

11/9/2010: Iowa football notebook



Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz discusses the 13th-ranked Hawkeyes' upcoming game at Northwestern during his weekly press conference on Tuesday, Nov. 9, 2010, at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City.

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – In the blink of an eye, the Iowa Hawkeyes saw dreams of a Big Ten title crippled, of an undefeated 2009 season shattered when the Northwestern Wildcats came into

Kinnick Stadium and won, 17-10.

On Nov. 13, the 13th-ranked Hawkeyes might not be seeking “revenge” against Northwestern, but they will look to earn just their second victory in six years against the Wildcats when the two meet at Ryan Field in Evanston, Ill.

A win over the Wildcats would set up a potentially epic showdown against No. 8 Ohio State next week at Kinnick Stadium, where the victor could position itself nicely for another trip to a BCS bowl game.

“This is a game we have to win,” junior cornerback Shaun Prater said. “We have to go in there and get this win. Hopefully, we can pull it off.”

Dating back to 2005, Northwestern has won four of the last five match-ups. But it’s the last two that really have everyone’s attention.

In addition to last year’s game that derailed a dream season for the Hawkeyes, Northwestern also won a game at Kinnick Stadium back in 2008, 22-17. In that game, Iowa had five turnovers and lost running back Shonn Greene to an injury.

Between the two recent losses in Iowa City, the Hawkeyes had a combined total of nine turnovers to Northwestern’s two, a statistic Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz was quick to point out as a reason for past failures against the Wildcats.

“To me, that has been the story of it,” Ferentz said. “You’ve got two even teams. One team played clean, played really well, and the other team didn’t. It’s pretty academic who’s going to win or lose.”

If the Hawkeyes are going to end this losing streak to Northwestern, the one player they will have to shut down is Dan Persa. The junior quarterback has filled the shoes of Mike Kafka as the Wildcats’ signal-caller admirably, and comes into

this game as one of the most efficient passers in the country.

But the greater aspect of Persa's game is his mobility, something the Hawkeyes saw up close and in-person last year when Persa came in for an injured Kafka and paved the way for the Wildcats to leave Iowa with a win last November.

"A very good dual-threat quarterback," junior safety Tyler Sash said in describing Persa. "If the pocket's collapsing, he's not scared. He'll try to run you over. He's not like most quarterbacks in the Big Ten who are going to slide or just try to pick up the first down. He's fighting for extra yards and he's doing everything in his will to help the team win. He has been doing a great job of that all year."

Injury not changing things

One moment that still sticks fresh in the memories of not only fans, but players and coaches from last year's meeting was Iowa quarterback Ricky Stanzi suffering an ankle injury that required surgery and forced him to miss the remainder of the Hawkeyes' regular season.

The play was a naked bootleg near the goal-line in which Stanzi was sacked, lost the football, and it was recovered by the Wildcats in the end zone for a touchdown. While Northwestern was celebrating, the entire stadium sat in stunned silence as trainers came to the side of Stanzi, laying on the turf.

"I think I more heard it than saw it," senior offensive lineman Julian Vandervelde said, describing that moment when Stanzi was down. "You hear the crowd kind of collectively gasp."

"You turn around and you see your quarterback on the ground, that's always a moment of dread for an offensive lineman."

It has been more than a year now since the injury occurred,

and Stanzi has played lights out as a quarterback since returning for the 2010 FedEx Orange Bowl last January. This season, Stanzi has thrown 20 touchdown passes to just three interceptions.

Part of Stanzi's success, he feels, comes from not changing how he approached or played the game of football because of the ankle injury.

"It was an injury. It's part of football. You go and rehab, and you try to get back as fast as possible," Stanzi said. "If you change the way you play after an injury mentally, it's just not something that you're supposed to do. It's an injury. It's part of the game."

Robinson good to go

Ferentz expected sophomore running back Adam Robinson to return to the practice field on Tuesday after missing last weekend's game at Indiana with an injury believed to be a concussion, although Ferentz didn't acknowledge it was a concussion.

But while Robinson is poised to return to the backfield this weekend, Iowa's "Next Man In" philosophy seemed to work OK as far as a ground game was concerned.

True freshman running back Marcus Coker got the start in place of the absent Robinson, and made the most of it. Coker finished with 22 carries for 129 yards rushing.

"He ran hard," senior tight end Allen Reisner said about Coker's performance. "I think he hurt his hand or something like that, but he still kept running hard and he didn't fumble the ball at all, so that's great."

Nevertheless, Robinson's return gives Iowa an extra boost it might find itself needing this weekend.

"It's a relief to have Adam back," redshirt freshman running

back Brad Rogers said. "Marcus did a good job of filling in for him, but having Adam back brings a different dimension to the offense."

Kinnick East?

Northwestern is anticipating a sellout of the 47,130-seat Ryan Field this weekend when the Hawkeyes do travel to Evanston. It is reportedly the first time the Wildcats have sold out a game at Ryan Field not against either Michigan or Ohio State since its first year of existence in 1997, when it replaced the team's former confines, Dyche Stadium.

But while the seats are expected to fill to capacity, it appears many of the fans on hand will be Hawkeye fans making the trek across the Mississippi into the Chicagoland area this weekend.

Which is just fine with the Iowa players.

"They show up everywhere," sophomore cornerback Micah Hyde said about Iowa fans. "Everywhere we go, you hear the Hawkeyes cheering and yelling. It does give us momentum and stuff like that."