

2013 Big Ten football previews: Nebraska (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

We've discussed [Penn State](#), [Illinois](#), [Purdue](#), [Indiana](#), [No. 23 Wisconsin](#), [No. 2 Ohio State](#), [Minnesota](#), [Michigan State](#), [No. 22 Northwestern](#) and [No. 17 Michigan](#). Now our attention shifts to the No. 18 Nebraska Cornhuskers, who won the Legends Division last season. Iowa visits Memorial Stadium in Lincoln, Neb., on Nov. 29.

For as tumultuous as it appeared Nebraska's season was at times in 2012, the Cornhuskers managed to turn things around in mid-October and ended up posting a 7-1 conference mark to win the Legends Division outright. But the games Nebraska did lose were ugly, particularly on the defensive side of the football. In its four defeats, the team historically known for its "Blackshirts" defense surrendered a combined total of 214 points. Just in those four games. That includes giving up 70 points in losing the Big Ten Championship Game to Wisconsin.

But with all of that out of the way, I look at the Cornhuskers here in 2013 and see a team that looks like it could at the very least return to Lucas Oil Stadium this December and maybe find itself in the Rose Bowl regardless of that outcome.

Nebraska had, at least statistically speaking, the Big Ten's top offense in 2012 and it returns a lot of playmakers from that group this fall. It obviously starts with senior quarterback Taylor Martinez, who now seems to have Tim Beck's offense down pat after a junior campaign where he remarkably completed 62 percent of his passes for 2,871 yards and tossed 23 touchdowns. To put that in perspective, Martinez had that many TD passes for his entire career entering last season. Add

in that he also rushed for 1,019 yards and there's a chance Martinez could be leaving Nebraska as its most decorated quarterback in school history. Let that sink in.

While the Cornhusker backfield won't have Rex Burkhead back there anymore, it does bring back junior Ameer Abdullah, who led Nebraska in rushing last season with 1,137 yards rushing on 226 carries and eight touchdowns. Now that he's clearly the top back and Martinez has shown he can throw the ball effectively, I would expect Abdullah's workload to increase a little in 2013. Another name to watch as well is sophomore Imani Cross, a bigger back who rushed for seven touchdowns on 55 carries as a freshman.

Also looking to boost Nebraska's offense in 2013 is a very experienced receiving corps returning all three of its top wideouts. The leader of this group is junior Kenny Bell. As a sophomore, Bell led the Cornhuskers in just about every receiving category with 50 catches, 863 yards receiving and eight touchdowns. Senior Quincy Enunwa and junior Jamal Turner make up the rest of the unit's core, combining for 74 catches, 887 yards and four scores between the two. Senior Jake Long is expected to fill the void left at tight end by the outgoing Ben Cotton.

The offensive line is fairly experienced, featuring three seniors who all contributed heavily in 2012. Brent Qvale returns at left tackle, along with Jeremiah Sirles at right tackle and Spencer Long at right guard. Sirles and Long started every game and Qvale every game except the one against Northwestern. Senior Cole Pensick, who took over at center for both the Big Ten Championship Game against Wisconsin and the Capital One Bowl against Georgia, also returns and is listed atop the Cornhuskers' depth chart.

While Nebraska's offense looks to be strong, the defense (and more specifically, the front seven) is one that is very young and inexperienced, even though head coach Bo Pelini believes

there's serious potential. The front seven returns one starter – senior defensive end Jason Ankrah. That's it.

Ankrah had 26 tackles and two sacks while starting nine games last season and is now one of the guys being heavily looked up this year. Joining him along the defensive line is another senior in Thad Randle and then a pair of redshirt freshmen – Vincent Valentine and Greg McMullen. Valentine is expected to start alongside Randle at defensive tackle, while McMullen will take over at the end spot opposite Ankrah. This is a front four that lost a couple of marquee guys in Cameron Meredith and Blake Steinkuhler, who between the two of them had 100 tackles and 7.5 sacks.

Then there's the linebacking corps losing all three of Will Compton, Sean Fisher and Alonzo Whaley. This trio only started five games together as Nebraska opened the majority of its games last season in nickel, but the Cornhuskers won four of those five games. Junior Zaire Anderson got to start against Arkansas State and sophomore David Santos got to start against Michigan. Santos had 24 tackles as a freshman and now that he's anchoring the middle of this group, he'll be someone Nebraska will need to perform big. Redshirt freshman Jared Afalava is also likely to start this season.

The secondary is by far the most experienced group of players returning to the "Blackshirts." Not just because it features three guys who started the bulk of the Cornhuskers' games back there last season, but because some of the younger players saw significant action with the amount of nickel and dime that was played. Nebraska brings back both of its corners in seniors Ciante Evans and Andrew Green. Evans had 56 tackles and led the Cornhuskers with eight pass break ups, while Green had 50 tackles. Nebraska also brings back Stanley Jean-Baptiste, who's the only current DB who had more than one interception a year ago.

On special teams, the return game will be fine with both

Abdullah and Bell. But the Cornhuskers also had the luxury of one of the league's top kickers in Brett Maher, who handled both punting and placekicking, and he's no longer there. Nebraska will need to have both a punter and a kicker established and the players plugged into those spots have enormous shoes to fill.

Looking at the schedule, the key game is Sept. 14 against UCLA, a game the Cornhuskers get at home after losing to the Bruins in Pasadena last year. If Nebraska's able to avenge that loss, there's a very real chance it enters its Nov. 2 home date with Northwestern at 7-0. I would be cautious of the game one week earlier at Minnesota because it's the pure definition of a "trap game" with the Cornhuskers coming off a bye and playing the Golden Gophers before entering their November gauntlet.

