

10/9/2012: Iowa football notebook



Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz discusses the Hawkeyes' upcoming game at Michigan State with the local media during his weekly press conference held Tuesday, Oct. 9, 2012 at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City.

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HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – It was a moment Micah Hyde was dreading Tuesday, but knew he had to tackle head on.

Three days following [his arrest on charges of interference with official acts and public intoxication](#), Hyde stood inside the Kenyon Practice Facility, faced the media, and said what he could say on the matter.

Some questions led to multiple replies of “I have a game I have to prepare for.” But to his credit, Hyde didn’t shy away from it all either.

“I just felt like I let a lot of people down,” Hyde said. “It

definitely could have been avoided. I felt it just escalated to where it shouldn't have. But it could have easily been resolved."

Because it was a first time offense for Hyde, he won't be suspended. In fact, head coach Kirk Ferentz made clear Tuesday that neither he nor sophomore tight end Ray Hamilton nor junior offensive lineman Drew Clark – both of whom also had separate run-ins with the law this past weekend – would face suspensions for Iowa's game Oct. 13 against Michigan State because all three players were in good standing prior. [Hyde and Hamilton were both listed on the 2-deep released](#) by the team on Oct. 8.

"If they practice well this week, we expect them all to play," Ferentz said.

In Hyde's case, one thing he did lose was his captaincy. Ferentz purposefully left Hyde off the ballot given to the team over the weekend and in his place – for now – as one of the Hawkeyes' team captains will be junior linebacker Christian Kirksey.

"Since I've been here, I've tried to lead my team, obviously, in the right direction," Hyde said. "With this year being my senior year, I definitely wanted the captain name underneath my belt. It's unfortunate. It's my life and I've got to learn from it."

Whether or not Hyde could be re-named a team captain later in the season remains to be seen (Ferentz didn't rule this out). Senior wide receiver Keenan Davis, one of Hyde's closest friends on the team, said the entire team still views Hyde as though he was a team captain, even if he isn't holding the actual title right now. When asked about the matter, Ferentz took the opportunity to speak highly of his three-year starting cornerback.

"I'm not minimizing what he did, but again, we're talking

about three-and-a-half years of model behavior, model citizenship. Quality young guy,” Ferentz said. “I have no reason to believe there are going to be any problems moving down the road. That’s kind of my attitude on this whole thing.”

Hyde pled guilty to the interference with official acts charge, and not guilty to the public intoxication charge.

Players react

The initial reaction from teammates was shock. Senior cornerback Greg Castillo said he found out about everything Saturday afternoon from his girlfriend after he had just spent his morning taking the LSAT exam.

“I texted them and let them know, ‘Hey, I’m here if you need anything,’” Castillo said. “But I guess people forget we’re all college students, too. We’re all guilty of doing stupid stuff.”

As a result of the three incidents to take place over the weekend, Ferentz said he made the decision to move the team’s curfew up to a time he declined to publicly specify and made everyone aware of the decision after meeting with them Sunday.

“We’re all going to pay attention and not relax so much now,” Davis said. “It’s going to be more of a wake-up call for us, and it’s for the whole team, just to know that we can’t relax. Anything can happen in Iowa City.”

How the bye weekend was spent

With Iowa having a Saturday away from the gridiron, players used the opportunity to do other things. While Castillo was taking the LSAT, guys like offensive linemen Matt Tobin and Brandon Scherff used the off day to get some hunting in.

But for the most part, players spent their Saturday off watching college football. As one would expect, some players

made the conscientious effort to watch Michigan State's game at Indiana last weekend, a game the Spartans won 31-27 after trailing 17-0 in the first quarter.

"I was watching the game," junior linebacker Anthony Hitchens said. "Me and a couple of buddies on the team were watching and making texts throughout the game. We were definitely trying to get better by watching the game and using the extra time to get our reads better than the week before."

That opportunity to just sit around and watch games was a rare one for defensive tackle Steve Bigach. As a fifth-year senior who has become so accustomed to religiously studying game film, Bigach said it felt different to simply watch Michigan State's game against Indiana and others throughout the day on TV like a fan.

