

10/22/2013: Iowa football notebook



Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz discusses the Hawkeyes' upcoming game against Northwestern during his weekly press conference held Tuesday, Oct. 22, 2013, at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City.

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – At this time a year ago, the Iowa Hawkeyes entered an upcoming contest against Northwestern possessing a 4-3 overall record after losing a tough game to Penn State the week before.

What ensued was ugly. The Wildcats went up-and-down the field on the Hawkeyes and aside from a pair of fourth quarter touchdowns, Iowa was manhandled. After that 28-17 defeat in Evanston, Ill., the Hawkeyes' 2012 season continued to nosedive.

"It was a Kodak moment in that there were a lot of things that took place in the game that we didn't execute well enough,"

Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said during his weekly press conference Tuesday. "As a coach, you focus on the things that keep you from having a chance to have success. There were a lot of visuals in that game that really jumped out."

This week, the Hawkeyes find themselves in a similar spot. Once again, they face Northwestern with a 4-3 record. Once again, there's an opportunity to rebound after a difficult defeat – this time, a 34-24 loss to No. 4 Ohio State last weekend in Columbus, Ohio.

Two major differences between last year's meeting and Saturday's showdown between the Hawkeyes and Wildcats exist, however. One is location, as Iowa opens up a two-game home-stand Saturday with this game against Northwestern. The other is the Wildcats looking more vulnerable this time around, as they seek their first Big Ten win after losing their last three games – the most recent being a 20-17 defeat at home to Minnesota.

There's also the matter of Northwestern not being entirely at full strength. Running back Venric Mark will miss his second consecutive game following a leg injury suffered in a game at Wisconsin. Quarterback Kain Colter is "day-to-day" according to head coach Pat Fitzgerald, but was listed as the Wildcats' first-string quarterback on their depth chart this week and is expected to return Saturday after he injured his ankle in that same Wisconsin game.

Last season against the Hawkeyes, Colter and Mark combined for 332 yards rushing and the former scored three times on the ground. Given the day-to-day status, Iowa defensive players are anticipating Colter being out there this weekend.

"We just got to prepare because he is one of their best players," senior linebacker Christian Kirksey said about Colter. "You know, we're in Big Ten play, so he's probably getting ready to play for them, so we just got to expect

that.”

Meanwhile, Iowa will be without the services of senior defensive end Dominic Alvis on Saturday. Alvis originally got injured in the Hawkeyes’ game against Michigan State on Oct. 5. He started against Ohio State, but left during the Buckeyes’ opening possession and didn’t return the rest of the game. Alvis wasn’t listed on Iowa’s 2-deep this week, as junior Mike Hardy was listed in his place instead.

Ferentz said he hopes a four-man rotation at defensive end can continue without Alvis this week, but that fourth spot in the rotation is currently up for grabs. Hardy, along with sophomores Drew Ott and Nate Meier constitute the three known spots right now.

Another challenge for the Hawkeyes this week will be finding ways to finish games. Iowa’s current 4-3 mark comes despite leading at halftime in all seven contests played thus far. In the three losses to Northern Illinois, Michigan State and Ohio State, things such as turnovers, limited time of possession and not scoring points have plagued Iowa in the second halves of those games.

Six of sophomore quarterback Jake Rudock’s seven interceptions this season have come in the second half, including four in those three defeats. The Hawkeyes also have a combined total of just 10 second half points during those 90 minutes of football and opponents have more than doubled Iowa in time of possession.

“The way I look at it is we just have to finish,” Rudock said. “We know teams are going to make adjustments. They have to. That’s part of the game of football unless they give you a goose egg in the first half.

“It really is just execution. When you’re not finishing drives, when you’re not getting at least close enough to have a chance at a field goal, it makes it tougher.”

The topic of targeting

Last Saturday's game in Columbus marked the first time this season Iowa was involved in a targeting call. It came during the first quarter on the Hawkeyes' second possession of the game. Senior tight end C.J. Fiedorowicz made an 11-yard reception and was hit helmet-to-helmet by Ohio State cornerback Bradley Roby as he turned his head. Roby was called for "targeting" and ejected from the game following a booth review. Targeting is defined in the NCAA rulebook as taking aim at an opponent with intent that goes beyond any legal tackle, block or play of the football.