Nebraska's three main competitors in the Legends Division are Northwestern, Michigan and Michigan State, with the Wolverines being the only team of these three the Cornhuskers play away from Lincoln. There's also a tough road game at Penn State on Nov. 23, but Nebraska should be favored in that game assuming its season doesn't become a complete disaster.

The Legends Division is nearly a complete toss-up this season, but if I had to pick a team to come out of that division to meet Ohio State for the Big Ten title, it would be the Cornhuskers. And even if Nebraska doesn't win that game, the possibility of going to the Rose Bowl might still be there if Ohio State finds itself in the BCS National Championship Game like many expect.

If Nebraska's defense manages to meet Pelini's expectations, it shouldn't be entering that November stretch as an enormous question mark still like it currently is and if that does happen, watch out.

AUDIO:

Nebraska head coach Bo Pelini – <http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Bo-Pelini-2013-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>

Nebraska quarterback Taylor Martinez – <http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Taylor-Martinez-2013-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>

Hawkeyes in the NFL: 2013 Preseason Week Three

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

The third week of the 2013 NFL preseason, also known as the “dress rehearsal” week since starters play the majority of the games, begins Thursday. As of Wednesday, there are currently 34 former Iowa football players listed on NFL rosters. Earlier this week, the New England Patriots released former Hawkeye linebacker A.J. Edds.

Below is a list of this week’s preseason games in the NFL, including which former Iowa players are with which teams. Included will be a list of televisions stations in Iowa carrying preseason games of two Midwest teams – the Chicago Bears and Kansas City Chiefs.

In addition, there are also six nationally televised preseason games this week including the Aug. 22 contest on ESPN between the Carolina Panthers and Baltimore Ravens, which features four former Hawkeyes (two on each team).

Thursday, Aug. 22:

New England at Detroit, 6:30 p.m. – **Patriots:** Jeff Tarpinian, Markus Zusevics; **Lions:** Riley Reiff, Amari Spievey

Carolina at Baltimore, 7 p.m. (ESPN) – **Panthers:** Colin Cole, Charles Godfrey; **Ravens:** Dallas Clark, Marshal Yanda

Friday, Aug. 23:

Seattle at Green Bay, 7 p.m. (CBS) – **Packers:** Mike Daniels, Micah Hyde, Bryan Bulaga

Chicago at Oakland, 9 p.m.

***TV stations in Iowa carrying Bears/Raiders:** KFXA-DT 28.1 (Eastern Iowa); KLJB-DT 18.1 (Quad Cities); KCWI-CW 23.1 (Des Moines); KPTM-DT 42.1 (Council Bluffs/Omaha)

Saturday, Aug. 24:

Buffalo at Washington, 3:30 p.m. (NFL Network) – **Bills:** Scott Chandler; **Redskins:** Adam Gettis

Cleveland at Indianapolis, 6 p.m. – **Colts:** Pat Angerer

NY Jets at NY Giants, 6 p.m. – **Giants:** Brandon Myers, Tyler Sash

Philadelphia at Jacksonville, 6:30 p.m. – **Eagles:** Bradley Fletcher, Matt Tobin, Julian Vandervelde; **Jaguars:** Allen Reisner

Tampa Bay at Miami, 6:30 p.m. – **Buccaneers:** Adrian Clayborn; **Dolphins:** Keenan Davis, Marvin McNutt

Kansas City at Pittsburgh, 6:30 p.m. – **Chiefs:** Greg Castillo, Tony Moeaki, Ricky Stanzi

***TV stations in Iowa carrying Chiefs/Steelers:** KD SM-DT 17.1 (Des Moines); KTV0-DT2 33.2 (Ottumwa/Kirksville)

Cincinnati at Dallas, 7 p.m. – **Bengals:** Shaun Prater

St. Louis at Denver, 7 p.m. (CBS)

Atlanta at Tennessee, 7 p.m. – **Falcons:** Jonathan Babineaux; **Titans:** Shonn Greene, Karl Klug

San Diego at Arizona, 9 p.m.

Sunday, Aug. 25:

New Orleans at Houston, 3 p.m. (FOX)

Minnesota at San Francisco, 7 p.m. (NBC) – **Vikings:** Christian Ballard, Chad Greenway, Seth Olsen, James Vandenberg

**All times listed are Central Standard Time*

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We've written about [Penn State](#), [Illinois](#), [Purdue](#), [Indiana](#), [No. 23 Wisconsin](#), [No. 2 Ohio State](#), [Minnesota](#), [Michigan State](#) and [No. 22 Northwestern](#). Now we set our sights on the Michigan Wolverines, who enter the 2013 season ranked 17th nationally. Iowa will play Michigan on Nov. 23 at Kinnick Stadium.

I previously mentioned whiffing on my Northwestern prediction last season. Conversely, the one team I was as close to "spot on" with predicting in the Big Ten as possible in 2012 was Michigan. Yes, the Wolverines didn't win the Legends Division like I thought they would or play in the Rose Bowl like I thought, but they did go 8-4 and the four losses came in the

four games I figured they'd lose last year. They also lost the Outback Bowl to South Carolina in a game the Gamecocks were favored to win.

Now in 2013, Michigan is a team being considered by many as the favorite to win the Legends Division. Part of it I feel is sentimental because this year marks the last possible opportunity for the Wolverines to meet Ohio State for the Big Ten title before they share the same division again in 2014. While I think Michigan is good and it wouldn't surprise me if it did win the Legends Division, I'm not entirely certain of this.

