

8/31/2010: Iowa football notebook

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Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz speaking at his weekly press conference on Aug. 31, 2010

IOWA CITY, Iowa – After a grueling month of practices and scrimmages in the Iowa heat, the No. 9 Iowa Hawkeyes have begun shifting their attention to the Eastern Illinois Panthers, who they will play at Kinnick Stadium on Sept. 4.

Although Eastern Illinois is a member of the Football Championship Division (FCS), Iowa is not taking the Panthers lightly. Last season, the Hawkeyes escaped their season-opener against another FCS opponent, Northern Iowa, hanging on to a 17-16 victory.

It is something the players have been reminded of this week.

“We weren’t prepared, and they were a pretty good team. We may

have underestimated them,” junior wide receiver Marvin McNutt said while reflecting on that game against UNI. “We definitely this year want to come out and make sure that our main focus is to get win No. 1 instead of thinking of Week Two.”

Koeppel recovering from accident

During the opening statement of his weekly press conference Tuesday, Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz addressed a recent situation involving senior center Josh Koeppel. On Aug. 30, Koeppel was involved in an accident with a truck while riding a moped. The Iowa City native suffered some scrapes, bruises, and soreness, but that was the severity of it, as Ferentz said he had seen the 6-2, 273-pound lineman on a few occasions since the accident.

While Koeppel recovers, sophomore center James Ferentz, the son of the 12-year Hawkeye coach, will be starting at center against Eastern Illinois.

Christian Ballard, tackle or end?

One of the stories to keep an eye on this week, and the entire season for that matter, is along the defensive line. Iowa's 2-deep was updated, and it now features senior Christian Ballard listed as co-starters at both defensive tackle and defensive end.

Ferentz said during his weekly press conference on Tuesday that Ballard will likely start at defensive end this weekend, giving way for junior defensive tackle Mike Daniels to make his first career start. The move comes as a result of junior defensive end Broderick Binns being suspended one game for an OWI arrest back in July.

There is a history here with Ballard switching positions. The Lawrence, Kan., native came to Iowa City as a tight end, and made the switch right away to playing on the defensive line. As a sophomore in 2008, he and Adrian Clayborn both started at

defensive end while Mitch King and Matt Kroul handled everything inside.

Then prior to last season, Ballard moved inside to make room for Binns to be a contributor at defensive end.

The versatility is something Ferentz has taken notice of and appreciates from one of his senior leaders.

"I tell you, I was really impressed a year ago spring when he moved inside," Ferentz said. "Christian Ballard has just been very accomodating, and works hard where he lines up."

Prater status uncertain; Castillo ready to fill role

A leg strain that has lingered with junior cornerback Shaun Prater may possibly affect whether he is able to play on Sept. 4.

As of Tuesday, Prater was not listed on the Hawkeyes' 2-deep, but his return hasn't been entirely ruled out, either. Prater said he had been dealing with this throughout the summer, and that it is starting to get better.

"Every day, it feels good," Prater said. "I'm just trying to get the fluid built up by there, and I'm running now. Everything is getting better as we go, day by day."

If he is unable to go, sophomore Greg Castillo is ready to jump in and take over against the Panthers. Ironically, it was Castillo who started in place of Prater during Iowa's opener against UNI last year while Prater was serving a two-game suspension.

"I think he's eager and older now," Ferentz said. "He has had a lot of time and repetition with the first and second-string defense. Greg is a real sharp guy, a very detailed guy, and he'll give himself every chance to play well out there."

That experience Ferentz speaks of is something that has caught

the players' attention as well with Castillo. That, and something else.

"Greg has some of the best footwork on the team," junior safety Tyler Sash said. "We always bust him about it, but I have all the confidence in the world with him. I'm just excited about both corners [Castillo and sophomore Micah Hyde]."

"They're young guys, but they're full of energy and that's what corners do, they just run around all day. I don't know how they do it covering receivers all day."

McNutt returning punts? Maybe

Right now, senior wide receiver Colin Sandeman is listed as the Hawkeyes' first-string punt returner. What's interesting is McNutt being listed on the 2-deep behind Sandeman.

McNutt may end up playing a great role on special teams for Iowa, this coming after he had made the switch in 2008 from quarterback (which he came in as) to receiver.

"You're the main focus on that play basically," the 6-4 receiver said about fielding punts. "It's like if you're the only receiver in on a fade ball. You're the only person going to get it. You know that you have to make a play and be ready because there are 10 other guys out there counting on you."

It is an idea Ferentz and his coaching staff experimented with when the Hawkeyes held their annual Kids Day scrimmage back on Aug. 14.

"He has welcomed the opportunity and has done a good job with it," Ferentz said.

Freshmen potentially making an impact

During his press conference Tuesday, Ferentz mentioned the possibility of three true freshmen seeing plenty of playing

time – tight end C.J. Fiedorowicz, and linebackers James Morris and Christian Kirksley.

He said Morris and Kirksley will likely be seeing the majority of their action on special teams, and that right now, Fiedorowicz is the No. 3 tight end behind senior Allen Reisner and junior Brad Herman.

“It’s a little different with tight ends. We’ll play two or three of them at a time,” Ferentz said. “So he may have an opportunity to be out there on scrimmage plays.”

FryFest festivities

With the second annual FryFest being held in Coralville on Sept. 3, a couple of events will be happening during this.

That morning, Stadium Drive outside Kinnick Stadium will be re-named Evashevski Drive, in honor of former Iowa football coach Forest Evashevski, who led the Hawkeyes to wins in both the 1957 and 1959 Rose Bowls.

In addition, there is a panel discussion happening at 11 a.m. inside the Coralville Marriott, featuring members of the 1985 team that won the Big Ten and went to the Rose Bowl. That squad, and members of the 1960 team, will both be signing autographs for fans during the day.