

8/27/2013: Iowa football notebook



Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz discusses the Hawkeyes' upcoming game against Northern Illinois during his weekly press conference held Tuesday, Aug. 27, 2013, at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City. Ferentz is beginning his 15th season as Iowa's head coach.

By Brendan Stiles

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – The words “quarterback” and “Iowa” have gone hand-in-hand now for the past week. Two former Hawkeye signal-callers – Paul Burmeister and Chuck Long – are among the BTN's announcing crew for Iowa's game against Northern Illinois on Aug. 31. Long and Randy Duncan are among nine players who will appear on Kinnick Stadium's Wall of Honor and Brad Banks will be inducted later this week into Iowa's Athletics Hall of Fame.

Even a pair of recently former QBs have been in the news with

Ricky Stanzi and James Vandenberg both being cut by Kansas City and Minnesota respectively earlier in the week (Stanzi has since been claimed off waivers by Jacksonville).

In the middle of all these former Iowa quarterbacks being in the news was the announcement made Aug. 23 of current sophomore signal-caller Jake Rudock being anointed the Hawkeyes' starter by head coach Kirk Ferentz.

When asked about what separated Rudock from his competition – redshirt freshman C.J. Beathard and junior Cody Sokol – Ferentz described him as being “the most consistent” throughout the entire offseason.

“We wanted to give it time, plenty of time,” Ferentz said. “There was no sense rushing to a conclusion because things do change and can change. We wanted to wait as late as we could, but we also wanted to start preparing for this game a little bit, which we did at the end of the last week.”

The news about Rudock becoming the starter became official last week. But it wasn't news that really caught others off guard. Beathard said it started to dawn on him midway through fall camp that the job was becoming Rudock's to lose. Others could sense it even earlier as Rudock began to work more and more with the first-string unit throughout fall camp.

“I think we all kind of knew all along. No one said anything because we didn't want him to start getting a big head, going out there thinking he has got that spot,” senior tight end C.J. Fiedorowicz said. “You could tell early on in spring ball he was making a move and from early on in camp, he was running and doing a lot of 1s reps, making a lot of big plays and leading the offense.”

In one sense, Saturday's contest against Northern Illinois will be the apex of a two-year journey for Rudock, who redshirted in 2011 and then spent all of last year learning a new offense under offensive coordinator Greg Davis. He's also

banking on it being a new beginning for him as well.

"You came to Iowa to play football, just like all these guys here," Rudock said. "I want to do the best I can."

Getting to know Rudock

So who exactly is Rudock? This is a question on the minds of many in the Hawkeye State, especially when one considers that the Florida native didn't take a single snap as Iowa's back-up quarterback a year ago.

Talk to him and talk to his teammates and one trait stands out – Rudock's intelligence. Off the field, Rudock is listed as a microbiology/pre-medicine major. He currently takes 14 semester hours at the UI, which includes courses such as Organic Chemistry II, Physics I and Anthropology.

"I didn't take many of those courses, I could tell you that," Ferentz said. "Probably none of those courses, to be specific. He's on a different planet. But that's a good thing.

"He's a smart guy, but he's also a guy who prepares and he's very serious about what's in front of him."

On the gridiron, that same intelligence carries over. His command of the offense – whether it's in the huddle or at the line of scrimmage whenever Iowa opts to push the tempo – has resonated with his peers.

"Once it's time to go, he gets everybody together and tells everybody what to do," junior running back Damon Bullock said. "He knows what the tight ends have to do, the line, everybody."

In high school, Rudock led St. Thomas Aquinas to a national championship his senior season. He said his coach there once referred to him being "business-like," a description Rudock wants continuing to apply to him now as Iowa's starter.

"I'm smiling with all you guys right here, but in the game, I'm not really smiling until hopefully after we win," Rudock said. "I kind of stay to myself, but I do go around the team and talk to the team and focus on that."

Preparing for Lynch

Iowa had the fortune of handing Northern Illinois its only regular-season loss of 2012 in last season's opener at Soldier Field, but the 18-17 victory was far from flawless. One play in that game from Huskie quarterback Jordan Lynch still sticks in the minds of many along the returning members of the Hawkeye defense.

In the third quarter and with Iowa lined up in dime as opposed to its base 4-3 defense, Lynch ran a designed quarterback draw and proceeded to scamper 73 yards for a Northern Illinois touchdown. It was the first of many highlights last season for Lynch, who finished seventh in the Heisman Trophy voting and is currently the one player nationally with his school promoting him for the honor during the preseason.

If there's reason for encouragement that Iowa might fare better when running nickel or dime packages against the Huskie offense this weekend, the personnel in the secondary will be noticeably different. On that particular touchdown run, neither of the Hawkeyes' current starting cornerbacks were on the field (B.J. Lowery had just exited the game with an injury shortly beforehand and Jordan Lomax missed all of last season with a shoulder injury).

"We're coming in expecting that, so that's what we've been practicing," senior linebacker Anthony Hitchens said. "We'll be all right."

Regardless of what type of defense is used to keep Lynch and the rest of Northern Illinois' offense in check, one of the big things being stressed this week is not letting him break contain.

“If the guys are in man coverage behind us, we got to know that we can’t get too crazy going up-field with the pass rush,” senior defensive end Dominic Alvis said. “We’ve just got to be mindful of where our support is and be mindful at all times when’s a good time to pass rush and when’s a good time to not.”

Kirksey, Lowery with gameday birthdays

A pair of seniors in the defense’s back seven will be celebrating their birthdays by starting in the Hawkeyes’ season opener on Saturday.

While sharing the same date, cornerback B.J. Lowery and linebacker Christian Kirksey are separated in age by one year – Lowery will turn 22 on Saturday while Kirksey turns 21. After spending their birthdays cooped up in a Chicago hotel preparing for Northern Illinois last year, they both are more excited about actually getting to play on the date this year and in front of 70,500 fans at Kinnick Stadium to boot.

“That’s a great way to bring it in, with the first game your senior year,” Kirksey said. “Just going out there and battling with my teammates, that’s the best thing that could happen on your birthday. I’m looking forward to it.”

Captains named

Ferentz announced his four captains for this week’s game and the names aren’t too surprising. Kirksey and fellow senior linebacker James Morris – both of whom served time as team captains last season – were given those honors on the defensive side while the offensive captains are senior offensive tackle Brett Van Sloten and junior running back Mark Weisman.

Learning the news shortly after his arrival at the Kenyon Practice Facility on Tuesday, Weisman was beaming. The captaincy is yet another feather in his cap this year. Weisman

was placed on scholarship following last season after he initially joined Iowa as a walk-on transfer from the Air Force Academy.

“It’s what you always want and what you shoot for, but yeah, it’s tough to see sometimes as a walk-on,” Weisman said. “You never know where it’s going to take you, so you got to just keep working hard and see where that takes you.”