Quarterback is intriguing because I actually believe the Wolverines are better here now. Not to take anything away from Denard Robinson because he was an exciting player to watch, but I feel junior Devin Gardner is more of a fit in offensive coordinator Al Borges' system. Before, Brady Hoke in his coaching staff had to improvise around Robinson. Now with Gardner taking snaps and having a better arm, Hoke and Borges will probably be able to run more of the kind of offense they've been wanting to run at Michigan.

When I look at running back, it looks clearer than one might be led to believe. If junior Fitzgerald Toussaint is back on the field, he's the Wolverines' top back, period. He suffered a nasty leg injury against Iowa last season, but still managed to rush for 514 yards and five touchdowns while getting 130 carries. Going back to the point about style of offense, my hunch is Toussaint's not only the No. 1 back, but that his production is going to increase here in 2013 now that Michigan isn't going to bank on Robinson racking up a ton of yards on the ground.

In the receiving corps, the Wolverines do bring back their leading receiver from last year in senior Jeremy Gallon. As a junior, he finished with 49 catches for 829 yards receiving and four touchdowns. Also returning is senior wideout Drew

Dileo. One name to watch here is sophomore Amara Darboh, who played at West Des Moines Valley High School in Iowa and now sits atop the depth chart with these two seniors, expected to fill a void left by Roy Roundtree. Michigan also has a really solid tight end in sophomore Devin Funchess, who hauled in 15 catches for 234 yards receiving and recorded a team-high five touchdowns in 2012.

Now up front, there's great news in left tackle Taylor Lewan deciding to return for his senior season. For my money, he's not just the best offensive lineman in the Big Ten, but perhaps the best offensive lineman in the entire country. Had he bolted early for the NFL, Lewan would've easily been a top 5 pick. With him and fellow senior right tackle Michael Schofield both back in 2013, the Wolverines are solid on the outside.

Here's the "but" when talking about the offensive line though – the entire inside of it will be new. Michigan lost three starters from last season that started every game and is replacing them with two redshirt freshmen at both guard positions and sophomore Jack Miller in the center spot. This is a group that could get better as the season progresses, especially with an anchor like Lewan on the outside. But it could be a struggle early on.

The defensive line returns one regular starter and two others who had some starting experience in 2012. The most experienced player is senior defensive tackle Quinton Washington, who started Michigan's last 10 games of the season and compiled 32 tackles and two sacks. Junior defensive end Frank Clark started four games a year ago (including the Outback Bowl against South Carolina) and senior defensive tackle Jibreel Black made a pair of starts.

While the linebacking corps might still be a strength for this Wolverine defense, it'll be without its top tackler Jake Ryan, who will be out the entire 2013 season with a torn ACL. Ryan

had 88 tackles, including 11.5 for a loss of yards and led Michigan with 4.5 sacks. Desmond Morgan returns for his junior campaign after recording 81 tackles and is now the leader of this group.

In the secondary, gone is Jordan Kovacs, who was one of Michigan's best players during his collegiate career. However, this will still be a solid group in 2013, mainly because it'll have cornerback Blake Countess back after he suffered a season-ending injury in the Wolverines' opener against Alabama. Also returning is senior free safety Thomas Gordon and junior cornerback Raymon Taylor. Gordon tied Morgan with 81 tackles.

One of the conference's best punters returns on special teams in senior Will Hagerup, but he also finds himself in competition with Matt Wile, who started games in Hagerup's place while the latter served an early-season suspension. Brendan Gibbons will once again handle the placekicking duties for the Wolverines and Gallon is back to return punts once again.

Looking at Michigan's schedule, it's kind of intriguing. Following its season opener against Central Michigan, the Wolverines play their annual rivalry game with Notre Dame at "The Big House" on Sept. 7, which will be one of those "national perception" sort of games for the entire Big Ten given the Fighting Irish going 3-0 against the Big Ten last season en route to playing in the national title game. Michigan also has to play at Connecticut before opening Big Ten play.

The Wolverines' Big Ten slate will be challenging. They do get to play "The Game" against No. 2 Ohio State at home. But it also features a road trip to Penn State in October and then come November, Michigan will be part of a four-team round-robin that'll likely decide the Legends Division. It starts with a trip to Michigan State, followed by a home game against

No. 18 Nebraska and another road game at No. 22 Northwestern. How the Wolverines fare in these three games will decide whether or not the Wolverines reach Indianapolis on Dec. 7.

I like Hoke. I think this is a good Michigan team that to be completely honest, looks like it's a year away from being big-time. I just don't see the Wolverines winning the Legends Division unless the interior of their O-line is on the same page with their tackles and unless they get everything situated with their front seven on defense, because Ryan's injury is a huge blow.

AUDIO:

Michigan head coach Brady Hoke
– <http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Brady-Hoke-2013-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>

Michigan quarterback Devin Gardner
– <http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Devin-Gardner-2013-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>

Kinnick Stadium will now feature “Wall of Honor”

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Nine former Iowa football players will be honored before the Hawkeyes' season opener Aug. 31 against Northern Illinois on a new feature at Kinnick Stadium called the “Wall of Honor,” the UI announced Tuesday.

Of the nine being recognized, the three who are currently still alive are former quarterbacks Randy Duncan and Chuck Long and former linebacker Larry Station. The six deceased players include Nile Kinnick and Cal Jones (who are the only Hawkeyes with their jersey numbers retired – No. 24 and No. 62, respectively), as well as Alex Karras, Aubrey Devine, Duke Slater and Gordon Locke.

