

4/9/2014: Iowa spring football notebook



Iowa running backs/special teams coach Chris White discusses the Hawkeyes' running back situation during a press conference held Wednesday, April 9, 2014, at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City.

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – Last season, Iowa divided its carries among four different running backs – Mark Weisman, Damon Bullock, Jordan Canzeri and LeShun Daniels – and also managed to incorporate a pair of fullbacks in Adam Cox and Macon Plewa, whom the coaches believed all warranted playing time.

Right now, Iowa running backs/specials teams coach Chris White has the luxury of having all six aforementioned players at his disposal for this spring and for the 2014 season. But the question becomes even more prevalent now as to how the carries will get assimilated.

One thing White said he has done this offseason is make cut-ups for all of his backs of every single carry they had in 2013, grading them each individually from their best runs to their worst. From there, he has gone about incorporating new drills.

"I graded everyone, made comments on everyone, and the bottom line was we didn't finish the runs well enough because we weren't in a good base," White said during a press conference on Wednesday. "Our feet were together. We were stopping our feet and we weren't being able to move.

"So I just created a couple of drills this offseason and it's really showing up on tape. Mark has made some phenomenal runs, jump cutting, getting up in there. Really looking fluid right now and I really believe it's because of the drills we're doing."

White acknowledged Wednesday that Weisman's best bet at a professional future in football would be playing fullback. But he also said that because there's a comfort level with both Cox and Plewa at fullback and because Weisman has the experience at running back, the plan is to keep him in the running back mix.

The same goes for Bullock, who moved around between running back and wide receiver his freshman season before primarily being featured as a running back over the past couple of years.

"He's not really built that way," White said of Bullock. "He's 205 pounds and he has got a running back body. He'd have a lot of work to do releasing at the line of scrimmage, reading coverage, all the things that go into being a wide receiver. But we realize what he can do and we're trying to get him isolated out there."

As for Canzeri, White heaped plenty of praise his way, calling him "instinctually, the best running back" Iowa has when it

comes to making cuts and finding a balance. Couple that with the way Canzeri came on late last season with big runs in each of Iowa's final five games, and there's reason to think he could play a much bigger role in 2014.

White also described younger running backs such as Akrum Wadley and Jonathan Parker – both of whom redshirted last season – making progress this spring, then spoke highly of the one back from that group who did see the field as a true freshman, LeShun Daniels, calling him, “a special kid.” Daniels is known as a bruising back with his frame, but White went out of his way to praise what the sophomore-to-be has done to become a more complete back this spring.

“He has kind of transformed his body,” White said. “He's very muscular, but he has really worked on trying to be more flexible in the upper body and lower body and I think it has really helped him out.

“You can see it on the field. He's explosive, he's faster and he's making better cuts.”



Iowa wide receivers coach Bobby Kennedy discusses the Hawkeyes' current crop of receivers during a press conference held Wednesday, April 9, 2014, at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City.

Kennedy breaks down strengths, areas of improvement for wideouts

As soon as White finished speaking inside the Hayden Fry Football Complex on Wednesday, Iowa wide receivers coach Bobby Kennedy took to the mic and began describing his group of players, which consists of a blend between proven upperclassmen and a subset of redshirt freshmen all waiting in the wings for their opportunities.

With the experienced group, it starts with the most veteran of Iowa's receivers, senior Kevonte Martin-Manley. When asked about his No. 1 wideout, Kennedy described Martin-Manley as "a relentless worker," someone who leads by example over the course of an entire week, not just Saturdays.

"He's more comfortable," Kennedy said. "I think he's starting to see the game better. There's a bunch of things he needs to improve on. There were some things in the bowl game that he could have done better that would have helped us.

"But I know this – he's willing to put in the work. So hopefully he'll continue to improve."

Looking beyond Martin-Manley, Iowa has a pair of juniors in Tevaun Smith and Jacob Hillyer who showed glimpses of their potential at times last season. Smith had a 54-yard touchdown reception against Michigan, while Hillyer had crucial catches in games against Iowa State and LSU.

When assessing this duo, Kennedy mentioned how he feels a core is being established within the receiving corps as a result of their developments. He added that Smith should view himself as someone playing a bigger role and that Hillyer may not have gotten the recognition he deserved for some of the things he did when he did see the field like making catches that resulted in third-down conversions.

Kennedy was also asked about the speedster among this group of

wideouts, senior Damond Powell. Last season, Powell played a very limited role, but played a part in Iowa's 23-7 win over Minnesota when he scampered 73 yards for a touchdown off a tunnel screen.

In his observations about Powell's development, Kennedy mentioned him having a better understanding of the route running in Iowa's system, as well as improving in and out of his cuts. He feels Powell is becoming more comfortable in part because he doesn't have as much to think about now as he upon arrival in Iowa City last August.

"The great thing about him is he's a great guy in our room," Kennedy said. "He has got a great, big personality and the guys respect him. But he also has a really good work ethic."

As for the redshirt freshmen, Kennedy believes they all are showing strides and as a result, a more heated competition to be part of what he said was a six-receiver system is taking place. Three names that he gave brief assessments about Wednesday were Andre Harris, Derrick Mitchell and Derrick Willies.

With Harris, Kennedy said "the sky's the limit," and also described him as being "a natural ball catcher" with quickness, something he feels may have lacked in previous years. The assessment of Mitchell was slightly different. Kennedy mentioned upper body strength as an attribute and that the key with him was becoming more consistent.

Then there's Willies, who Kennedy called "a phenomenal athlete" that has made "significant improvement."

"I'm really pleased that we decided to redshirt some of those guys because I think they've got the ability to really change the ... not necessarily the face of our program, but our ability outside to make plays," Kennedy said.

TRANSCRIPTS (courtesy of UI Sports Info.):

[Chris White \(4/9/2014\)](#)

[Bobby Kennedy \(4/9/2014\)](#)