

8/8/2013: Iowa Media Day notebook



Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz addresses the media during his press conference at Iowa's Media Day on Thursday, Aug. 8, 2013, at Carver-Hawkeye Arena in Iowa City. Ferentz is entering his 15th season as the Hawkeyes' head coach.

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – A revelation about Iowa's current quarterback situation came from the team's Media Day on Thursday. Head coach Kirk Ferentz revealed true freshman signal-caller Nic Shimonek is the clear No. 4 QB on the depth chart.

OK, that's not much a revelation seeing how true freshmen just arrived on campus last week and Shimonek has only had four practices with the team during fall camp. The "3-horse race" between sophomore Jake Rudock, junior Cody Sokol and redshirt freshman C.J. Beathard remains as such, or so Ferentz and just about everyone else in the program was saying Thursday.

"It's going to take some time," Ferentz said.

Of course, this is nothing new. Since former quarterback James Vandenberg graduated following last season, this trio of quarterbacks have been battling for that No. 1 spot and part of the reason for it at least starting out so evenly is the inexperience. Rudock, who was the No. 2 behind Vandenberg last season, hasn't taken a snap in a live game before and both Sokol (who transferred from Scottsdale Community College in Arizona) and Beathard redshirted in 2012.

Both Ferentz and offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Greg Davis would ideally like to have a starter in place well before the Hawkeyes' season opener against Northern Illinois on Aug. 31. But one thing Davis made clear Thursday is he wants one of the three – whoever steps up to win the job – to make the decision for him.

He also said if Iowa does end up playing more than one quarterback against the Huskies, so be it.

"I would like to see some separation at some point, whatever point that may be," Davis said. "If not, then we may have to go into the season alternating guys and then see what happens.

"We're not going to set a timetable. We would like for them to make that decision."

Other unmade decisions

The quarterback matter obviously draws the most attention. But there are other personnel decisions that haven't been made yet either.

In the backfield, there's the question of which junior running back – Mark Weisman or Damon Bullock – receives the bulk of the carries. Two things might be leaning the direction of it being Weisman. One is Ferentz being pleased with the progress made at fullback by both Adam Cox and Macon Plewa when plays

involving a fullback instead of two tight ends have been run in practice. The other is Bullock's versatility being able to also play receiver if called upon there.

"I think you can go a lot of different ways," Ferentz said. "Some things are looking pretty firm and we have good, healthy competition. It's not like we're just trying to fill a hole. Guys are really competing."

Meanwhile, there's a decision that hasn't been made yet at strong safety. Juniors Nico Law and John Lowdermilk have been listed as co-starters since the spring while the other three spots in the secondary have clear No. 1 options.

Then there's the return game. On one hand, there's senior wide receiver Jordan Cotton being used as one of the return guys on kickoffs. But what isn't clear yet is who will join him back there and who will replace former cornerback Micah Hyde with returning punts.

As of Thursday, Ferentz said the top three guys in line to return punts this season are junior wideout Kevonte Martin-Manley, redshirt freshman receiver Riley McCarron and sophomore running back Jordan Canzeri, who is currently listed behind both Weisman and Bullock on the 2-deep.

New coaches catching on

For the second straight offseason, there were shake-ups made on Ferentz's coaching staff as three new assistants came on board – wide receivers coach Bobby Kennedy, co-linebackers coach Jim Reid and running backs/special teams coach Chris Wilson.

In Kennedy's case, Iowa gave him the chance to reunite with Davis, who he worked alongside for seven seasons on Mack Brown's staff at Texas. It allowed for a quick transition, as Kennedy already had plenty of background on the type of offense Davis wants to assemble.

"I kind of understand what he expects, and even being with him for seven years, he knows I'm not afraid to ask if I'm not sure about something," Kennedy said. "If we're going to coach the kids, let's make sure it's right and let's make sure we're talking about it the same way. But there is a comfort level and it has been good."

"I've been around a lot of offensive coordinators. There are some really good ones and some really good offensive minds. He's as good an offensive coordinator as I've been around."

Reid also found himself making a rather seamless transition. Unlike Kennedy, the former Virginia defensive coordinator didn't have an established rapport with others on the coaching staff. But what made the transition to Iowa smooth was being embraced from the start by those who were already in place, most notably fellow linebackers coach LeVar Woods.

"I'd like to say we're friends, but the difference in age is more father-son," Reid said. "We've gotten along great together and he has really transitioned me in beautifully into the linebacker room and then also the university."

The continuity might not quite be where it was two years ago when Ferentz had assistants such as Ken O'Keefe and Norm Parker on board, but it's easy to sense him having more of a comfort with what's in place now as opposed to the start of last season.

"Going through spring practice, it felt like things were really coming together," Ferentz said. "Everybody was working well together. It starts with your coaching staff."

"You can't expect the team to play like a good team if the staff is not on the same page and I think certainly we've been together enough now that we're there."

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of every other Big Ten team, coverage from Iowa's Kid's Day event Aug. 17 and the return of the "Talkin' Hawks" podcast later this month, which will once again be co-hosted by myself and former Iowa defensive back Chris Rowell.