According to the UI's release, all nine men will have their names and jersey numbers from their senior seasons displayed on the lowest ribbon adjacent to the stadium's press box. The criteria for this honor included either being a member of both the College Football Hall of Fame and now-defunct Helms Athletic Foundation Hall of Fame, one of those two Hall of Fames and consensus all-American honors, or being named a consensus all-American on multiple occasions.

In addition to this, Iowa is conducting its fifth annual FryFest the day before (Aug. 30) as well as inducting its new Athletics Hall of Fame class, which features former football players Brad Banks and Craig Clemons among this year's list of inductees.

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discussed [Penn State](#), [Illinois](#), [Purdue](#), [Indiana](#), [No. 23 Wisconsin](#), [No. 2 Ohio State](#), [Minnesota](#) and [Michigan State](#). We now turn our attention to the Northwestern Wildcats, who enter the 2013 ranked 22nd nationally. Iowa will play Northwestern on Oct. 26 at Kinnick Stadium.

Before I dive too deep into analyzing Northwestern here, I have to acknowledge that this is the one team I badly whiffed on when doing these previews a year ago. At this time last August, I wasn't entirely sold on the Wildcats even being a bowl team because they lost a ton of talent from two years ago. They were not only better in 2012, but exponentially better. Northwestern won 10 games last season – including its first bowl victory in 64 years – and held double-digit leads in the fourth quarters all three of its losses. That's how close this team was to historic.

This season, the Wildcats are ranked in the preseason top 25 and deservedly so. There's a lot of momentum with this Northwestern program right now and while 2013 is going to present more challenges (at least on paper), I really believe the Wildcats are equipped to handle most of them.

Northwestern has a very unique quarterback situation because it uses both Kain Colter and Trevor Siemian regularly at the position. Siemian threw for more yards last season, but Colter completed over two-thirds of his pass attempts in 2012 and also threw two more touchdowns (8) than Siemian. As far as who starts, Colter's the one who probably will (and in my opinion should) start because he's more of a threat running the ball than Siemian is, as evident by his 12 touchdowns on the ground. But barring injuries, I imagine Pat Fitzgerald will continue using both as frequently as he did a year ago.

Last season, the Wildcats had the Big Ten's third-highest scoring offense and a huge reason why was the play of running back Venric Mark, who returns for his senior year this fall. In a league that had plenty of good backs, Mark and his burst

through almost any open lane he saw really stood out. Mark led Northwestern in rushing with 1,366 yards on 226 carries and tied Colter with 12 touchdowns on the ground. Right now, Mark has to be considered the conference's top running back and it wouldn't shock me if he led the Big Ten in rushing this season.

Also returning in 2013 for the Wildcats are four of their top five leading receivers from a year ago. Christian Jones led Northwestern last season with 35 catches and 412 receiving yards. Tony Jones (no relation) caught 29 passes for 335 yards and led the Wildcats with four touchdown catches. Both juniors averaged nearly 12 yards per reception. Add in senior wideout Rashad Lawrence and sophomore superback Dan Vitale both returning and Northwestern brings back a very experienced group of playmakers.

If there's one question with this offense though, it's up front and it's a huge question mark. After receiving plenty of continuity up front in 2012, the Wildcats only return two starters – junior center Brandon Vitabile and junior Jack Konopka, who started every game last season at right tackle and has now moved over to left tackle to replace Patrick Ward. Junior Paul Jorgensen is the likely candidate to take over at right tackle, while the two guard spots could end up being filled by underclassmen. The development of this group will be essential if this team's going to seriously contend in the Legends Division this season.

As for the defensive line, the good news for Northwestern is senior defensive end Tyler Scott returning after a junior year where he led the Big Ten with nine sacks while also recording 42 tackles. This group also brings back junior Sean McEvilly inside at one of the tackle spots. There's depth along the Wildcat front four, but someone will need to emerge here, especially with opposing offenses being more keyed in now on Scott.

Like most defenses, the heart and soul of them is typically in the linebacking corps and that certainly holds true here with Northwestern. Senior middle linebacker Damien Proby led the Wildcats with 112 tackles in 2012 and junior outside 'backer Chi Chi Ariguzo finished third with 91 tackles and also recorded three sacks and two interceptions. Junior Collin Ellis is the likely candidate to fill the other outside spot left by David Nwabuisi.

In the secondary, there's a void left by free safety. Otherwise, Northwestern brings back strong safety Ibraheim Campbell and corners Nick VanHoose and Daniel Jones in 2013. Campbell had 89 tackles last season, along with a team-high 12 pass break ups. VanHoose and Jones both had 33 tackles a year ago and VanHoose also compiled seven pass break ups and a team-high three interceptions for the Wildcats as a redshirt freshman. None of these three are seniors, either, so there's a chance this group continues to develop into a huge strength for a Northwestern defense that led the Big Ten in turnover margin last year.

Senior Brandon Williams averaged 39.9 yards per punt in 2012 and returns to handle the Wildcats' punting duties again this fall. Northwestern also brings back one of the conference's best kickers in senior Jeff Budzien, who made all of his PAT tries last season and led the Big Ten with a 95 percent accuracy rate on field goal attempts (he went 19-of-20). Oh, and the return game will once again feature Mark, who returned punts for touchdowns in games against Syracuse and Penn State, the first punt return touchdowns by the Wildcats since Fitzgerald took over as head coach in 2006.

