

Barta addresses ticket sales, having seven home games

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – In five weeks, the Iowa football team takes the field to open its 2014 season at Kinnick Stadium against Northern Iowa. The game is in five weeks, yet tickets for it remain available. In fact, tickets for all seven of the Hawkeyes' home games in 2014 are still currently available.

Speaking before an assembly of local media at Carver-Hawkeye Arena on Friday about this and other matters, Iowa athletics director Gary Barta provided a variety of reasons for why ticket sales are slower than before. Among the things he mentioned as he spoke for approximately one hour were lost momentum from a 4-8 2012 season still taking its toll, concerns fans have about the game day experience, and so on. Just about any factor one could think of was brought up.

Barta used the phrase, "The sky's not falling," to assess Iowa's current situation, but the look of concern was evident. He saw how the student section had a 27% drop in attendance last year and wants to see that number brought back closer to the 10,000 students that had filled their portion of Kinnick Stadium during fall weekends of years past.

In addition, he said current UI students have until Aug. 1 to guarantee seats in the student section. On that date, any available student section seats will also become available to the general public.

"My goal is to get the students in first and then fill up the stadium," Barta said. "That's the No. 1 goal."

A couple of other football-related items brought up Friday had to do with the game day experience for fans and Barta's stance on having seven home games every season. On the game day experience front, Barta said he hears constant feedback from fans about what they like and what they don't like. He brought up the new sound system being put in place and finding a fine line that pleases the most people possible.

While saying he wants fans to enjoy themselves as much as possible when tailgating, Barta also made clear his stance on policy changes over the last few years related to alcohol consumption hasn't changed either.

"I would tell you that the fans I'm talking to now recognize it isn't like it was four years ago," he said. "It's much better now and the vast majority of fans give me that feedback, but I think some of that still lingers from that moment in time where there was that hard reaction.

"My desire is that I can bring my kids to a game, they can be safe, they can have a great time and 99 percent of the fans do that. The one percent, we're still trying to work through."

Barta also defended the most recent change to go into effect this year about the K Lot no longer allowing tents to be set up during tailgates. Part of his defense on this matter was being told how RV owners have approved of Lot 75 since it was put in place for them and how fans began refusing to park anywhere to the west of Kinnick Stadium.

"We always try to think of what's going to make game day better. Not how we're going to punish people, but how we're going to make it better," Barta said. "I think it's going to be well-received. It's different, so we have to work our way through it. I'm already getting great feedback from the fans who were angry they couldn't get into their parking spot who are saying, 'Thank you.'

"We still have a great place for people who want to tent. It's

just in a different spot.”

As for the mandate on seven home games per season, Barta brought up how the athletics department collects between \$3.5-4 million in revenue per game and how the financial model Iowa has in place is predicated around having seven home football games. He also said the total in the school’s athletics budget is \$85 million per fiscal year.

When the nine-game Big Ten schedule goes into effect in 2016, Iowa will be locked into five home and five road games per season when the annual contest with Iowa State is factored in. That leaves two remaining games that, in accordance to Iowa’s model, both have to be played at Kinnick Stadium.

Barta said the ninth Big Ten game is similar to playing a home-and-home against an opponent from one of the Big 5 conference. As it stands now, Iowa has a home-and-home with Pittsburgh this year and next and it’s the only one with a Big 5 school not named Iowa State.

“We don’t have state dollars, we don’t have university dollars, so we’d have to either find another \$3.5 million-plus from some other source or cut something,” Barta said with regards to only playing a six-game home schedule. “We’d have that much less money and I’d either have to find more money from some other source or cut that much expense.

“I know I’m being simplistic, but I’m not going to answer with, ‘Here’s what I’m going to do,’ because it’s not going to happen. I’m not going to do it.”

Regarding the new football operations center being built, the timetable for it being completed is now mid-October. Barta said he didn’t want any construction to be taking place while the team went through fall camp next month.

Barta is scheduled to be in Chicago along with Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz and seniors Carl Davis, Brandon Scherff and Mark

Weisman next week.