

# COMMENTARY: Potential for bright future there

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

TAMPA, Fla. – When the final horn sounded on No. 14 LSU's 21-14 victory over Iowa in the 2014 Outback Bowl on Wednesday, there was a mixture of disappointment and optimism felt by the Hawkeyes as they left Raymond James Stadium.

The disappointment is obvious. Iowa came looking to end its 2013 campaign much like it did its 2008 season, which also featured the Hawkeyes' most recent Outback Bowl appearance before Wednesday's loss to LSU. Iowa was simply beat by a better team. Even though the Hawkeyes kept themselves in it the entire way, it was the Tigers' ability to run the ball and stop the run that made the difference.

It didn't matter that Iowa had an overwhelming amount of fan support in contrast to LSU. It didn't matter what the conditions were like or how the officiating was. The Tigers were simply better. That's it.

But now look ahead to 2014 and it is clear that potential is there for Iowa in the near future.

Should the preseason expectations reach a 2010-like proportion? No, probably not. That was a more talented team returning most of that talent following an Orange Bowl win. But the potential exists for Iowa to at the very least have a similar season in 2014 to what it just experienced.

The biggest question mark will be a group of linebackers losing all three of its starters. But what should help aid that next group is having guys like Louis Trinca-Pasat and

Carl Davis remaining in front of them and a secondary that will feature a cornerback in Desmond King who played like a veteran against LSU with six tackles, five of which came unassisted.

Offensively, the biggest loss is C.J. Fiedorowicz, but all of the other tight ends return. The offensive line loses a pair of starters in Brett Van Sloten and Conor Boffeli, but Iowa already knows it will have left tackle Brandon Scherff back for his senior season.

And regardless of whether the starting quarterback remains Jake Rudock or if C.J. Beathard is able to overtake him, whichever one's under center will have plenty of experienced skill players to rely on. The entire backfield returns, as do receivers like Kevonte Martin-Manley, Tevaun Smith and Jacob Hillyer.

That was a noticeable theme to what was being discussed by Ferentz and some of his players following Wednesday's game. They know there's enough in place as far as personnel goes.

Iowa will also benefit from what appears to be (at least on paper) a favorable 2014 schedule that results from the Big Ten realigning its division format. The Hawkeyes won't have to deal with teams like Michigan State, Michigan or Ohio State next season. They also get teams like Northwestern, Wisconsin and Nebraska all visiting Kinnick Stadium.

The pieces are there and the schedule is there. Now the question becomes whether Iowa can seize this opportunity. History would suggest no because seasons like 2006 and 2010 have come under Ferentz's watch.

But 2014 will be its own entity. The players who are returning know what's necessary now following a season where the number of wins doubled from the prior year.

There might not be much Iowa can take away from Wednesday's

game specifically because, again, LSU proved to be a better team. But losing to a team like the Tigers shouldn't diminish what the Hawkeyes were able to accomplish.

It also shouldn't diminish what they're capable of going forward.