Once again, Northwestern is pretty bold with its non-conference scheduling. After playing three non-conference games against BCS opponents last season (four if you want to include the Gator Bowl victory over Mississippi State), the Wildcats open this season with a trip to California on Aug. 31, followed by their home opener against Syracuse on Sept. 7,

a team Northwestern beat 42-41 in its 2012 opener.

Now regarding the Wildcats' Big Ten slate, this is the one trepidation that keeps me from picking Northwestern to win the Legends Division (well, that and the inexperience along the O-line, I suppose). The Wildcats belong right there in the conversation with No. 17 Michigan, No. 18 Nebraska and Michigan State. In fact, Northwestern doesn't play any of these three teams until November and only one of those games is away from Ryan Field (Nov. 2 at Nebraska).

But here's the difference in the scheduling: Of those four teams, the Wildcats are the only one who has to play BOTH No. 2 Ohio State and No. 23 Wisconsin in 2013. Not only that, but those also happen to be the first two Big Ten games they play. As it pertains to that Oct. 5 contest against the Buckeyes, that might not be a bigger regular season game Northwestern has ever played (at least under Fitzgerald) at Ryan Field or will play there anytime soon.

It's Homecoming. It's in prime time and given the rest of the college football schedule that week, there's a good chance of "College GameDay" being in Evanston that weekend (especially if Northwestern gets through its non-conference slate unbeaten). The Wildcats have two weeks to prepare while Ohio State will be coming off another high-stakes game the week before against Wisconsin. All this, combined with all the momentum from winning 10 games and winning the Gator Bowl last year that carried Northwestern through this offseason, and this particular game is make-or-break.

If the Wildcats beat the Buckeyes, they instantly become the favorite to win the Legends Division in 2013 and it could be huge for Fitzgerald and his program going into a future where Northwestern will be in the West Division when the Big Ten realigns in 2014. If the Wildcats don't win, they're already behind the 8-ball in their division and still have road trips to Wisconsin and Iowa before even getting to that daunting

slate of games in November against the teams they'll most likely be competing against.

If you want to call it a "window of opportunity" here for Northwestern, it's a window that's currently open but could immediately shut if the Wildcats take a step back in 2013.

AUDIO:

Northwestern head coach Pat Fitzgerald – <http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Pat-Fitzgerald-2013-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>

Northwestern running back Venric Mark – <http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Venric-Mark-2013-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>

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After examining [Penn State](#), [Illinois](#), [Purdue](#), [Indiana](#), [No. 23 Wisconsin](#), [No. 2 Ohio State](#) and [Minnesota](#), we now shift our attention to the Michigan State Spartans. Iowa plays its Homecoming Game against Michigan State at Kinnick Stadium on Oct. 5.

Following a pair of double-digit win seasons that featured a co-Big Ten championship, an appearance in the inaugural Big

Ten championship game and a victory in the 2012 Outback Bowl, Michigan State took a gigantic step backwards last season. Instead of continuing to build off recent success, the Spartans found themselves losing heartbreaker after heartbreaker in 2012 and while they did beat TCU 17-16 in last year's Buffalo Wild Wings Bowl, 7-6 wasn't what Mark Dantonio and his program had in mind.

When I look at Michigan State here in 2013, I see a team that should be better than it was a year ago. Maybe not substantially better to where it wins the Legends Division like it did in 2011, but better. While I don't see the Spartans actually winning the division this fall, there going to be hanging around long enough that they have to be viewed as a contender.

Right now, the two biggest questions surrounding Michigan State both lie in the backfield with quarterback and running back. As far as signal-callers go, Andrew Maxwell returns for his senior season, but his production in 2012 paled in comparison to that of his predecessor, Kirk Cousins. Starting all 13 games last season, Maxwell completed just 52.5 percent of his passes and while he did manage to throw for 2,606 yards, he only tossed 13 touchdowns to nine interceptions.

Not only that, but he actually got benched during the Buffalo Wild Wings Bowl in favor of Connor Cook, who led the Spartans to a comeback win and returns this year for his sophomore campaign. Maxwell will get the nod to start this season, but it's safe to say his leash is short, especially with Michigan State bringing on Jim Bollman as its new offensive coordinator replacing Dan Roushar.

Then there's running back, where the Spartans lost by far their best offensive weapon last season in Le'Veon Bell, who opted to forego his senior season and got drafted by the Pittsburgh Steelers last spring. All Bell did in 2012 was lead the Big Ten in rushing with an average of 137.9 yards per

game. In total, he compiled 1,793 yards and 12 touchdowns on the ground. Redshirt freshman running back Riley Bullough was listed atop Michigan State's preseason depth chart and assuming he wins the starting job, he's going to have huge shoes to fill here.

As a result of Maxwell's struggles, the Spartans had a virtually non-existent passing game last year. With senior Bennie Fowler and junior Keith Mumphery both returning though, it should at least improve in 2013. Mumphery hauled in a team-high 42 catches and compiled 515 yards receiving, but only had one touchdown last season. Fowler had 41 receptions for team-highs of 524 yards and four touchdown catches. Another name that began to emerge and might only elevate his game more is sophomore wideout Anthony Burbridge, who had 29 catches for 364 yards and two scores. The most likely tight end to replace Dion Sims is junior Andrew Gleichert.

Injuries absolutely depleted Michigan State up front throughout 2012 and the Spartans recently got hit with news of right tackle Skyler Burkland deciding to end his football career entirely days before fall camp started due to ongoing issues from an ankle injury suffered in 2011. Senior Fou Fonoti, who was going to be at left tackle this season, is now back at right tackle after only starting two games before suffering a season-ending foot injury. Junior Travis Jackson returns at center after breaking his leg against Ohio State. Senior Blake Treadwell, who is probably the Spartans' best lineman, is back at left guard. Senior Dan France now returns to left tackle and sophomore Jack Allen will start at right guard.

