

9/10/2013: Iowa football notebook



Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz discusses the Hawkeyes' upcoming game at Iowa State during his weekly press conference held Tuesday, Sept. 10, 2013, at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City. Entering his 15th match-up as head coach against the Cyclones, Ferentz is 6-8 lifetime against Iowa State.

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – Dependability. It's defined as "[the quality of being reliable; a form of trustworthiness.](#)"

Prior to his team's game against the Buffalo Bills last weekend, New England Patriots head coach Bill Belichick raised some eyebrows across the NFL landscape when he revealed the Patriots having a mantra of "[Dependability is more important than ability.](#)" In other words, it's not how physically capable one is of making a play, but rather can one be trusted to make

that specific play.

While this creed isn't quite verbatim with Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz, who spent three years as an assistant to Belichick with the Cleveland Browns, dependability is heavily stressed within the program. Whether it's during meetings inside the Hayden Fry Football Complex, at practice inside the Kenyon Practice Facility or during games at Kinnick Stadium and any other place the Hawkeyes travel, the message of dependability is relayed.

"Coach [Greg] Davis loves that saying," sophomore quarterback Jake Rudock said. "He loves dependability more than anything and it's because you need to know guys are going to be in the right space at the right time. I think that is very important.

"You have to be on the same page. That's what it really comes down to during the game and during practice. It's understanding the angle you're coming out of in a break, understanding what the linemen are seeing or saying."

Ferentz echoed Rudock's remarks about how important dependability is to Davis. He said part of it comes from experience and what goes on during practice, which would explain instances where older players who maybe aren't as athletic or have as much physical ability see the field before younger players who haven't yet proven their dependability to both him and the entire coaching staff.

"There's a lot placed on potential and we're all attracted to it," Ferentz said Tuesday morning during the Big Ten coaches' teleconference. "But at some point, it really gets down to production and I think part of production is being a dependable player, a player that's consistent with his actions.

"I think every coach appreciates having a good idea what to expect from a player each and every week."

That message of dependability doesn't just resonate with the offense, but also with the Iowa defense. Upon being told Tuesday about Belichick's comment, senior linebacker James Morris said it's something he agrees with because he sees trust in one another playing a vital role in how successful a defense can be."

"We've got a lot of guys that have tremendous ability," Morris said. "The guys you see on the field most of the time are the guys that are dependable.

"The way schemes work, so often you find yourself in a situation where you're not necessarily the player that makes the play, but you have to do your job in trusting that the guy next to you is going to be there to again, do his job, and then he might be the one that makes the play."

"Talk about the rivalry..."

Every year since 1977, the Iowa Hawkeyes and Iowa State Cyclones have met annually. For the last two years now, the Hawkeyes have watched the Cyclones celebrate 3-point victories at their expense – a 44-41 defeat in triple overtime at Jack Trice Stadium in 2011, followed by a 9-6 loss last season at Kinnick Stadium.

The cliché of this being "just another game" might be true big picture, but the significance of it is something the players can't avoid. They see the "Beat State" shirts on campus. They hear fans and UI students alike discuss what beating Iowa State on Saturday would mean to them.

"I have friends who go to both schools and the social media leading up to the game, it's just going nuts right now," said senior guard Conor Boffeli, who played at West Des Moines Valley High School and was recruited by both the Hawkeyes and Cyclones before settling on Iowa. "It's kind of hard not to hear the hype this week."

While Saturday will mark his first on-field taste of this intrastate rivalry, Rudock already had a familiarity with it. Despite redshirting in 2011, he made the trip to Ames and stood on the visiting sideline at Jack Trice Stadium for what was Iowa's first road game that season. He also made his official visit to Iowa in 2010 when the Hawkeyes faced the Cyclones at Kinnick Stadium – the former's last victory in this series.

He added that the rivalry reminds him of what he grew up around in Florida with Florida (SEC) and Florida State (ACC) meeting annually Thanksgiving weekend.

"I remember coming out for pregame and the corners not being full, then coming out for the game and the corners, where the hills were, being completely full of people," Rudock said about his 2011 trip with the team to Jack Trice Stadium. "It was a fully enclosed stadium and I thought that was kind of neat, just how the grass stadium was completely full and how crazy the fans were.

"Seeing it once already is definitely a help. You understand what to expect."

