

Iowa returns to Insight Bowl to face Oklahoma



The Iowa Hawkeyes will play No. 19 Oklahoma in the 2011 Insight Bowl on Dec. 30 at Sun Devil Stadium in Tempe, Ariz.

By Brendan Stiles

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For the second straight year, the Iowa Hawkeyes find their season culminating with a trip to the Insight Bowl. This time around though, the opponent has a familiar face to it and the circumstances of how Iowa ended up back in this game are different.

The Hawkeyes will face No. 19 Oklahoma (9-3) on Dec. 30 at Sun Devil Stadium in Tempe, Ariz. The Sooners are led by head coach Bob Stoops, a former Iowa defensive back who was also a finalist for the Hawkeye coaching gig when Kirk Ferentz was picked to replace Iowa icon Hayden Fry. In fact, Stoops played at Iowa while Ferentz was an assistant under Fry and the two

are very close friends.

If both coaches had their way, this game would never happen as long as they both roamed their respective teams' sidelines. But on Sunday, Ferentz seemed fully aware of having to put that friendship aside for one evening, just as he had to on two occasions before when Iowa played a home-and-home while Bob's younger brother Mike Stoops was its coach.

"It's not anything I look forward to, but there are worse things to do, too," Ferentz said. "It's better than staying home. I know that."

Then there's the dynamic of how this match-up between Iowa and Oklahoma came about. The Big Ten saw a series of unforeseen events greatly impact its bowl order. As expected, the conference received two BCS bids with Wisconsin playing in the Rose Bowl after beating Michigan State in the Big Ten Championship Game over the weekend, and Michigan found itself as an at-large and will play in the Sugar Bowl as a result. Nebraska was then selected to play in the Capital One Bowl, and Big Ten runner-up Michigan State will be in the Outback Bowl.

The Insight Bowl, which rotates every other year with the Gator Bowl in the Big Ten order, was in prime position to take a 9-3 Penn State squad that won a share of the Big Ten's Leaders Division. However, the child sex abuse scandal that came to light over the past month at Penn State and ultimately led to the dismissal of Joe Paterno as its head coach played a major role in the Insight Bowl not selecting the Nittany Lions.

As a result, 7-5 Iowa, 6-6 Ohio State and 6-6 Northwestern (all of whom lost to Penn State this season) all were selected ahead of Penn State, with the Insight Bowl opting to give the Hawkeyes a return trip to Tempe to face the Sooners later this month.

"Whenever I'm talking to bowl reps, we focus specifically on Iowa, Iowa's fans, Iowa's tradition and Iowa's coaching staff," Barta said. "So we didn't talk at all about any other teams."

Meanwhile, Oklahoma finds itself in this game after losing what was essentially a Big 12 title game to in-state rival Oklahoma State over the weekend, as a win would've given the Sooners their second straight Big 12 crown and earned them a trip to their fourth Fiesta Bowl in six years. Instead, Oklahoma limps into this game off the 44-10 drubbing it received from the Cowboys, as well as defeats at the hands of Texas Tech and Baylor this season.

The Sooners are also without their leading rusher (running back Dominique Whaley) and their leading receiver (Ryan Broyles). The loss of Broyles is the most significant, as Oklahoma is 1-2 since he tore his ACL in a win over Texas A&M. Before the injury, he had 83 catches for 1,157 yards receiving.

But even without Whaley and Broyles, the Hawkeyes will find themselves having to deal with another highly-touted quarterback this year in Oklahoma's Landry Jones. The junior has thrown for 4,302 yards this season, as well as 28 touchdown passes and 14 interceptions, five of which have come since losing Broyles.

"It's going to be an imposing task for us," Ferentz said.

With the Big 12 being the designated home team for this game, Iowa will wear its white jerseys for this game while Oklahoma wears its home crimson.

Kickoff is scheduled on Dec. 30 for 9 p.m. Central Standard Time, and the game will be televised nationally on ESPN.

2010-11 BIG TEN BOWL SCHEDULE:

Little Caesars Pizza Bowl; Detroit, Mich.

Tuesday, Dec. 27, 2011; Purdue (6-6) vs. Western Michigan (7-5); 3:30 p.m. CST; ESPN

Insight Bowl; Tempe, Ariz.

Friday, Dec. 30, 2011; Iowa (7-5) vs. Oklahoma (9-3); 9 p.m. CST; ESPN

Meineke Car Care Bowl of Texas; Houston, Texas

Saturday, Dec. 31, 2011; Northwestern (6-6) vs. Texas A&M (6-6); 11 a.m. CST; ESPN

Kraft Fight Hunger Bowl; San Francisco, Calif.

Saturday, Dec. 31, 2011; Illinois (6-6) vs. UCLA (6-7); 2:30 p.m. CST; ESPN

TicketCity Bowl; Dallas, Texas

Monday, Jan. 2, 2012; Penn State (9-3) vs. Houston (12-1); 11 a.m. CST; ESPNU

Gator Bowl; Jacksonville, Fla.

Monday, Jan. 2, 2012; Ohio State (6-6) vs. Florida (6-6); 12 p.m. CST; ESPN2

Outback Bowl; Tampa, Fla.

Monday, Jan. 2, 2012; Michigan State (10-3) vs. Georgia (10-3); 12 p.m. CST; ABC

Capital One Bowl; Orlando, Fla.

Monday, Jan. 2, 2012; Nebraska (9-3) vs. South Carolina (10-2); 12 p.m. CST; ESPN

Rose Bowl; Pasadena, Calif.

Monday, Jan. 2, 2012; Wisconsin (11-2) vs. Oregon (11-2); 4 p.m. CST; ESPN

Sugar Bowl; New Orleans, La.

Tuesday, Jan. 3, 2012; Michigan (10-2) vs. Virginia Tech (11-2); 7:30 p.m. CST; ESPN