

# 4/14/2013: Iowa spring practice notebook

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*HawkeyeDrive.com*

WEST DES MOINES, Iowa – Not every day does a FBS program like the Iowa Hawkeyes decide to hold a spring football practice two hours plus off campus. But Sunday afternoon proved to be a rare treat for those in the Central and Western portions of the state.

Iowa made its ninth of 15 spring practices open to the public. But instead of conducting the practice in its confines of Kinnick Stadium like what will take place two weeks from now, the Hawkeyes made the trek just outside the state capital and held its open event in front of an estimated crowd of 8,000 spectators at Valley Stadium.

The weather conditions proved less than ideal, as rain drizzled down and wind blew rapidly. But like most any other football practice, the show went on. What took place on the field Sunday was no different from any other spring practice as nothing's completely finalized and plenty of mental errors were made by both sides of the football.

It appeared typical for something so atypical.

"It was just nice to have a little change of pace," Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said following the practice.

For one player in particular, it proved to be a reunion of sorts. As if working with the first-string offense at left guard Sunday couldn't have been enough for senior offensive lineman Conor Boffeli, the West Des Moines Valley product had the experience of returning to the stadium he called home in

high school.

"This is a place where I had a lot of great memories and it was nice to come back with my current teammates and kind of share that with them," Boffeli said.

### **QB battle far from settled**

As Ferentz stated from the get-go, all three quarterbacks competing for Iowa's starting job got the chance to work with all three units during Sunday's practice as they have all spring.

And at this point in time, Ferentz has zero intentions of anointing anyone as a starter.

The 3-way competition between sophomore Jake Rudock, junior Cody Sokol and redshirt freshman C.J. Beathard was on display for all to see Sunday. While the experience edge might favor Rudock as he enters his third season as a member of the football team, no separation has taken place yet.

"You know, it's kind of hit or miss right now and that's kind of how the whole offense is at this point," Ferentz said. "We're rotating them in, which is probably tough for them to get a little bit of a rhythm going, but all three of them are doing some good things and all three still have some things to work on.

"I think at this point, it's early to predict and we're not going to. But we're going to let the guys compete."

From a teammate perspective, all three signal-callers have the respect of their peers. While the separation hasn't occurred, their teammates all see different qualities that allow them to be leaders.

As for the competitive aspect, Sokol – who was the only quarterback who spoke to the media following Sunday's practice – doesn't feel he's at either an advantage or disadvantage.

"This spring has been the first time we've all been able to actually repeat what we've started," Sokol said in reference to learning a new offense under now-second year offensive coordinator Greg Davis. "Everyone's kind of coming in fresh, more understanding and getting the same amount of reps."

### **Potential for a crowded backfield**

As expected, junior running backs Mark Weisman and Damon Bullock saw their fair share of carries during Sunday's open practice. But it's also fair to say a third back could be entering (or in this case, returning) to the fray.

After missing all of last season due to a torn ACL suffered last spring, sophomore running back Jordan Canzeri made the most of his opportunities Sunday when the ball was in his hands. While the 2-deep might not be listing him as a starter anytime soon, the running back who looked poised to become Iowa's starter prior to his injury is making his case for some additional carries.

"Even if I have a good day, I always tell myself that I can strive to be better," Canzeri said. "I just keep working on the little things and working more on my fundamentals."

Ferentz said Sunday was the first time since Canzeri tore his ACL that he was tackled during a practice to what he called "a great extent."

Meanwhile, Iowa also showed its package that involves both Weisman and Bullock together in the backfield, with Weisman lined up as the fullback in an I-formation. Bullock also saw his share of reps at receiver, a position he played on and off as a true freshman in 2011.

And then there was the use of the zone read, which Iowa ran a few times while the offense was lined up in a spread formation.

"I feel like it's a great play," Bullock said. "Our defense, they see it every day and they still can't stop it, so it's good."

### **Energy of new coaches on display**

While most of what took place Sunday was similar to past open practices Iowa has held, the differences that did exist were quite noticeable to those on hand at Valley Stadium. To be more specific, those notable differences were a byproduct of the three coaching changes Ferentz made this offseason.

On the offensive side of the ball, there's Bobby Kennedy, who took over as Iowa's wide receivers coach. During the beginning portion of the team's practice Sunday, the receiving corps was performing new drills such as lunging and high stepping before cutting back to the middle of the field for a catch.

"He's a good receivers coach and we're all ready to get going, get the season going with this new guy," said sophomore wide receiver Jacob Hillyer, who saw himself working plenty with the first-string offense during Sunday's practice.

Defensively, there's the addition of Jim Reid as co-linebackers coach. LeVar Woods still works with the outside linebackers specifically, but Reid has come in to help with the inside 'backers and try to make what's easily the strength of this year's defense even stronger.

"It kind of helps us focus more, you know, focus on the fundamentals and the little things," senior linebacker Christian Kirksey said. "Sometimes when you have one coach teaching three different linebacker positions, it's kind of hard. So I think it's better to have two coaches where you can kind of break up and get focused more on the little things."

And then there's special teams, a group primarily overseen by Iowa's most recent coaching addition – Chris White.

After spending the past four seasons as a special teams coach for the NFL's Minnesota Vikings, White joined Ferentz's staff last February not only as the Hawkeyes' new running backs coach, but also to add some fire to Iowa's special teams unit. Working on drills that specifically focus on the gunners during a punt, for instance, is something that took place during the team's practice Sunday that was a new wrinkle.

"Chris has had some different ideas and it's really all he has done for four years now," Ferentz said. "He came in with some new ideas and when we sat down and talked, it was really interesting to hear some thoughts and it has been fun to watch him work with the guys. I think they're enjoying it.

"I think they've enjoyed his style and the things he's doing with them and I've seen some good things on not only the field, but the film afterwards."

### **Davis adding weight, but getting leaner**

With Iowa missing junior defensive tackle Louis Trinca-Pasat for the spring following surgery to repair a torn left rotator cuff, another junior defensive tackle has gotten those first-team reps and to this point, has made the most of his opportunity.

Carl Davis is now listed at 315 pounds, adding an additional five pounds to his frame from last year. However, Davis looks slim and more agile as a result of the added weight, which he feels has played a part in him looking as good now than at any point prior in his playing career.

"It takes a lot of hard work conditioning and trying to get yourself in great shape," Davis said. "It's tough, but I'm getting better and that's one of the things that I think I'll always have to work on."

One point Ferentz made when asked about Davis' strides was how at this time last year, Davis was missing spring practices due

to offseason surgery, which combined with still being a sophomore didn't allow him to develop to the point he's starting to now.

"Players develop and they develop confidence with experience," Ferentz said. "That set Carl back a little bit, but he had a really good winter. I think the strength staff was really pleased with the way he worked and it just seemed like he was starting to mature a little bit."