

11/6/2012: Iowa football notebook



Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz discusses the Hawkeyes' upcoming game against Purdue during his weekly press conference held Tuesday, Nov. 6, 2012, at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City.

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – The clock is ticking on the Iowa Hawkeyes' 2012 season.

With three games left, Iowa sits at 4-5 overall (2-3 in the Big Ten) and needing to win two of those last three contests in order to become bowl-eligible. The Hawkeyes, however, have lost three straight games and still have yet to play a ranked opponent this season.

Not to mention that after Saturday's contest at Kinnick Stadium with Purdue, Iowa still has to close out its season playing Michigan and No. 18 Nebraska, both of whom are tied atop the Legends Division at 4-1 in conference play.

"We've just got to keep fighting, keep playing," senior wide receiver Keenan Davis said. "It's not work ethic. We all want to be out there. We're all playing hard."

"We just need to execute better in these last three weeks."

As far as elaborating on the team-wide "lack of execution" cliché used following every loss, Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz simply said it was a matter of everyone being in better sync.

"We win as a team typically and lose as a team," Ferentz said. "We're not quite there. Then the other part of that discussion is consistency."

Revisiting another fourth down decision

For the second straight week, the Hawkeyes found themselves facing a fourth down where the coaching decision made by Ferentz drew vocal criticism from the fan base. In a 28-17 loss to Northwestern, it was going for it on fourth down instead of kicking a field goal late that could've made it a one-possession game.

Last weekend in Iowa's 24-21 loss to Indiana, it was Ferentz deciding to punt on 4th-and-1 late and count on his defense to get a stop despite getting carved apart throughout the game by the Hoosier offense.

The Hawkeyes had 4th-and-1 on their own 28-yard line following a seven-yard reception by Davis. Iowa was looking to catch Indiana off guard by running up to the line to run a QB sneak with Vandenberg on 4th-and-1.

"We were in our stances all ready to go fly on the ball," senior left tackle Matt Tobin said, who described everyone on the offensive line (including himself) as being "geeked up" about going for it in that spot.

But the element of surprise evaporated into the Bloomington air when the officials stopped the clock to review the spot

where Davis was hit out of bounds. Ferentz defended his decision Tuesday by saying the play would've been ruled dead even if Vandenberg had gotten the snap off and executed the play for a first down.

He also came to the defense of offensive coordinator Greg Davis, saying it was him, not Davis, that made both the initial decision to go for it on fourth down and later the decision to punt instead while the prior play was being looked at.

"At that point, I had made up my mind," Ferentz said. "Don't be mad at Greg on that one. If anyone is mad at Greg, be mad at me. Just to clear the air."

Hyde renamed team captain

Ferentz announced Tuesday that senior cornerback Micah Hyde was renamed a team captain for Saturday's game against Purdue. Hyde served as one of the Hawkeyes' four captains for the first five weeks of the season but had the title taken from him following Iowa's bye week last month when Hyde was arrested on charges of interference with official acts and public intoxication (Hyde pled guilty to the interference charge and not guilty to the public intoxication charge).

Hyde didn't learn of the honor until Tuesday afternoon as he entered the Kenyon Practice Facility.

"It's an honor, especially after what happened," Hyde said. "I could keep working hard and everybody could put it past them and continue to keep working."

For the last four games, junior linebacker Christian Kirksey had filled in as a team captain in place of Hyde. Ferentz said the decision to make Hyde a captain again had nothing to do with Kirksey and everything to do with Hyde getting back in good graces.

"That was one of the penalties he faced. He had several," Ferentz said. "So that part has been paid, now he's eligible again. It's kind of a no-brainer. Micah is a tremendous young guy, a tremendous football player."

Special uniforms being worn Saturday

When the Hawkeyes take the field Saturday morning, they'll be coming out with a much different look than anything they've ever worn inside Kinnick Stadium.

The uniforms being worn are of the Nike Pro Combat variety, but Iowa is adding a twist to them in honor of Veteran's Day.

"I'm excited," senior center James Ferentz said. "Anytime you get to honor the real heroes of this country, obviously you want the servicemen and women of this country to know how proud and thankful we are for them and everything that they do. It's really an honor to try and pay tribute to them."

In the past, Kirk Ferentz was always hesitant about experimenting with Nike Pro Combat uniforms and that he had always preferred the traditional look Iowa has when playing at home. On Tuesday, he said the idea for what the Hawkeyes will do this weekend stemmed from Paul Federici, who is the team's director of football operations.

When the plan first came about, players were given the choice in fall camp for which branch of the Armed Forces it wanted to individually honor. Vandenberg said he would be paying homage to the Iowa National Guard. Hyde will honor the U.S. Army and more specifically, a friend from his hometown who lost his leg while serving the country.

"I just want to commemorate him now for doing his service over there," Hyde said. "I know we've got a lot of people fighting for our freedom, so I just wanted to do that. It's a big honor."

Bigach In '32?

With over 100 players on a football team, there's certain to be a political divide as to who should be President of the United States in 2012. But when asked about which one of their teammates would most likely be a presidential candidate 20 years from now, one name stood out from the rest – senior defensive tackle Steve Bigach.

“Every Monday, we work out and while we're stretching, you just hear Bigach yakking away about politics,” junior cornerback B.J. Lowery said. “Everybody's turning around like, ‘No! Please! Stop, Bigach!’”

Now, Bigach wasn't the unanimous name. Tobin said his first guess would be Vandenberg because of the leadership he has displayed in the football program throughout his career. Strangely enough, the first name that came to mind for both Bigach and Vandenberg (as well as junior linebacker Christian Kirksey) was junior linebacker James Morris.

“He's extremely intelligent,” Vandenberg said of Morris. “He certainly comes off as a future governor, a future presidential candidate.”

But aside from those exceptions, every other player who spoke to the media Tuesday, back offensive and defensive players, answered the question with Bigach's name.

“He's a bulldog,” junior defensive end Dominic Alvis said. “He'll confront you with his beliefs and try to debate you. He's always looking for a good debate.”

When told about being “the clubhouse leader” among his peers, Bigach said he couldn't see himself ever running for president, even despite his passion for discussing politics.

“I would be a terrible presidential candidate and I could tell you that with 100 percent certainty,” said Bigach, who one

teammate of his confirmed was a Mitt Romney supporter in this year's election. "I'm more slanted one way than the other, so I'm not sure that'd be a good decision for me."