

10/2/2012: Iowa football notebook

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – With the Iowa Hawkeyes in the early portion of their bye week, head coach Kirk Ferentz is staying silent. Defensive coordinator Phil Parker filled in for Ferentz on the Big Ten teleconference Tuesday morning. Tuesday also provided the one press conference during the regular season in which Parker and offensive coordinator Greg Davis would speak to the media and share their thoughts publicly on what they've seen thus far in 2012.

Iowa sits at 3-2 overall after winning its Big Ten opener over Minnesota last weekend. What has made the Hawkeyes' season intriguing to this point is that both the offense and defense have had major roles in both wins and losses. The defense was critical to an 18-17 win over Northern Illinois, but also was a culprit in losing 32-31 to Central Michigan. Conversely, the offense could only muster six points in a loss to Iowa State, but managed to bounce back and score 27 points the following week against Northern Iowa.



Iowa offensive coordinator Greg Davis discusses the Hawkeye offense with

reporters during his press conference held Tuesday, Oct. 2, 2012, at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City.

As far as the offense is concerned, it has been a progression. After scoring a combined total of 24 points in its first two games, the Hawkeyes have averaged nearly 30 points per game since. Two of the major reasons why have been improved play along the offensive line and the surprising emergence of sophomore Mark Weisman as the team's featured back after starting Iowa's first three games at fullback.

After surrendering six sacks in their season opener against Northern Illinois, the Iowa O-line hasn't given up a single sack in each of its last four games. As for Weisman, he has rushed for 505 yards and five touchdowns on 70 carries since becoming the top running back following injuries to sophomore Damon Bullock and true freshman Greg Garmon in the contest against Northern Iowa.

"If you had asked me in August if I knew that Mark Weisman would be this productive, I would've liked to have said yes, but that would've been less than truth," Davis said. "We did work Mark in camp at tailback some. We had no idea he'd be as productive as he has been since he has jumped in there."

Davis said Weisman would remain at running back for the time being, but that when Bullock returns from his concussion, Iowa would like to use some packages like it did earlier in the season where both are on the field at the same time.

Also a heavy topic of conversation while Davis was at the dais was the play of senior quarterback James Vandenberg. Following a junior season where he tossed 25 touchdown passes, Vandenberg has only thrown two touchdowns through five games this fall.

While the numbers haven't been what either Davis or Vandenberg may have envisioned for this point in the season, the first-year offensive coordinator expressed optimism regarding how Vandenberg has been mature enough to manage the offense with the leeway provided to him by the coaching staff.

"In the red zone the other day, we probably had at least five passes that he checked off of and went to a run," Davis said, referring to Iowa's most recent game against Minnesota. "I mean, he had plenty of opportunities in the red zone to go to a pass, but he saw an advantage in the run and he went to the run."



Iowa defensive coordinator Greg Davis discusses the Hawkeye defense with reporters during his press conference held Tuesday, Oct. 2, 2012, at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City.

Defensively, one intriguing topic of conversation came when Parker was asked about adjustment making. Prior to last weekend's game against Minnesota, Iowa had gone three straight games – all at home no less – where opposing offenses drove down the field for touchdowns on their first possessions. In the two games against Iowa State and Northern Iowa, the only touchdowns given up came on those opening drives.

The Hawkeyes got off to a much better start against the Golden Gophers with junior free safety Tanner Miller making an interception on Minnesota's fourth play from scrimmage and the defense as a whole forcing three Gopher turnovers. What eventually transpired was Iowa taking a 24-0 lead with it into halftime.

"I don't think we schemed any differently," Parker said. "I think the guys played with a lot of energy and they came out ready to go and played the full 60 minutes. Their attitude was right and their energy was right and I think that's a big part of football today."

One player who has emerged along the defense this season – at least statistically speaking – is junior linebacker Anthony Hitchens. In his first season as a starter, Hitchens has recorded 63 tackles through five games. Not only is that a team-high and not only does that total lead the Big Ten, but at this point, his 63 tackles are a national high among FBS players.

"Sometimes, he has been in positions based on where they want to throw the ball, but obviously in the run game he has been effective, too," Parker said. "I'm pleased. We knew he was a tough, strong kid and he has made a lot of tackles for us."

While the Hawkeyes sit at home this weekend...

By Saturday's end, Iowa could find itself alone in first place atop the Legends Division. Right now, the Hawkeyes are one of three teams in the division at 1-0, with the others being No. 21 Nebraska and No. 24 Northwestern.

Both the Cornhuskers and Wildcats face challenging road games this week against teams from the Leaders. Nebraska plays at No. 12 Ohio State, while Northwestern travels to Penn State seeking to become the Big Ten's first bowl-eligible team. Michigan also opens Big Ten play this week at Purdue. If the Cornhuskers, Wildcats and Wolverines all lose Saturday, Iowa

would then remain as the only Legends Division team without a conference loss.

TRANSCRIPTS (courtesy of UI Sports Info.):

[Greg Davis, Iowa offensive coordinator \(10/2/2012\)](#)

[Phil Parker, Iowa defensive coordinator \(10/2/2012\)](#)