

11/2/2010: Iowa football notebook



Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz discusses the 15th-ranked Hawkeyes' upcoming game at Indiana during his weekly press conference on Tuesday, Nov. 2, 2010, at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City.

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – The hits keep coming to the Iowa linebacking corps.

Head coach Kirk Ferentz announced at his weekly press conference Tuesday that junior outside linebacker Tyler

Nielsen would be out "weeks" with a neck injury that took him out of the team's 37-6 win over Michigan State last weekend.

Nielsen's injury is just one of many endured by Iowa linebackers this season.

"He has really done a great job. It's a tough loss for us," Ferentz said. "As an individual, he wants to play out there. It means an awful lot to him.

"He's going to be out for a while. We have to try to get through that."

When the 15th-ranked Hawkeyes travel to Bloomington, Ind., this weekend to play the Indiana Hoosiers, the one certainty stemming from Iowa's 2-deep this week is at middle linebacker, as freshman James Morris will make his second career start at the position.

One defensive lineman whose eyes lit up when asked about Morris on Tuesday was junior Mike Daniels. He described Morris as "bringing a fire" to the gridiron because of his passion for the game of football and said that rubs off on him.

"It's great to see the confidence he can bring in there being a true freshman," Daniels said. "Last week, he just stepped in there like it was nothing. It just goes right with our mentality of approaching everybody the same.

"He's a great kid and a great player."

Assuming Morris remains good to go throughout the rest of the week, the outside linebackers appear to be seniors Ross Petersen and Troy Johnson. However, redshirt freshman Shane DiBona got the start in place of an injured Jeremiha Hunter last week along with Nielsen before sustaining his injury.

DiBona reflected on his first start and said it felt good once he got his first hit on a Michigan State player.

"Once you're in there, you got to be physical," DiBona said. "You can't be thinking. You got to go full speed."

Ferentz added that the team hopes to have both Tarpinian and Hunter dressed when they take the field this weekend. He also said that defensive coordinator Norm Parker, who was in the press box for the Hawkeyes' game against the Spartans last weekend, will not be traveling with the team this week to Bloomington.

"I think we're probably anywhere from five to eight days, based on what I know, before he comes home," Ferentz said. "I think we're getting real close to him coming back home. The next step will be getting him in the office a couple of hours a day, that type of thing. But he won't be here Saturday."

A running trend

Even though sophomore running back Adam Robinson has proven to be the focal point of Iowa's rushing attack, there's a statistic that leads to suggest that freshman running back Marcus Coker could have a big day against Indiana should he get an appropriate number of carries this week.

Two years ago when the Hawkeyes last played the Hoosiers at Memorial Stadium, then-true freshman Jewel Hampton returned to his home state and rushed for 119 yards and three touchdowns, complementing the production Iowa was getting that day from Shonn Greene.

Then last season when the two met at Kinnick Stadium, it was then-true freshman running back Brandon Wegher getting his first career start in place of an injured Robinson. Wegher proceeded to rush for almost identical numbers as Hampton the year before with 118 yards on the ground and three touchdowns.

So if Coker does get carries – something Ferentz said he was looking to do down the stretch here – against the Hoosiers, can he be the third straight true freshman for Iowa to crack

the century mark for rushing yards on Indiana's defense?

"It would be nice to see him on the field a little bit more," junior offensive lineman Adam Gettis said of Coker after talking about the importance of Robinson to the team. "These guys are some great running backs, and I just hope they perform their best this week."

Stanzi for Heisman?

The odds of Iowa senior quarterback Ricky Stanzi seem slim, but considering where he was just over a year ago and where he is now, the transformation is quite remarkable.

In last year's 42-24 win over Indiana, Stanzi threw five interceptions, four of which came in the third quarter alone. From the fourth quarter of that game until now, the Mentor, Ohio native has thrown 24 touchdowns to just four interceptions.

This season, Stanzi has tossed 19 touchdown passes to only two picks and has gone three straight games now without turning the ball over. Should his numbers remain consistent in these final four contests, one would think that would warrant an invitation to New York City next month as a finalist for the Heisman Trophy, especially if Iowa ran the table.

He got a ringing endorsement from senior offensive lineman Julian Vandervelde despite not even being asked a question with the words "Stanzi" and "Heisman" in the same sentence.

"Take a look at Rick's stats. Everybody keeps talking about [Jake] Locker and [Andrew] Luck and Cam Newton and all these guys. I'll put Rick's stats up against any of them," Vandervelde said. "I'll put Rick as a guy, as a hard worker, and as a quarterback up against any of them."

But all that being said, the topic was brought up to Stanzi on Tuesday and he simply brushed it to the side.

"I don't really have a reaction because there's a lot of football left," the 6-4 signal-caller said. "Just like when they put you on watch lists and ask you about that, it really doesn't have any outcome on the game. It's not going to help us get better as a team. That's not going to do the preparation for us.

"It doesn't bear any weight. It doesn't really mean anything."

Rise and shine

Over the years under Ferentz, the majority of Iowa's games have traditionally started at 11 a.m. Central Standard Time.

When the Hawkeyes and Hoosiers square off inside Memorial Stadium on Saturday, it will be a 12 p.m. EST kickoff in Bloomington. This marks the first time in over a month Iowa will be playing a game that early, with the last game the Hawkeyes played that started at that time being back on Sept. 25 against Ball State.

For some of the players, playing the game early – especially since it's not at Kinnick Stadium – is just fine with them.

"We love playing early games," Vandervelde said. "My first two years here, we might not have played a game here past 11 o'clock. It's pretty standard."

This will be just the third game this season Iowa has played early, and the first one on the road. The Hawkeyes' game at Arizona on Sept. 18 was a 7:30 p.m. local start in Tucson, while the most recent road game three weeks ago at Michigan was a 3:30 p.m. local kickoff.

With this in mind, Iowa junior wide receiver Marvin McNutt talked about the importance of everyone sticking to a normal routine, even if it means getting up earlier than everyone has become accustomed to throughout October.

"You're going to have to wake up earlier and get yourselves

more prepared, get a good meal in you and things like that," McNutt said. "So yeah, our schedule does change a little bit."