz said. "It happens in life to all of us. He probably just needs a little time away right now. Hopefully, he'll choose to return to the team.

"We would love to have him back. I hope that's the path it takes."

Ferentz said there isn't a set timetable for Wegher returning, nor would there be, adding that the idea of redshirting the Dakota Dunes, S.D., native was something that would maybe be discussed at a later time if his return doesn't occur in the near future.

Junior wide receiver Marvin McNutt called Wegher a good friend, saying he would be welcomed back by everyone on the team.

"We're all thinking about him, and he's always in our prayers," McNutt said. "He's definitely someone that we would love to have

With Wegher's absence, the Hawkeyes shift their ground game attention on sophomore running backs Adam Robinson and Jewel Hampton. Ferentz said right now that senior Paki O'Meara would be the clear third back if Wegher isn't back in time for the start of the season, which likely means O'Meara will be behind Robinson on the 2-deep for the Sept. 4 contest against Eastern Illinois with Hampton serving a one-game suspension.

Even though Wegher is missed by the players and coaches, it's not something anyone within the program can be worrying about.

"When we line up for practice every day and he's not out there, we can't stop practice and hold a prayer session," senior quarterback Ricky Stanzi said. "We've got to keep moving with the guys that we have. That's going to be our best chance of winning, with the guys here now that are trying to get better."

Kicker battle undecided

A week into fall camp, and there still doesn't appear to be a clear-cut winner for the place-kicking job, something that Ferentz continued to harp on as something that needs to be fixed.

"We're capable, but not consistent," Ferentz said. "That has been the story right now."

Both Trent Mossbrucker and Daniel Murray, as well as a third kicker in freshman Michael Meyer, split field goal and PAT duties equally during Saturday's open practice. The split duties is something Murray said had been going on at every practice thus far.

The Iowa City native also said he was happy with the way his

approach has improved mentally thus far.

"Today, I missed three or something, and I was able to make the one right after it," Murray said. "That was something good, something positive to lean on, but I still got plenty of stuff to work on."

As for Mossbrucker, he feels he still has a legit shot to win the job, but know he has to continue to get better.

"I'm just trying to take it day-by-day and just trying to get better every day at the craft that I do, and just trying to help the team out," Mossbrucker said.

Ferentz, Koeppel still fighting to start

The other intriguing position battle is at center between sophomore James Ferentz and senior Josh Koeppel. As of Saturday, this also remains unclear, but for different reasons.

The coaching staff likes the way both players have competed, as both got chances to work with the first string offense throughout the open practice. Stanzi also likes what's happening at the center spot right now.

"We've got them in a nice rotation there, so we've gotten a lot of snaps with them," Stanzi said. "Koeppel, I've been taking snaps from him since freshman year, and there's not really a change. James has been the same way. We've been taking a ton of snaps."

Koeppel wouldn't say the center-quarterback rapport has given him an edge against Ferentz for the job, but he did mention the practice over the years with the 6- quarterback has provided comfort during this ongoing process.

"Rick and I have always kind of been pretty good on our snaps, I know his cadence and all that stuff," Koeppel said. "I think being together since freshman year has been pretty good for

us.”