Now the bright spot with Michigan State in 2012 was that it had the best defense in the entire Big Ten. No team gave up fewer yards rushing, fewer yards of total offense, fewer touchdowns and had more interceptions than the Spartans. This is a group that returns seven starters in 2013.

Along the D-line, the big loss is defensive end William Gholston, who led Michigan State with 4.5 sacks and 10 pass break ups. However, Marcus Rush returns after starting all 13 games last season at the opposite end spot and even more importantly for the Spartans, Tyler Hoover is fully back at defensive tackle after injuries over the past two seasons haven't allowed him to build off a solid freshman campaign back in 2010.

The linebacking corps returns a pair of seniors who started every game in 2012 and are the heart and soul of this entire defense. Max Bullough returns at middle linebacker after a junior year where he recorded a team-high 111 tackles and Denicos Allen is coming off a season where he had 79 tackles and three sacks. Junior Taiwan Jones started four games for Michigan State in 2012 and will start at the STAR backer spot this fall.

There was no better Big Ten secondary last season and this year's group of defensive backs features three guys who were Spartan regulars on the field a year ago. Johnny Adams is gone at corner, but returning at one corner spot is senior Darqueze Dennard, who like Adams was all-Big Ten in 2012 after recording 52 tackles, seven pass break ups and a team-high three interceptions. Also back is senior strong safety Isaiah Lewis, who is arguably the best at his position in the entire conference after finishing second on the team with 80 tackles while also recording six pass break ups and two picks. Junior Kurtis Drummond is the name to watch at free safety, while sophomore Trae Waynes is getting the first crack replacing Adams at corner.

On special teams, Michigan State returns one of the league's top punters in junior Mike Sadler, who punted 79 times in 2012 and possessed a net average of 43.3 yards per punt (second in the Big Ten). The Spartans lose Dan Conroy as their kicker and look like they'll be relying on a freshman to handle their field goals, extra points and kickoffs. Junior running back

Nick Hill will most likely be used as a returner for Michigan State again in 2013.

Looking at the Spartans' schedule, they should be 3-0 entering South Bend on Sept. 21 for their annual (for now) showdown with Notre Dame. After having Ohio State and Wisconsin as crossovers the last two seasons, Michigan State catches a break with Purdue and Illinois on the schedule this season. Add in contests at Iowa and against Indiana at home, and the Spartans have a manageable October to navigate.

That being said, this team's true identity will show come November when it faces a trio of preseason top 25 teams from within its own division – Michigan at home and back-to-back road games against Nebraska and Northwestern. How Michigan State fares in these three games will determine whether or not the Spartans find themselves in Indianapolis on Dec. 7 for the Big Ten title game.

Michigan State should be better in 2013 and you'll definitely see the Spartans playing in a bowl game sometime around the holidays. I just don't know if this team gets back to that same level it was at in 2010 or 2011.

AUDIO:

Michigan State head coach Mark Dantonio – <http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Mark-Dantonio-2013-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>

Michigan State linebacker Max Bullough – <http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Max-Bullough-2013-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>

8/17/2013: Iowa football video (Kids Day)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – The Iowa Hawkeyes held their annual “Kids Day” practice on Saturday at Kinnick Stadium, which was open to fans and media alike.

Below are seven videos from Saturday’s practice, six of which include footage throughout the 11-on-11 portions and one video at the bottom featuring Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz sharing his thoughts on how the late afternoon/evening went.

KIRK FERENTZ:

2013 Big Ten football previews: Minnesota (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

After previewing the Big Ten’s Leaders Division consisting of [Penn State](#), [Illinois](#), [Purdue](#), [Indiana](#), [No. 23 Wisconsin](#) and [No. 2 Ohio State](#), our first look at the Legends Division

features the Minnesota Golden Gophers. Iowa will visit TCF Bank Stadium in Minneapolis, Minn., on Sept. 28.

Last season, Minnesota made the type of stride I expected it to make in head coach Jerry Kill's second year at the helm. The Golden Gophers managed to reach six wins and found themselves playing against Texas Tech in the Meineke Car Care Bowl of Texas, a game they lost on a last-second field goal last December. When I look at Minnesota this year, I think it will have a harder time becoming bowl-eligible because the schedule for 2013 is tougher in all facets, so the margin of error that was there in 2012 is thinner now, if not completely non-existent.

Offensively, I think the most encouraging thing for the Golden Gophers is that Kill has his guy at quarterback now in sophomore Philip Nelson, who had his redshirt burned midway through last season and started Minnesota's final seven games including the bowl game against Texas Tech. As a freshman, Nelson threw eight touchdowns to eight interceptions and completed less than 50 percent of his throws. Those are numbers he should improve on and quite frankly he'll need to be better if the Golden Gophers are going to have any sort of success offensively this fall.

Right now, I envision Minnesota being a heavily run-oriented offense in 2013 because one of the playmakers the Golden Gophers do return is junior running back Donnell Kirkwood. Last season, Kirkwood started all 13 of Minnesota's games and led the team in rushing with 218 carries for 926 yards and six touchdowns on the ground. Add in the fact that the Golden Gophers used the Maryland-I formation in their bowl game and I feel a major emphasis will be placed early on establishing a rushing attack.

