

# 12/23/2013: Outback Bowl notebook



The backdrop near the entrance to the Coralville Outback Steakhouse during Iowa's team lunch there on Monday, Dec. 23, 2013. Should Iowa defeat No. 14 LSU in the 2014 Outback Bowl, the restaurant will supply complimentary Coconut Shrimps to all its customers on Jan. 2, 2014.

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

CORALVILLE, Iowa – Typically, the rewards of a bowl trip for college football players tend to come upon reaching the final destination. The weeks leading up to departure feature some of the most strenuous work done between the last regular season game and that bowl trip.

Two weeks have passed since the Iowa Hawkeyes learned they would face No. 14 LSU in the 2014 Outback Bowl. Since learning of their opponent, players have described enduring practices they liken to all the work done in the offseason in the months

leading up to the season opener.

“Practices have been a lot like camp practices,” junior defensive tackle Louis Trinca-Pasat said. “We’ve got to get ready for a good opponent in LSU.”

The Hawkeyes leave for Tampa, Fla., on Christmas Eve. But before leaving the comforts of their surroundings, they were treated to a lunch Monday afternoon at Outback Steakhouse, the sponsor of Iowa’s bowl match-up with the Bayou Bengals.

Even though the bowl activities down in Tampa don’t actually begin until Dec. 26, Ferentz said the reason for bringing the team there Tuesday is to get all the players acclimated enough to their surroundings before game preparation begins to ratchet up, as well as enjoy the perks of playing in a game like the Outback Bowl.

After two weeks of practices in Iowa City, Ferentz said concentration has begun to shift towards installing a game plan, which he added hadn’t been finalized yet.

“Two things – we just got to keep everybody healthy, that’s first and foremost,” Ferentz said. “Then secondly, we still have to get game ready and that’s a good problem to have.”

### **Preparing for unexpected**

In some ways, there are uncharted waters ahead for the Hawkeyes. Although Iowa has appeared in three previous Outback Bowls under head coach Kirk Ferentz, this is the first Tampa trip for everyone currently on the roster. In fact, only the fifth-year seniors on the team like right tackle Brett Van Sloten have even experienced traveling to a Florida bowl game of any kind.

With that in mind, Van Sloten said it’s up to him and other veteran players on the team to help keep the entirety of the trip in perspective for the rest of their teammates.

"When it's football, you're all football," Van Sloten said. "You can't get distracted by all that's going on there. There's going to be a lot of fun activities and when coaches say, 'O.K., it's time to put your feet up and relax,' you can go out and spend your free time with what you choose to do.

"But when it comes down to football, you've got to be focused and 100 percent in."

This also marks the first time Iowa has been to a bowl game since all the coaching overhaul that began taking place in 2012. That's not to say there isn't bowl game experience among the new assistants – for instance, offensive coordinator Greg Davis and wide receivers coach Bobby Kennedy both were part of a national championship team at Texas in 2005. But it marks the first time for everyone together.

Davis said Monday he hasn't noticed any major differences in preparing for a bowl at Iowa versus preparing for one at Texas. If anything, the experience he had on Mack Brown's staff might be of benefit considering his familiarity competing against LSU head coach Les Miles back when he was in charge at Oklahoma State.

"They're not a team that plays a ton of things that you haven't seen or that you would say is 'weird,'" Davis said when speaking of LSU's defense. "They play from a 4-down front, they play under and over, their third-down package is 3-down, they put nickel and dime personnel in with guys that can run and they're not a huge team with blitz.

"They're very sound in what they do and they try not to give up big plays."

### **Rudock's homecoming (well, sort of)**

Although Tampa is not Jake Rudock's hometown, the sophomore quarterback couldn't help but express excitement Monday about the opportunity of playing in his home state of Florida next

week.

"It's just nice that my parents don't have to fly," Rudock said. "My parents can just drive there. It's just under a four-hour drive and that's a lot better than a 3-4 hour flight. A lot cheaper, too, so that's a good thing."

The Weston, Fla., native said he had played in Tampa before whenever his high school, St. Thomas Aquinas played against nearby high schools at their home stadiums. But the experience of playing at Raymond James Stadium on New Year's Day will be a first for Rudock.

One of the biggest concerns with Rudock entering this match-up against the Tigers is his health, specifically with both of his knees. He left games against both Wisconsin and Nebraska last month (games that were four weeks apart) with separate knee injuries. The coaching staff has taken caution with Rudock during practices, but the plan remains the same with him returning to the field next week.

"Having some time off definitely helped," Rudock said. "I feel good. I always hate the percentage thing, but I feel good. I feel better than I had after the [Nebraska] game, so I should be good to go."

### **Stiff test awaits defense**

The biggest storyline surrounding Iowa's defense is the matter of preparing for a second-string quarterback, with Anthony Jennings starting in place of an injured Zach Mettenberger next week.

But looking beyond LSU's quarterback situation, two aspects of the Tiger offense have raised eyebrows among the Hawkeyes' defensive personnel. One aspect is LSU's rushing attack that features a 1-2 punch of Jeremy Hill and Terrance Magee. The two backs combined for 22 touchdowns on the ground during the regular season. Hill, who is listed at 6-2, 235 pounds, drew

comparisons Monday to another back Iowa faced this season that is practically the same size – Ohio State’s Carlos Hyde.

“They’ve got the size and speed and can break away,” senior linebacker Anthony Hitchens said. “So yeah, a little bit. You know, it will just come down to our basics.”

Then there’s the other 1-2 punch LSU has in its receiving corps. Defensive coordinator Phil Parker called the Tigers’ duo of Odell Beckham, Jr., and Jarvis Landry “the most talented receivers [Parker] had seen in a long time.” Both currently possess over 1,000 yards receiving on the season and have combined for 18 touchdown catches.

“Unbelievably athletic,” senior free safety Tanner Miller said. “They’re both top-notch players. They’re the full package. They’ll block downfield, run great routes and they don’t take plays off.

“They go full [speed] 100 percent of the time.”

[\\*Click here for audio from Kirk Ferentz, Greg Davis, Phil Parker and Hawkeye players from Iowa’s event at Outback Steakhouse on Monday.](#)

***\*HawkeyeDrive.com’s coverage from Tampa, Fla., of the 2014 Outback Bowl will begin Sunday, Dec. 29 and run each day through Jan. 1 with complete coverage of Iowa’s contest against No. 14 LSU at Raymond James Stadium.***