

Iowa to face No. 14 LSU in 2014 Outback Bowl



Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz (left) and athletics director Gary Barta discuss the Hawkeyes' invitation to the 2014 Outback Bowl against No. 14 LSU during a press conference held Sunday, Dec. 8, 2013, at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City. This will be Iowa's fourth Outback Bowl appearance under Ferentz. The game takes place at Raymond James Stadium in Tampa, Fla., on Wednesday, Jan. 1, 2014.

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – The résumé was established. In the final two weeks of the regular season, the Iowa Hawkeyes picked up their two biggest victories of 2013. First, they overcame a 21-7 halftime deficit to beat Michigan. Then they went into Nebraska on a short week and steamrolled the Cornhuskers,

38-17. That eighth victory of 2013 in Lincoln gave Iowa twice the number of wins from what it had one year before.

That on-the-field success is what Iowa athletics director Gary Barta believes made the difference Sunday when the Hawkeyes learned they would be playing No. 14 LSU in the 2014 Outback Bowl on New Year's Day. Iowa got the bid on merit, even without having the name recognition nationally that either Michigan or Nebraska has.

"I don't know how much selling an athletic director does. The selling goes on on the field," Barta said during a press conference Sunday evening inside the Hayden Fry Football Complex. "If you look at what our players have done, we're playing some of the best football certainly in the Big Ten and maybe some argument, across the country.

"It really sells itself."

For Iowa, this will be its fourth appearance in the Outback Bowl, all four of which have come during head coach Kirk Ferentz's 15 seasons at the helm. Of those three previous Tampa appearances, the Hawkeyes have victories in two of those including a 31-10 win over South Carolina in their most recent appearance in 2009.

The familiarity Iowa has with the Outback Bowl, combined with fans being anxious to travel after the Hawkeyes missed out on a bowl game entirely in 2012, is something both Ferentz and Barta believe played a factor in getting selected.

"They're ready to go and I would tell you that this was anecdotally the No. 1 choice with the fans that I was talking with," Barta said, referencing interactions he had over the weekend with fans while in Des Moines with the men's basketball team for the Big Four Classic.

This will be the second time Iowa and LSU have faced each other. The first go-around also occurred on New Year's Day in

the same state – albeit a different city and different bowl – and remains in Hawkeye lore. Iowa won the 2005 Capital One Bowl 30-25 over the Bayou Bengals when Drew Tate connected with Warren Holloway for a 56-yard touchdown pass on the very final play of the game.

Things are somewhat different this time around. Instead of Orlando, the Hawkeyes and Tigers will meet at Raymond James Stadium in Tampa, Fla. Instead of Nick Saban coaching LSU (the 2005 Capital One Bowl was his final game there before becoming the Miami Dolphins' head coach), the Tigers are led by the man who was Saban's successor in 2005, Les Miles.

The former Michigan offensive lineman has a national title to his name at LSU and the Tigers come into this showdown with a 9-3 mark that features the only victory anyone currently possesses over Auburn, who won the SEC Championship Game over the weekend. Ferentz recalled going head-to-head once with Miles in the 1980s for a recruit in the Kansas City area (Ferentz was among Hayden Fry's assistants at Iowa, while Miles was an assistant at Michigan for Bo Schembechler). Beyond that however, Ferentz said the interactions have been few and far between.

"I don't think I've ever met him. You know, I've seen him on TV and YouTube and all that stuff, a lot of times," Ferentz said. "It seems like every time I see him, he's on the winning side, so hopefully we can do something about it. It won't be easy."

On the injury front, Ferentz declined to get into specifics Sunday evening about players currently dealing with injuries, but said there aren't any major injuries now that would keep anyone out. That isn't the case with LSU, as the Tigers are coping with a pretty significant loss following their 31-27 win over Arkansas last week.

LSU will be playing Iowa minus the services of senior

quarterback Zach Mettenberger, who recently had surgery done on his knee after injuring it in the fourth quarter of last week's contest against the Razorbacks. Mettenberger was a 2-year starter who was among the top signal-callers in the SEC.

In Mettenberger's place will be a true freshman named Anthony Jennings, who did engineer LSU's game-winning drive against Arkansas by completing four passes, including a 49-yard touchdown pass with 1:15 showing on the clock. While Jennings has appeared in eight games for the Tigers this season, he is only 6-of-10 passing and the Outback Bowl will be his first career start.

Ferentz said he hadn't studied any LSU film prior to meeting the press Sunday, but did make mention of how the Tigers nearly came back to beat Iowa in that prior Capital One Bowl with a third-string redshirt freshman named JaMarcus Russell, who later went on to become the top overall selection in the 2007 NFL Draft by the Oakland Raiders.

"I'm just guessing their No. 2 guy probably doesn't look like the No. 2 guy at Maine when I was there for three years," Ferentz said. "I know nothing about him other than I bet he's a good football player and they've got a month to get ready, too.

"Playing back-up quarterbacks at LSU might not be a good thing, at least based on past experience."

Iowa will be the designated visiting team for the 2014 Outback Bowl, but will likely be wearing its black jerseys since LSU typically wears white at home.

Kickoff is scheduled for 12 p.m. Central on Jan. 1, with the game being televised nationally on ESPN.

2013-14 BIG TEN BOWL SCHEDULE:

Texas Bowl; Houston, Texas

Friday, Dec. 27, 2013; Minnesota (8-4) vs. Syracuse (6-6), 5 p.m., ESPN

Buffalo Wild Wings Bowl; Tempe, Ariz.

Saturday, Dec. 28, 2013; Michigan (7-5) vs. Kansas State (7-5), 9:15 p.m., ESPN

Gator Bowl; Jacksonville, Fla.

Wednesday, Jan. 1, 2014; Nebraska (8-4) vs. Georgia (8-4), 11 a.m., ESPN2

Capital One Bowl; Orlando, Fla.

Wednesday, Jan. 1, 2014; Wisconsin (9-3) vs. South Carolina (10-2), 12 p.m., ABC

Outback Bowl; Tampa, Fla.

Wednesday, Jan. 1, 2014; Iowa (8-4) vs. LSU (9-3), 12 p.m., ESPN

Rose Bowl; Pasadena, Calif.

Wednesday, Jan. 1, 2014; Michigan State (12-1) vs. Stanford (11-2), 4 p.m., ESPN

Orange Bowl; Miami, Fla.

Friday, Jan. 3, 2014; Ohio State (12-1) vs. Clemson (10-2), 7:30 p.m., ESPN

****All times listed are Central Standard Time***