Iowa vs. Northern Illinois (What to expect)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

To get you all ready for Saturday's game between Iowa and Northern Illinois, I put together a list of things you ought to know before these two face off at Kinnick Stadium.

At the end, I'll provide what I think are three keys to an Iowa victory.

Iowa Hawkeyes (0-0) vs. Northern Illinois Huskies (0-0)

Kinnick Stadium; Iowa City, Iowa

Aug. 31, 2013

2:30 p.m. Central

TV: BTN (Paul Burmeister, Chuck Long, Danan Hughes)

Radio: Hawkeye Radio Network (Gary Dolphin, Ed Podolak, Rob Brooks)

Weather: 88 degrees; sunny skies; winds from N around 6 MPH

Brendan's Three Keys to the Game:

1. Convert in red zone

Looking back at last season's meeting in Chicago, one thing Iowa did well was keep the ball away from Northern Illinois. Obviously, the Hawkeyes' best recipe for success on Saturday will come with establishing the run with guys like Mark Weisman and Damon Bullock and being able to execute play-action passes off of that. But the reason why Iowa nearly lost

this game last year was because it continued stalling in the red zone and having to settle on Mike Meyer making field goals. If the offense is going to prove to be better in 2013, red zone touchdowns have to be there and getting them against an opponent like the Huskies would be a good indication of things bouncing back in Iowa's favor as an offense.

2. Stay simple schematically on defense

Just about all of Jordan Lynch's big plays for Northern Illinois in last year's game came on third down when Iowa showed nickel or dime packages defensively (his 73-yard touchdown run came against the dime and after the Hawkeyes had to adjust their dime personnel because of an injury to corner B.J. Lowery a few plays prior). Eventually, Iowa stuck with its base 4-3 and Lynch had nowhere to go. While personnel groupings for nickel and dime this year should be better now versus a year ago, I still thinking staying 4-3 as much as possible Saturday will play to Iowa's advantage, unless Lynch is just completing every pass in sight (he was only 6-of-16 last year, by the way). Defensively, Iowa should expect him to run almost every time it does throw an additional defensive back or two on the field (if any nickel or dime gets presented).

3. Use depth to advantage

With the heat reportedly in Saturday's forecast, a lot has been made about what type of affect this will have. To me, the biggest factor related to the heat is depth. Keep in mind that Northern Illinois is only allowed to travel 70 players (as is any other college football team playing on the road; this is something that has been around for years, by the way). If Iowa does attempt to push the tempo offensively, Northern Illinois might not have as many options at its disposal in terms of rotating guys on defense and giving players breathers between reps. Conversely, that depth will be there on Saturday for the Hawkeyes whenever the Huskies attempt to push the tempo. This

is something that isn’t going to go away with more teams playing this type of offense regardless of the week and regardless of the opponent. But throw in the scorching temperatures outside and this becomes an ever bigger issue, in my opinion.