

# 4/17/2013: Iowa spring football notebook

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Consistency and versatility are two things that for years have been synonymous with Iowa football.

These were also two topics that became prevalent Wednesday afternoon as the two Hawkeye assistants who coach inside the trenches – offensive line coach Brian Ferentz and defensive line coach Reese Morgan – spoke publicly for the first time since last August.

For Ferentz, this spring is about finding consistency along the offensive line, all while preparing his group to have moving parts in the event injuries occur. The six-game losing streak Iowa had to conclude 2012 started with a 38-14 loss to Penn State where the Hawkeyes lost two linemen – tackle Brandon Scherff and guard Andrew Donnal – to season-ending injuries.

“Can you move pieces in and out and can you move guys in and out and maintain a certain level of play, that’s always the trick,” Ferentz said. “I don’t feel like we did that very well last year. I don’t feel like we are doing it really that well right now.

“That’s something we need to improve, because if you sit around and you expect that not to happen, you’re preparing for failure.”

As for Morgan, versatility is something he’s starting to notice along his front four. Players such as redshirt freshman Faith Ekakitie and junior Mike Hardy have gotten reps this

spring working as defensive ends, even though both have primarily worked as tackles since arriving on campus.

“I think we would like to have the philosophy that we want guys that can play everywhere,” Morgan said.



Iowa defensive line coach Reese Morgan discusses spring practices during his press conference held Wednesday, April 17, 2013, at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City.

### **Finding pass rushers**

Depth is being established inside along Iowa's front four. But the mystery with this group is what ends up happening in terms of outside depth.

Defensive ends such as senior Dominic Alvis and sophomore Drew Ott sit atop the 2-deep, primarily due to the amount of playing experience both received last season (in Ott's case, the last five games of the year). Morgan views Alvis in the sort of leadership role players such as Steve Bigach and Joe Gaglione held last year, and with Ott getting the work with the first-team, the mystery isn't who starts, but who else plays in the rotation at these spots.

“A year ago, we didn't even have two deep,” Morgan said about the end spots. “We were struggling. We were taking guys in

practice, just putting a body there to do that.”

In addition to mentioning players such as Ekakitie and Hardy seeing reps at both end and tackle this spring, Morgan also said that players such as sophomore Riley McMin and redshirt freshman Damauntas Venckus-Cucchiara will likely see reps at defensive end both this spring and come the fall.

Morgan said part of the challenge this spring has been developing depth on the outside, thus the reason for moving around players like Ekakitie and Hardy to see what they could provide.

“We are asking a lot of the guys, but they are responding,” Morgan said. “We know that’s an area that we have to improve upon.”



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## **Inside battles**

While the questions surrounding the defensive line are on the outside, the opposite holds true with the Hawkeyes’ offensive line. Scherff and senior Brett Van Sloten appear set at the two tackle spots.

With Ferentz stressing that he wants to put the five best offensive linemen on the field, competition has really ratcheted up at the two interior guard spots specifically.

Right now, Iowa has senior Conor Boffeli listed as the starter at left guard and Donnal as the first-string right guard on its 2-deep. But neither spot is fully set in stone like the two tackle positions look to be. Sophomore Jordan Walsh gained some playing experience at guard last season while Donnal was injured and Ferentz also mentioned being pleased with someone like senior Drew Clark – listed at 6-4, 288 pounds – being capable of playing inside.

“We need to have depth there,” Ferentz said. “We need to have depth inside.”

Iowa has also gone through the process this spring of moving sophomore Austin Blythe over exclusively at center. After redshirting in 2011, Blythe started the majority of last season over at right guard and is now the heir apparent to former three-year starter James Ferentz (Brian’s younger brother).

Brian Ferentz made note of Blythe gaining reps working as a back-up center in practice last year and that the transition for him isn’t a completely new one. He also said he was pleased with what Blythe has shown to this point with making the switch.

“I’m pleased with how Austin has responded to what we have asked him to do,” Ferentz said. “At least we are getting the ball to the quarterback. That’s a good start.”

### **Blending old school and new school**

One is more old-fashioned, the other more in tune with the types of changes happening to the landscape of college football. But when it comes to recruiting, both the elder Morgan and younger Ferentz hold similar values and

philosophies that are mixed together from the different perspectives they provide.

Part of the reason Ferentz feels compelled to be active with social media has to do with recruiting. He mentioned how he sees social media outlets being used more and more by high school players as a form of communication and finds importance in being cognizant of what's being used not just by recruits, but other coaches as well.

"It does make a difference," Ferentz said. "You have to do it or else you won't be able to talk to them because they certainly do not like talking on the phone. That has changed a lot."

Ferentz knows what's all out there – from Twitter to Instagram to Vine, a newer brand of social media that allows one to shoot videos. He also used his platform Wednesday to take exception to the outside notion of his father and the program being "archaic" with what they do.

"He has got an iPhone and he has got an iPad. Twitter, that's a personal decision everybody makes," Ferentz said in reference to his dad. "I think that's unique to every person. I really think if you saw our head coach on Twitter or doing those kinds of things, those aren't in his personality. That's not natural to him."

Meanwhile, Morgan said he has a rarely used Facebook account and joked about how he uses a flip phone still (he called it "an F-phone"). But while acknowledging he isn't as tech-savvy, Morgan also believes what happens in recruiting comes down to the relationships built during the process, regardless of who's doing the recruiting or how someone's being recruited.

"People know if you care about them," Morgan said. "You don't have to write and I think we take great pride in developing relationships with our coaches and our parents through the recruiting process. Then there's a certain comfort level or a

trust that comes in there.”

[4/17/2013: Brian Ferentz/Reese Morgan press conference transcripts](#)