

10/12/2010: Iowa football notebook



Kirk Ferentz,
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IOWA CITY, Iowa — As the No. 15 Iowa Hawkeyes (4-1, 1-0) come away from their bye week, they now set their sights on what can only be described as a major challenge defensively when they visit Ann Arbor, Mich., on Oct. 16 to battle the Michigan Wolverines (5-1, 1-1).

Although the Wolverines are coming off a disheartening 34-17 defeat at the hands of intrastate foe Michigan State on Oct. 9, Michigan possesses the most talked-about player in the country in quarterback Denard Robinson.

Everyone in the program knows enough about him. They've seen all the "SportsCenter" highlights, and have heard all the hype surrounding the Florida native.

So much so that junior cornerback Shaun Prater said the following:

"I just want to get out there and play him," he said. "Everyone can say what they want. I just want to get out there and play."

Through six games this season, the 6-1 sophomore has 991 yards on the ground, as well as 1,223 yards passing. Altogether, Robinson has accounted for 17 of the Wolverines' touchdowns in 2010, running for nine of them, and tossing eight touchdown passes.

His play reminds both head coach Kirk Ferentz and defensive backs coach Phil Parker of former Indiana quarterback Antwaan Randle El, who made life a living hell for Ferentz during his first three seasons as the Hawkeyes' head coach.

In three games against Iowa between 1999-2001, Randle El accumulated 852 yards of total offense and nine touchdowns (five passing, four rushing).

"They're not the same players, but the pressure they put on you I think is comparable," Ferentz said. "They're the catalyst of a very explosive, high-powered offense, and I think that was true when Randle El was at Indiana. They were a very tough team to defend, and I think Michigan is the same way."

Robinson is coming off his worst performance of the season, throwing three interceptions against Michigan State. However, the defensive players know what he is aware of, and their game plan is simple.

"Keep him contained," junior linebacker Tyler Nielsen said. "Keep him inside, and don't let him loose."

Dealing with noise

Although "The Big House" hasn't always had the reputation of being such a hostile environment on opposing players like "The Horseshoe" at Ohio State or Penn State's Beaver Stadium, the 113,000-seat stadium has the largest capacity of any college football stadium in the country.

This season, after Michigan Stadium's renovations were

complete, the talk has been about how “The Big House” is as loud as it has ever been.

With this in mind, the Hawkeyes aren’t taking any chances. Wednesday practices during road game weeks will have simulated noise throughout, and the offense will be placing a major emphasis this week on improving with silent snap counts.

“You have to,” senior quarterback Ricky Stanzi said. “There are just certain things you have to do. It gets loud, and you’re in the shotgun, there’s no other way to do it. There’s no other way to get the ball snapped really.”

One thing Iowa will have going for it, however, is that the majority of the starters on both sides endured similar situations a season ago, traveling to both Penn State and Ohio State and playing in front of 100,000-plus.

“I think it helps you maintain your composure, it helps with not getting caught up in the flow of the moment and just kind of the excitement of the atmosphere,” Vandervelde said. “It’s certainly a different experience going into stadiums that are 100,000-plus people. But at the same time, when everything gets down to it, loud is loud, a stadium is a stadium, and a field is a field.”

From one Hyde to another

While sophomore cornerback Micah Hyde was enjoying his bye week like the rest of his Hawkeye teammates, his older brother was a part of the most talked about college football game on campus over the weekend.

Marcus Hyde is a starting cornerback at Michigan State, and went up against this very Michigan offense Micah will be facing this week. In fact, Marcus came away as the Spartans’ leading tackler in their 34-17 win over the Wolverines.

Micah was fully aware of the situation, and admitted it was a

little harder than he expected to simply watch the game and focus solely on what Michigan was doing offensively.

"My mom was texting me the whole game saying 'this and that, this and that, 'Go Spartans!'" he said. "She was excited, but for me, it was just watching Michigan, trying to see how they're doing."

Micah said he and Marcus talk on a weekly basis, but that the conversations rarely revolve around football. He added that any football discussion between the two of them is pretty straightforward.

"We'll both say 'Good luck,'" Micah said. "But other than that, it's not hours of talks of who they played, what could we do to do the same thing you guys did."

No desire to "hail" anybody

There are certain college fight songs that are iconic with college football. Considering the tradition and aura that surrounds the Michigan program, even the casual college football fan has heard the tune to "Hail to the Victors." Those associated with the Maize and Blue probably know the words by heart.

This week, Hawkeye players have gone inside the Hayden Fry Football Complex hearing that song over and over again.

"We've heard it about a million times already," junior offensive lineman Adam Gettis said.

"Hail to the Victors" was played repeatedly throughout the team's weight-lifting session On Monday. Gettis said it is a common occurrence for him and his teammates to hear the upcoming opponent's fight song or alma mater throughout the week when the team lifts.

The tactic has served its purpose, though.

"You don't want to hear it," Gettis said. "Every time they score a touchdown, they play that song. We don't want to hear it. We're going to prevent them from doing that so we don't have to hear that song again."

Vandervelde recalled playing the NCAA Football video games when he was younger and having to always hear the song back then, saying that it's already under his skin.

"You never really get away from it, but that's the sort of the prestige that they've built up there over at Michigan," Vandervelde said. "You can't go into that game like, 'Oh, my gosh! It's Michigan! Oh, it's 'Hail to the Victors!' You just have to go in there and play football."