Ferentz said during his press conference Tuesday the team will still travel across the state late Friday afternoon and stay at a hotel near Ames overnight, even though Saturday's kickoff isn't until 5 p.m. Central and Ames is roughly 2-2.5 hours away from Iowa City. He did say Friday evening would most likely be spent with some assistants scouting high school games across Central Iowa and pre-game meetings that would normally happen Friday night would be pushed back to Saturday morning.

A Cotton family affair

Senior wide receiver Jordan Cotton grew up in Mount Pleasant and decided to follow in his father Marshall's footsteps by becoming a Hawkeye. His younger brother Darian however,

decided to complicate the family rooting interests by committing to Paul Rhoads and becoming a Cyclone. Darian is a sophomore defensive back and is listed on Iowa State's depth chart as the second-string strong safety.

Jordan said when they've played each other in the past, their dad would sit with other Iowa family members given his Hawkeye background while their mom Cindy would sit with the Iowa State family members. Even though the game's being played in Darian's home field, both players were still put in charge of getting enough tickets for the 20-25 family members they're expecting to see at Jack Trice Stadium this weekend.

"It's definitely fun with my family," he said. "We have the whole 'House Divided' shirts and everything made, so it's fun for us."

The odds of the Cotton brothers being on the field at the same time – at least when Iowa is on offense – appear scarce. Even with being on opposite sidelines Saturday, Jordan said communication between the two would still be existent throughout the week and that they both still wish each other well before playing one another, just like they do any other week.

But bragging rights remain at stake. Darian possesses a 2-0 record against older brother, who desperately wants to get the last laugh this weekend.

"Every time we're back home, he rubs it into me," Jordan said. "Since this is my last time playing against him and playing against Iowa State, I have to try and get the bragging rights back to me."

Throwing King into the fire

Last weekend marked the first time since 2010 that a true freshman started on either offense or defense for Iowa when cornerback Desmond King was depended on to fill the void left

by sophomore Jordan Lomax, who suffered a hamstring injury in the opener against Northern Illinois and was unable to play against Missouri State.

While the Hawkeyes are cautiously optimistic of Lomax returning for Saturday's contest against the Cyclones, they like what they've seen from King, the first of three true freshmen thus far to have their redshirts burned this fall. Through one-and-a-half games, King has compiled seven tackles, three of which are solo, and he recovered a fumble during the second quarter of last weekend's game against Missouri State.

"He's a young player who is working hard and currently, he's our second most-experienced corner out there, at least for this season," Ferentz said. "He's working hard, has a good attitude, but he's still young and learning like some of our other guys."

Part of that "young and learning" facet was on display in the fourth quarter last Saturday when Missouri State scored its lone offensive touchdown on a play where King's guy beat him deep. When the defense came off the field following that play, senior cornerback B.J. Lowery said he went over to talk with him and make sure King could move on from that play the next time they went back out there.

"First thing I said to him was, 'Hey, welcome to college football. It's going to happen,'" Lowery said. "It happened to me. It's going to happen."

Lowery added that he had been impressed with King's demeanor on the field since fall camp when the latter first arrived on campus and started getting the practice reps.

"He stepped in real early and he made plays real early," Lowery said. "That's one thing Coach [Phil] Parker wanted to capitalize on, because he makes plays."

D-line looking to step up

If there's one group that has faced the most scrutiny following the Hawkeyes' 28-14 win over Missouri State last weekend, it's the defensive line. Iowa won and the play of the defense was a huge reason why, but the front four combined for zero sacks against the Bears (senior linebacker Anthony Hitchens had the lone Iowa sack on the afternoon).

Junior defensive tackle Carl Davis believes too much is being made of the defensive line being unable to sack Missouri State quarterback Kiarra Harris. But he also recognizes the importance of getting more pressure on opposing QBs, so much so that he sent a mass text Monday to the entire D-line group.

"This week, I sent out a message to the guys – we need to get to the quarterback, who's going to be the first guy?," Davis said. "When we're out there, we're going to be ready."

Despite zero sacks being registered, Ferentz likes the path his D-line is currently on. He added Tuesday that the rotation would likely remain at what was shown last weekend, where six players continuously rotated up front with sophomore Nate Meier occasionally being used as a pass-rusher (Meier's first snaps at defensive end last weekend all came in the second half).

"I think that group's improving," Ferentz said. "We're making progress. We're further along the road than last year at this time probably and that's encouraging. So it's just a matter of keep getting better."