Afterwards, Ferentz said he felt [the correct call was made](#) by the officials and Fiedorowicz said [Roby hit him with his helmet](#).

When Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer was asked about the targeting rule last summer at Big Ten Media Days, he said he was good with it since player safety was the primary purpose for why it would become more strictly enforced by officials in 2013. While talking to reporters Monday in Columbus, Meyer reiterated his support for player safety, but suggested the rule be re-examined during the off-season.

As it pertained to Roby's hit on Fiedorowicz, Meyer said, ["That rule was not put in for that play."](#) Roby was the second Big Ten player in as many weeks to be ejected from a game for targeting after no Big Ten players were ejected for targeting in the first six weeks of the 2013 season.

During his press conference Tuesday, Ferentz was asked about Meyer's remarks and he expressed how his opinion on the topic meant very little.

"The rules are the rules. Every rule is open to interpretation," Ferentz said. "It's all about player safety. That's why they pushed it."

“Every one of us showed that tape to our players in August. It’s a bang-bang thing. It’s a hard rule to officiate. That’s why I think the process, everything I know about it, is the way it should be. You just go from there.”

The “13” package

In preparing for Ohio State last week, Iowa implemented a new wrinkle to its offense by making use of the “13” package, which is the Hawkeyes’ personnel name for when they line up using three tight ends. On Saturday, the look was used frequently with Fiedorowicz, junior Ray Hamilton and sophomore Jake Duzey and it paid off early on for Iowa. The opening drive consisted of 15 plays, five of which were completions by sophomore quarterback Jake Rudock. All five of those completions went to tight ends, including the 2-yard score by Fiedorowicz that gave Iowa a 7-0 lead.

Fiedorowicz and Duzey combined for over half of Rudock’s 19 completions and in Duzey’s case, he actually led the Hawkeyes in both receptions (6) and receiving yards (138), the bulk of which came on his 85-yard score in the third quarter that tied the game at 24-24.

“It fit what we were doing,” Ferentz said about the 13 package being in the team’s game plan last week. “It doesn’t alter us dramatically, but it gave us maybe just one more package to go to a little bit without radically changing what we’re doing.”

In Duzey’s case, the package allowed him to showcase his quickness in space, as evident by the touchdown he scored.

“I’m not going to say I’m faster than everybody, but I feel pretty good about it,” Duzey said about his confidence level in open space.

Whether it remains a permanent fixture of Iowa’s offense going forward remains to be seen. Given Northwestern’s issues defensively, it shouldn’t surprise if the Hawkeyes continue

utilizing the 13 set this weekend.

"They continue to work hard and improve," Ferentz said. "We'll utilize that group if it fits the team we're playing."

King shining

Earlier in the week, freshman cornerback Desmond King was named the Big Ten's Freshman of the Week, marking the first time an Iowa player had received the honor since it was first established in 2010. Against the Buckeyes, King tied for a team-high 12 tackles (10 of which were solo) with senior linebacker James Morris.

King was the first true freshman to have his redshirt burned this season when he filled in for an injured Jordan Lomax during the Hawkeyes' season-opening loss to Northern Illinois back on Aug. 31. Since then, he has started every game at corner opposite senior B.J. Lowery.

"He has done a good job of coming in right away, getting thrown into the fire and just adapting," senior free safety Tanner Miller said. "It's just a tribute to him coming in with the right mind-set and work ethic."

Along the way, King has also earned the respect of his defensive teammates. Not just during games like this past weekend against Ohio State, but also during practice and when the entire defense gets together for group meetings and watching film.

"He's not acting like a freshman," Kirksey said. "Sometimes when you're a freshman, you might just stay in the back and listen. You know, get a feel of things. But he's in there asking questions. He's in there trying to better himself."

Much like Ferentz and his coaching staff, Morris said how he took notice of King during fall camp last August, specifically during 7-on-7 drills.

"Some guys just sort of have a natural knack for coverage abilities, man-to-man coverage situations," Morris said. "Desmond was definitely one of those guys and that was evident when you first watched him practice.

"I've just been really, really encouraged by his work ethic and buying into the team identities. He seems like a pretty unselfish kid and it has been fun to play with him."