

9/13/2011: Iowa football notebook



Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz discusses the Hawkeyes' upcoming game against Pittsburgh with the local media during his weekly press conference on Tuesday, Sept. 13, 2011 at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City.

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – Three days have passed since the Iowa Hawkeyes left Ames 44-41 losers in triple overtime to Iowa State, and the best way to describe the mood Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz was in Tuesday is cantankerous.

Ferentz might downplay it publicly, but he's fully aware of the criticism coming from fans and media alike following two decisions made against Iowa State last weekend. The first decision was heading to overtime despite having 1:17 and two timeouts to work with offensively at the end of the fourth quarter. The second decision was having Mike Meyer kick a 33-yard field goal on 4th-and-1 shortly after Iowa State was

called for a five-yard illegal substitution penalty.

The first decision was barely touched on by Ferentz. The second one, however, he did provide a little elaboration on.

“Obviously, I was banking on us being able to keep them out of the end zone,” Ferentz said. “Knowing what I know now, I would’ve done it differently for sure.”

The Hawkeyes now transition into playing their next two games at home, with the first of those contests coming Sept. 17 against Pittsburgh, who enters Kinnick Stadium with a 2-0 record after defeating Maine last weekend, 35-29.

Even though 1-1 isn’t where any of the Hawkeyes envisioned themselves being at this juncture in their season, the focus now becomes not allowing what took place in Ames to reincarnate this weekend inside Kinnick Stadium.

“Right now, there’s a long season ahead of us,” senior wide receiver Marvin McNutt said. “We’re 1-1. That’s not anything to hold your head down for. We have one loss on the season, so continue to fight, continue to work, and continue to try and get better.”

Facing nation’s top back

When Pittsburgh comes to Kinnick Stadium this weekend, it will have at its disposal junior running back Ray Graham, who currently leads the Football Bowl Subdivision in rushing with a total of 322 yards on the ground in the Panthers’ first two games.

Graham had 201 yards rushing in Pittsburgh’s season-opener, a 35-16 win over Buffalo, and followed that up with a 121-yard performance against Maine last weekend.

Ferentz described Graham as “a strong, aggressive runner” on Tuesday.

"It's definitely exciting," senior defensive tackle Mike Daniels said about facing a running back he didn't know until Tuesday afternoon had the success he has had to this point. "I mean, football is fun regardless, but to hear something like that makes it much more fun."

It isn't just the defense excited about the challenge a back like Graham provides. Sophomore running back Marcus Coker is also embracing the opportunity to see how he measures up against a player receiving all the hype entering this week.

"He's a great running back and they have a great offense," Coker said. "I need to step my game up to be like him."

Speaking of Coker...

Coker bounced back for the Hawkeyes last weekend against Iowa State, rushing for 140 yards on 35 carries and scoring a pair of touchdowns. This outing came following a disastrous performance against Tennessee Tech in the season-opener, where he only compiled 41 yards on 11 carries and fumbled twice.

"It felt good to be sore again," Coker said. "That's one of those things that you miss. I mean, you hate it when you are sore, but you miss it when you're not."

Junior quarterback James Vandenberg doesn't believe there's any sort of "breaking point" with Coker, adding that he's "never seen him flinch." He also commented on Coker being calm in the huddle.

"He's not a very talkative guy. Kind of reminds you of Shonn Greene," Vandenberg said. "Never really comments. If we call a run play, he takes it and crushes somebody. If we can a pass play, he stays in there and protects."

Meyer becoming more comfortable, confident

Ferentz referred to sophomore kicker Mike Meyer as one of the few bright spots for the Hawkeyes against Iowa State, and for

good reason. Meyer accounted for 15 of Iowa's points last weekend and made all three of his PAT tries and all four of his field-goal attempts. One of the field goals he made came in the third quarter from 50 yards out, which was a career-long.

"I knew the coaches had confidence in me, putting me in there," Meyer said about the 50-yard attempt. "If they have confidence, I definitely know I can do it."

Meyer said an ideal range for him with Iowa facing the wind on its final possession last Saturday would've been around 50 yards had the Hawkeyes been able to move the ball. He also said there wasn't any second guessing by Ferentz on whether to trust him and his leg on the 4th-and-1 in the third overtime.

"He called it, so I stuck with it," Meyer said.

Ferentz addresses question regarding DJK

The timing might have seemed awkward to some, but Ferentz was asked for the first time in a public setting about former wide receiver Derrell Johnson-Koulianos, who was unsuccessful signing with an NFL team following the lockout last July when players such as Allen Reisner and Ryan Donahue were able to ink free-agent deals and make the 53-man rosters of the teams they signed with.

Ferentz denied any accusations that might exist of him deliberately telling NFL teams not to sign Johnson-Koulianos, who was suspended from the team last December following an arrest three weeks before the Hawkeyes played in the Insight Bowl.

"Typically, players' actions speak for themselves, and I haven't slammed any player to anybody since I've been here," Ferentz said.

First color-schemed game

This is the first of three color-schemed games Iowa has planned for 2011, as it encourages fans to wear gold to this weekend's game against Pittsburgh. Iowa has played five such games where fans were encouraged to wear gold and has won the last four. The lone loss was the first one back in 2006 when the Hawkeyes lost to then-No. 1 Ohio State.