There are two other things to consider regarding Minnesota's offense likely being more run-heavy – one good and one bad. The bad news is there's a drop-off in the Golden Gophers'

receiving corps. Junior wideout Isaac Fruechte statistically had the best 2012 of any current receiver and he only hauled in 19 catches for 256 yards and two touchdowns. Minnesota's other most-experienced receiver is senior Derrick Engel, who had 18 catches for 375 yards and one touchdown. Unless true freshman Donovan Jones flawlessly transitions into that quarterback/wide receiver hybrid that MarQueis Gray had been, there's not much here.

Now here's the good news – Minnesota has a pretty veteran offensive line returning in 2013. All five projected starters for this season played significantly last year. Senior Ed Olson returns at left tackle, where he started nine games in 2012. Junior Zac Epping and sophomore Jon Christenson can both be used at either guard or center. Junior Caleb Bak started 11 games at right guard last season and sophomore Josh Campion is the one lineman who started every game at one position (right tackle). This group is a strength that will allow the Golden Gophers to rely on their ground game.

Looking at the defensive line, there is one huge loss at one of the defensive end spots with D.L. Wilhite no longer around. All he did last season was lead Minnesota with 8.5 sacks, which was tied for third most among all Big Ten players in 2012. However, the three guys returning to the front four all started every game last season, including the guy I believe to be the best defensive player in the entire conference this season – senior defensive tackle Ra'Shede Hageman.

As a junior, Hageman actually compiled more tackles than Wilhite and his six sacks were tied for sixth among all Big Ten players. At 6-6, 311 pounds, Hageman is the real deal and I think he has a monster senior year regardless of how Minnesota does as a team. Hageman will be alongside juniors Cameron Botticelli at nose tackle and Michael Amaefula at end. Sophomore Theiren Cockran is the current odds-on favorite to take over Wilhite's void at that other end position.

The linebacking corps is the biggest question mark on this team, which has one proven commodity at strong-side backer in senior Aaron Hill, who tied for third on the team with 74 tackles. Sophomore De'Vondre Campbell currently sits atop the Golden Gophers' depth chart at the weak-side backer spot and then the middle linebacker position will likely be occupied by either junior college transfer Damien Wilson or redshirt freshman Jack Lynn. Either way, filling the voids left by Mike Rallis and Keanon Cooper will be challenging.

Minnesota's secondary lost the team's top tackler from 2012 in cornerback Troy Stoudemire, who had 82 of them. Also gone is corner Michael Carter, who led the Golden Gophers with 15 pass break ups last season. Senior Brock Vereen split time at both safety positions and is currently listed as the team's top free safety, while junior Cedric Thompson is at strong safety after starting eight games in 2012. Junior Derrick Wells started 11 games at safety last season, but has made the move to cornerback this season and will play there opposite sophomore Eric Murray.

Special teams is a huge question mark surrounding Minnesota right now. The Golden Gophers return two punters in senior Dan Orseke and junior Christian Eldred. Orseke didn't play at all last season, which allowed Eldred to handle 67 punts with an average of 38.1 yards per punt. Minnesota also needs to figure out who its kicker will be and there's a possibility of it being a true freshman in Ryan Santoso. Stoudemire's absence also leaves a huge void in the return game as he was regarded as one of the best returners in the entire conference throughout his career.

Looking at the Golden Gophers' schedule, they should have zero trouble reaching 3-0. The two games that I think are crucial for Minnesota if its going to be bowl-eligible for the second straight season are both at TCF Bank Stadium in late September. The final non-conference game is against a San Jose State squad that won 11 games last season and returns a big-

time quarterback in David Fales. Then there's that Big Ten opener the following week against Iowa. The Hawkeyes throttled Minnesota last season in Iowa City despite the Golden Gophers being the better team last season. Seeing how both will have tough sledding against the rest of the Legends Division, this is a game that could be make or break for Minnesota in 2013.

The rest of the Golden Gophers' Big Ten slate is brutal. Of the teams considered to be contenders in the Legends Division, only No. 18 Nebraska travels to the Twin Cities this year and the crossover home games come in November against Penn State and No. 23 Wisconsin. The road portion features No. 17 Michigan, No. 22 Northwestern, a Michigan State squad entering this season just outside the top 25 and an up-and-coming Indiana squad in Bloomington. In other words, another 2-6 mark during Big Ten play might be the most plausible scenario again for Minnesota.

I think Kill is a solid coach and a good fit for this program. I also believe he's slowly yet successfully molding his team into the type of identity he wants it to have. But with all that being said, there's some real tough sledding ahead this season and in terms of wins and losses, it shouldn't come as a shock if the Golden Gophers take a small step backwards this fall.

AUDIO:

Minnesota head coach Jerry Kill
– <http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Jerry-Kill-2013-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>

Minnesota defensive tackle Ra'Shede Hageman
– <http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/RaShede-Hageman-2013-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>

2013 Iowa position breakdowns: Special Teams

This week, HawkeyeDrive.com presents an eight-part series of position breakdowns as the Iowa Hawkeyes continue preparing for the 2013 season. After previously focusing on [quarterbacks](#), [running backs](#), [wide receivers and tight ends](#), the [offensive line](#), [defensive line](#), [linebackers](#) and the [secondary](#), our eighth and final part examines the Hawkeyes' special teams.

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

For all the questions facing the Iowa Hawkeyes on both the offensive and defensive sides of the football entering the 2013 season, special teams is an area that, for the most part, appears set in stone.

