

10/4/2011: Iowa football notebook



Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz discusses the Hawkeyes' upcoming game at Penn State with the local media during his weekly press conference on Tuesday, Oct. 4, 2011, at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City.

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – The Iowa Hawkeyes open Big Ten play against an opponent that has brought out the best in them in recent seasons.

Iowa enters its Oct. 8 contest at Penn State having won three straight meetings against the Nittany Lions, and this also marks the third consecutive season the Hawkeyes' conference opener has come against Penn State, a team head coach Kirk Ferentz has an 8-2 record against since his inaugural campaign in 1999.

Even more revealing is that Iowa has emerged victorious in five of its last six visits to Beaver Stadium in State

College, Pa., a trend that dates back to the 1996 season. The lone defeat at Penn State during this span came in 2007, a season where the Hawkeyes finished 6-6.

But even with the past success against the Nittany Lions, there's also one historical anecdote working against Iowa this week. Coming off bye weeks during the Ferentz era, the Hawkeyes have a 3-5 record, with one of those victories coming last season at Michigan.

With all this in mind, one thing that is clear entering this interdivisional contest to Ferentz is knowing what his team will have to do against one coached by a college football icon in Joe Paterno.

"We are going to have to be at our absolute best, just to have a chance to win this football game," Ferentz said.

Facing two quarterbacks

One of the biggest challenges Iowa will have this week is preparing for two Penn State quarterbacks in sophomore Rob Bolden and junior Matt McGloin. Bolden has started the Nittany Lions' first five games, but has split reps in each of those five games with McGloin. As of Tuesday, Paterno remains unsettled on the quarterback situation for this weekend's game.

When the Hawkeyes defeated Penn State 24-3 at Kinnick Stadium last season, Bolden started for the Nittany Lions, completing 20-of-37 pass attempts for 212 yards. He also threw a pick-six late in the fourth quarter to cornerback Shaun Prater, which secured the win for Iowa.

"He was a younger guy, so he was definitely getting used to their system," senior defensive tackle Mike Daniels said. "He looks more comfortable back there."

As far as this season is concerned, McGloin has been the more

efficient quarterback for Penn State completing 44-of-76 attempts for 625 yards passing, along with four touchdowns and zero interceptions. In comparison, Bolden is 39-of-85 passing for 455 yards with only one touchdown and four interceptions.

"I've seen McGloin make some nice throws, but at the same time, I've seen Bolden extend some plays with his feet," sophomore linebacker James Morris said. "Those are two things that maybe we've struggled defending this year, so we're going to have to tighten screws when Bolden's in the game, or McGloin, just be conscientious of what they can do to hurt us."

Utilizing the bye week

Last weekend's bye gave players and coaches alike an opportunity to get away from football and do things like watch other games or spend time with family.

Sophomore running back Marcus Coker used it as a chance to rest while other running backs such as true freshmen Damon Bullock and Jordan Canzeri, both of whom got carries in Iowa's 45-17 win over ULM on Sept. 24, were being worked heavily.

"It was probably good because they were in the game a little bit, so they know how it is," Coker said. "They can see the things they need to critique."

Prater was among those who spent the day watching college football, but said he was unable to watch Penn State's game against Indiana since his Mediacom service didn't include ESPNU, the channel that aired that game. It gave him a different perspective.

"It was very different," Prater said. "I'm watching these guys go through their game plans, preparations, and pre-warmups and I'm just sitting there calm and relaxed. It was nice."

As for Ferentz, it was a chance to be 'Dad.' He said his

family hosted a dinner that evening for his youngest son, Steve, who is a senior at Iowa City High School. He also said he was fully aware of the game going on between Nebraska and Wisconsin up at Camp Randall Stadium in Madison.

"I was being a parent, and I knew the game was on, too," Ferentz said. "I was being a good parent."

Meanwhile, some of the players from the eastern part of the country like Coker (Maryland) and Daniels (New Jersey) have been dealing with ticket requests from family and friends for this weekend's game seeing how both grew up nearby State College.

"Being from New Jersey, Penn State, that was the college everybody rooted for," Daniels said. "I think it's about a five-hour drive from where I live, so I have a lot of people that are interested in going to the game."

Derby update

Ferentz said during his press conference Tuesday that while redshirt freshman quarterback A.J. Derby is suspended for Iowa's next two games, he would continue to practice with the team. Derby was arrested Oct. 1 on charges of Fourth Degree criminal mischief and public intoxication.

"There are two kinds of suspensions, I guess. One where you're banished," Ferentz said. "Then the other is where you'll just work on teams over the weekend, do community service and those kinds of things, pay your price. When you're done, you're done and you go back to work."

With Derby absent from the short-term picture, junior quarterback John Wienke now enters as the back-up to fellow junior quarterback James Vandenberg. Wienke has never taken snaps during a game, but has been handling the team's holding duties this season.

Ferentz described Wienke as being conscientious, and also expressed what he felt was the slightest of differences between him and Derby.

“John is a guy who is more of a thrower probably,” Ferentz said. “A.J. is a little bit more athletic, and John is probably more of a thrower, a deep-ball thrower.”

Injury update

Ferentz also presented updates on sophomore cornerback B.J. Lowery and sophomore fullback Brad Rogers on Tuesday. Lowery, who has been out since fall camp with a wrist injury, will not play for the Hawkeyes this weekend at Penn State, but Ferentz is optimistic Lowery will return to action in time for Iowa's game next week against Northwestern.

As for Rogers, Ferentz used a swimming pool analogy when describing Rogers' progress, saying he's still at the shallow end while most of the team is back in the deep end. Rogers, who hasn't played since a heart condition was discovered shortly before last year's Insight Bowl against Missouri, has been medically cleared to practice again with the team, but is far behind everyone in terms of conditioning.

“Guys break down if they are not in great shape,” Ferentz said. “So we have to be really smart about how much he does and how many plays he would play once he gets to the game field.”

The last memorable visit to Beaver Stadium

Iowa's last visit to Beaver Stadium came in 2009, with the Hawkeyes coming from behind to beat then-No. 5 Penn State, 21-10, in a game that set the stage for the Orange Bowl run Iowa went on that season.

The defining moment from that contest came in the fourth quarter. With Iowa trailing 10-5, a “punt safe” formation was

called with Penn State facing a fourth down. Former defensive end Adrian Clayborn proceeded to block the Nittany Lion punt and return it 53 yards to put the Hawkeyes ahead 11-10.

"We were just waiting for them to punt it down, maybe get a fair catch, and get the offense on the field," said junior cornerback Micah Hyde, who back then was a true freshman. "I remember everyone just jumping up and down. It was a crazy experience."

Senior wide receiver Marvin McNutt, then a sophomore, said he felt Clayborn's block coming since he had come close to blocking the previous Penn State punt and recalled discussing it with then-wide receiver Paul Chaney, Jr.

"I looked at Paul, he looked at me, and we started going crazy," McNutt said. "It was just a great moment in Hawkeye football."