"It's weird," Bigach said. "I still can't watch it like a fan. I kind of watch the offensive line and how they're moving with their hand placement and everything like that. I usually don't watch the ball very much."

"It was nice to just get a chance to relax and watch football. I haven't done that in a number of years, so it was nice."

Bullock "expected to play"

Perhaps the best news to come the Hawkeyes' way over the weekend was confirmation from Ferentz that sophomore running back Damon Bullock has been medically cleared to practice and is expected to play against Michigan State. Bullock suffered a concussion during the second quarter of Iowa's 27-16 win over Northern Iowa on Sept. 15 and has missed the past two games as a result.

What makes this intriguing is the success sophomore Mark Weisman has had since taking over running back duties in that same game for Bullock and freshman Greg Garmon (who has since returned from his injury). Playing at running back, Weisman

has 70 carries to the tune of 505 yards rushing and five touchdowns.

"I don't know if it changes anything," Weisman said. "I'm just going to prepare the same way I have been, just prepare to play as much as I can. We'll see. That's the coaches' decision who's going to get all the reps."

Ferentz said he'll want to use packages that feature both Weisman and Bullock, whether it's with Weisman lined up as a fullback again, or if he's the feature back and Bullock is lined up as a receiver, which he played on and off last season.

"They're both guys who have promise and have potential to be good players," Ferentz said. "The biggest thing we don't want to do is screw one of them up and have them do too much. If they can both focus on playing that running back position, I think if we can get that established, we'd be well ahead of the game from where we were six weeks ago."

Regardless of who's in the backfield when, Iowa's offense has a tall order facing Michigan State this weekend. The Spartans have the top rushing defense in the Big Ten, allowing a mere 86 yards per game on the ground. Michigan State also leads the conference in total defense. Its 272 yards per game allowed is almost 40 yards fewer than the second-best yards allowed average, which belongs to Michigan.

"They stop people from running the ball, from the very beginning," senior quarterback James Vandenberg said. "If you don't get a positive play on that first down, you're already behind the chains and they've got you where they want you."

Last weekend against Indiana, the Spartans found themselves spotting the Hoosiers 17 points before coming from behind to win. In the first quarter of that game, Indiana's success came mainly through using no-huddle and playing up-tempo, something Iowa offensive coordinator Greg Davis said last week he was

hoping to implement more of in the Hawkeye offense going forward.

But Ferentz was quick to say that very little revisions (if any) were made to the game plan being assembled by the coaching staff last week.

"What Indiana has success with, we really don't do," Ferentz said. "So congratulations to them, but it didn't help us an awful lot. They're very different in terms of their structure, but they did a nice job.

"Bottom line is, if you execute well and play really well, you'll have a chance to be successful. But if you're not doing that, you're going to get the door shut on you."

Not wanting to get hurdled

The defensive players have watched both game film and highlight reels of Michigan State running back Le'Veon Bell. They're fully aware of Bell's knack for embarrassing guys trying to tackle him by hurdling over them en route to long runs.

Bell did it again last weekend against Indiana, the third time on record he has hurdled a defender this season. When asked what goes through his mind watching Bell's hops, Castillo quickly said, "I hope I'm not one of them."

Hitchens said one of the keys to tackling Bell and keeping him from attempting his signature hurdling is to simply put a body on him without ducking the head. But when Bell's not hurdling guys, he's bull-dozing defenders. Through six games, Bell has rushed for a league-high 776 yards and has seven touchdowns on the ground.

His 129.3 yards per game is second to Michigan quarterback Denard Robinson, and the Spartans' average time of possession is 34:17, which not only leads the Big Ten but is more than a

full minute longer than Minnesota's second-longest league average of 33:08.

"If you always try to go for his legs, he will hurdle you," Kirksey said. "He's a big back, so sometimes he can run through you. You just got to make sure you run full speed and gang tackle."