

3/27/2013: Iowa spring football notebook



Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz discusses the start of spring practices during his press conference held Wednesday, March 27, 2013, at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City.

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – During the opening remarks of his press conference Wednesday, Kirk Ferentz sensed the questions coming. His team has begun its spring football period and the biggest storyline surrounding the Iowa Hawkeyes is at the game's most important position.

James Vandenberg, who took every snap as Iowa's signal-caller last season, is no longer at the helm and the QB competition is as deep and as open as it has ever been since Ferentz first took command in 1999.

Sophomore quarterback Jake Rudock was listed as the starter on the spring 2-deep released Wednesday. But since he hasn't yet played in a single game for the Hawkeyes, a 3-way battle is

taking place between him and a pair of QBs who redshirted in 2012 – junior Cody Sokol and freshman C.J. Beathard. Sokol transferred to Iowa last year after playing two seasons at Scottsdale Community College in Arizona, while Beathard was a late addition to the 2012 recruiting class.

“We really like all three guys,” Ferentz said. “All three of them have some things about them that really intrigue you and make you feel good. They’ve got good football mentalities. They like the game, they like each other and I think they are all respected by their teammates.

“It’s going to be obviously interesting to watch it.”

Ferentz said while Rudock is listed first-string, all three quarterbacks are expected to get first, second and third team reps during the 15 practices Iowa has between now and April 27, when it conducts its open practice at Kinnick Stadium.

“We’re going in really with a truly open mind,” Ferentz said, adding that there’s no definitive timetable for when a starter will be named. “Whenever the picture becomes clearer, that is when we’ll move on it. A lot of times, it goes a long ways.”

Introducing the YB

One of the wrinkles that came as a result of Greg Davis taking the reigns as offensive coordinator last year was the use of multiple tight ends, as the position was considered a strength of the offense. Over the course of the 2012 season, Iowa’s opening drives began to feature less use of a fullback and more use of multiple tight ends.

If the 2-deep released Wednesday really proves to be an indication, Iowa will continue to go the direction of starting two tight ends as opposed to what it has traditionally done in years past under Ferentz, using one tight end and one fullback.

Listed on the 2-deep as “YBs” (Y-back; the equivalent of an H-Back) are sophomore tight ends Jake Duzey and Henry Kreiger-Coble. Both saw significant playing time last season and Kreiger-Coble even caught a touchdown pass from Vandenberg in Iowa’s 42-17 loss to Michigan last season.

But even though the YB position has arrived, Ferentz said he wouldn’t completely rid of fullback. In fact, he even said how sophomore Macon Plewa has switched over to fullback after playing linebacker and that junior Mark Weisman would get looks at the fullback position as well.

“Obviously the goal is to get your best 11 out there,” Ferentz said. “I envision us playing with a fullback. I envision us with two tight ends at times. Also three wides, that type of thing, the things that we’ve done in the past. It’s just a matter of seeing what we can piece together.”

Weisman’s looks at fullback would also provide Iowa with the opportunity to have both him and junior running back Damon Bullock on the field at the same time, something that only occurred during the beginning of last season before Weisman became a household name.

“If you could have those two guys out there, I think it gives us a little bit more fire power, which is something we lacked last year for sure,” Ferentz said.

Adapting to coaching changes

With Wednesday marking the first day of spring practices, it also marked the first opportunity for changes among the coaching staff to truly be observed.

Last month, Iowa hired three new assistants in wide receivers coach Bobby Kennedy (previously at Colorado and Texas, where he worked with Davis), co-linebackers coach Jim Reid (previously the defensive coordinator at Virginia) and running backs/special teams coach Chris White (previously an assistant

with the Minnesota Vikings).

The one change that could prove noticeable right away is White overseeing special teams. He'll be assisted with the duty, but White is the main person in charge of special teams as opposed to the duties being split between former assistants Lester Erb and Darrell Wilson.

"The good thing is he comes in with a fresh eye," Ferentz said about White. "He doesn't have any preconceived notions about anybody. Anybody is going to have a chance to get on the punt team right now, the kickoff team.

"I think really, the bottom line on all of that stuff is not so much team as just us doing a better job."

One thing Ferentz said he has noticed since bringing the new batch of assistants on board is how communication has become a necessity in order for the entire staff to be on the same page. He also said though that while some things need tweaking, he doesn't anticipate what he called, "any radical differences."

"The things that we thought were important 14 years ago, to me, they are still important," Ferentz said. "That is really going to be the foundation of what we try to be as a football team."

Open practice in Des Moines not finalized, but likely

Ferentz said the details haven't been finalized. However, the Iowa spring prospectus confirmed [a report last month from KCCI-TV's Andy Garman](#) that the Hawkeyes are planning an open practice for April 20 that would take place at West Des Moines High School's Valley Stadium.

Should this indeed take place, one of the factors is Iowa having a four-and-a-half week period to conduct spring practices this year. Ferentz said by having one of the 15

practices Iowa is allowed to have elsewhere (in this case, West Des Moines), it allows the monotony of spring football to be broken up a little. He also mentioned being able to give back to those in Central and Western Iowa who typically make the trek to Iowa City for any of Iowa's past open practices.

"Certainly, the Des Moines population basis is important to us," Ferentz said. "So maybe our way of saying, 'Thank you,'" Ferentz said.