

# COMMENTARY: Disappointment felt, but the clock keeps ticking



Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz conducted a season-ending press conference held Wednesday, Nov. 28, 2012 at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City.

By Brendan Stiles

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – Nine months ago, Kirk Ferentz had a sudden void on his coaching staff when Ken O’Keefe, his offensive coordinator of 13 years, left shortly after National Signing Day to become the Miami Dolphins’ wide receivers coach. This move came just before Ferentz could publicly proclaim Phil Parker as his new defensive coordinator.

Three weeks later, what was deemed an emergency hire by Iowa athletics director Gary Barta was made as Greg Davis, who spent 13 years as Mack Brown’s offensive coordinator at Texas, was hired to assume the roles held by O’Keefe.

On Wednesday, Ferentz said “as far as he knew,” Davis would

return as Iowa's offensive coordinator in 2013. This announcement comes five days after the Hawkeyes concluded a disastrous 4-8 season that ended with a six-game losing streak.

Statistically speaking, 2012 was one of Iowa's worst years in terms of offensive production under Ferentz. According to [cfbstats.com](http://cfbstats.com), out of 124 FBS teams nationally, Iowa finished 114th in scoring offense, 105th in rushing offense, 102nd in passing offense and 117th in total offense.

James Vandenberg, a fifth-year senior who had thrown 25 touchdown passes the season before, took every snap for Iowa, the only FBS team to play one quarterback all year. In 12 games, he threw seven touchdowns and eight interceptions.

But despite all that, Ferentz's support of Davis hasn't wavered.

"Greg's a tremendous football coach," Ferentz said Wednesday. "We wouldn't have brought him here if we didn't feel that way. I feel stronger about the kind of coaching person he is now after working with him."

The trajectory for this offense began as expected. Iowa struggled offensively in its first two games, but those two games were against a Northern Illinois squad that hasn't lost since the Hawkeyes beat it 18-17 at Soldier Field on Sept. 1 and an Iowa State squad that featured a stingy defense. One had to figure there would still be a learning curve early on.

The offense began to improve over the month of September, and took an expected step back in a 19-16 win over a Michigan State team that featured one of the Big Ten's top defenses. But then came a six-game losing streak to conclude 2012 and with it, offensive production that was inconsistent at best and dreadful at worst.

In those six defeats, Iowa scored a total of 10 offensive

touchdowns. Less than two touchdowns per game isn't enough to win in the Big Ten, even when it's as down as it was in 2012.

This isn't written to be an indictment on Davis or Vandenberg. Vandenberg's playing days at Iowa are done and Ferentz made clear that Davis would be back in 2013.

Back in February, when Ferentz spoke publicly for the first time since O'Keefe's departure, [two key points were established](#) long before the name "Greg Davis" became known around Iowa. First, what Ferentz says, goes. Second, the pressure was now squarely on Ferentz.

What Ferentz says inside the Hayden Fry Football Complex, still goes. But the pressure on Ferentz to deliver is higher than ever before. For all of his accomplishments in 14 years, society as a whole has evolved into "What have you done for me lately?"

Since winning the 2010 Orange Bowl, Iowa's record over the past three seasons is 19-19, with three of those victories coming against FCS opponents – Eastern Illinois, Tennessee Tech and Northern Iowa. This type of drop-off over a three-year span gets some coaches fired. Heck, there have been coaches such as Tom O'Brien who had a better overall record the past three years at North Carolina State yet was shown the door this past weekend.

It's also worth noting that since that Orange Bowl victory, mass media has evolved to the point that when Ferentz answers any questions, he's not only speaking directly to those who ask. He's also speaking directly to his constituency as well and lately, his rhetoric has rung hollow with that constituency.

Patience has worn thin around Iowa, but not from those who directly matter. Barta will continue to ride it out with Ferentz, who was awarded a new contract in 2010 that keeps him around through 2020. Ferentz will continue to ride it out with

who he brought on last year with the attitude that better days lie ahead. This is how it worked in his early years at Iowa and how it worked during the years of 2006-07, the last time before now that Iowa football went through a downward spiral.

But what if things don't get better? If personnel – both coaching and player – remains the same and both offensive and defensive schematics remain the same, what's the reason to believe things will improve in 2013?

Yes, player personnel changes year-to-year, but unless an infusion of youth occurs on both sides of the ball this offseason and outperforms expectations, things probably won't be that much better. The premises of Davis' system and Parker's system can remain constant, but unless there are wrinkles put into both this offseason, opponents are going to know exactly how to attack them. By that point, "lack of execution" can't be used as an excuse.

At this point in time, Iowa football is like a sinking ship. Ferentz is going to either resurrect the ship and have it floating on the ocean surface again, or succumb with the ship to the bottom of that ocean.

His lasting legacy will be remembered one way or the other. Either way, the clock is continuing to tick and the level of distress is such where the legions of Iowa fans who have put their faith in Ferentz and continue to do so are screaming, "Do something!"

Nine months from now, the Hawkeyes will return to the gridiron, once again beginning their upcoming season against Northern Illinois. This might seem like an eternity, but it really isn't. At least it shouldn't be for Ferentz or anyone else in the program that can survive the immediate fallout of a 4-8 season.

"We've got to knock our deficit down, realize there is one, and work on it," Ferentz said.

**TRANSCRIPT:** [Kirk Ferentz, Nov. 28, 2012 press conference](#) (*Courtesy: UI Sports Info.*)