Nothing has been determined as far as which younger players see the field during punts and kickoffs (both coverage and return), but the most important positions on special teams have continuity of some sort. Senior Mike Meyer is back to handle place-kicking duties after coming off what was easily his best season as a Hawkeye in 2012.

After having kicking struggles during the latter stretch of his sophomore campaign, the Dubuque native bounced back in a huge way as a junior. Meyer connected on 17-of-21 field goal attempts and had two games against Northern Illinois and Michigan State – both of which were Iowa victories – where he made four field goals.

“Each and every year, he has improved and I think he really gained his confidence,” Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said regarding Meyer’s 2012 season. “Mike was really hitting the gas pedal and doing a great job.

“He continues to do a nice job. We’re really counting on him.”

Sophomore Connor Kornbrath handled the majority of the punting for Iowa last season, but the intrigue lies in Kornbrath now being the lone Hawkeye punter that will likely see the field this fall. As a true freshman, Kornbrath was relied on mainly in situations where Iowa found itself deep in its own territory and needed a punt that drastically shifted field position battles. But in instances where the Hawkeyes would be in opposing territory and simply looking to pin teams inside their own 20, John Wienke was the guy called upon 14 times and was successful getting punts inside the 20-yard line on nine such occasions.

With Kornbrath now handling practice reps for every single punting scenario this fall, he has found himself working on coffin corner punts, where the idea is to directional punt into a corner where the ball lands out of bounds before crossing the plane for a touchback. He also mentioned working more this offseason on having shorter steps and improving his follow through.

“Last year, I was new to the Aussie-type punt that Wienke did, but I’ve practiced that this offseason and I’ve become very comfortable with it,” Kornbrath said. “Long punt, you’re going to want a nice, flat drop. For pinning them deep, if you’re say a plus-50 punt, you’ll angle the ball and the nose is more right up towards you, so you’ll try to get a different kind of spin with a better bounce.”

Whenever Iowa finds itself punting, or attempting either a field goal or extra point, senior Casey Kreiter will be the one handling long-snapping for the third consecutive season.

During Iowa's Media Day, first-year assistant coach Chris White – who will oversee the Hawkeyes' special teams after having the same duties for four years with the Minnesota Vikings – was asked about Kreiter and used the word “outstanding” to describe him.

“I wish we had a whole team of Caseys,” White said. “Casey is dialed into football. He works as hard or harder than any guy on this football team. He's really serious about his craft and I really expect that Casey will have a chance to play after college here.”

Now the return game is a bit more interesting. Ferentz said he is fully committed to senior wide receiver Jordan Cotton being one of the guys back on kickoff return, and for good reason. Cotton led the Big Ten last season with an average of 28.2 yards per return and did have one touchdown return that came in the Hawkeyes' 38-14 loss to Penn State. He also said getting the opportunity to return kicks allowed him to gain confidence as a football player.

However, Ferentz also made clear during Iowa's Media Day that Cotton wouldn't be used on both kickoff and punt returns, meaning someone else will be replacing former cornerback Micah Hyde as the Hawkeyes' punt returner. Ferentz mentioned three names when asked about punt return and junior wideout Kevonte Martin-Manley – who was the first of the three names mentioned – will most likely be the guy returning punts.

Sophomore receiver Tevaun Smith saw some time as a kickoff returner last season, but didn't have any returns in 2012. The one name to keep an eye on being opposite Cotton on kickoff returns this fall is sophomore running back Jordan Canzeri, especially if he remains behind both juniors Mark Weisman and Damon Bullock at running back on Iowa's 2-deep throughout the season.

“If I do get that spot, I would love to [return kicks], just

to be able to help out the team,” Canzeri said.

Two things are clear right now as it relates to Iowa and football’s third phase – The hiring of White to oversee all of the Hawkeye special teams was done to show commitment to an area that has haunted Iowa in some sort of manner each of the past three seasons, and the team feels comfortable with what’s currently in place.

“I like what I see,” White said.

2013 Big Ten football previews: (premium) Ohio State

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

After examining [Penn State](#), [Illinois](#), [Purdue](#), [Indiana](#) and [Wisconsin](#), we now take time to discuss the upcoming 2013 season for the Ohio State Buckeyes, who went a perfect 12-0 last season and won the Leaders Division despite having a postseason ban. Iowa visits Ohio Stadium (a.k.a. “The Horseshoe”) in Columbus, Ohio, on Oct. 19.

I’m going to keep this real simple – Ohio State is clearly the best team in the Big Ten entering 2013 and it shouldn’t surprise anyone if the Buckeyes not only win the conference this season, but make a trip to the BCS National Championship Game being played on Jan. 6 in Pasadena, Calif.

Last season ended up being the absolute best case scenario for

Ohio State considering its circumstances. Had there not been a postseason ban in place, the Buckeyes would've been the team facing Notre Dame last January instead of Alabama, who ended up winning a second straight national title in part because of Ohio State athletics director Gene Smith underestimating the type of punishment that would be handed down by the NCAA. The turning point for the Buckeyes came in their Big Ten opener at Michigan State, a game they won 17-16. From there, Ohio State won five straight to reach 10-0 entering its final two games, which ended up being an overtime victory at Wisconsin and a win at home over arch-rival Michigan to cap a perfect season in Urban Meyer's first year in charge.

Meyer has already made an enormous impact not just on Ohio State, but on the entire Big Ten, and the Buckeyes are poised to be even more dominant this year. One of the biggest reasons why is the return of junior quarterback Braxton Miller, who was named the Big Ten's top QB and Offensive Player of the Year in 2012. Miller is coming off a sophomore year where he accounted for 28 Ohio State touchdowns (15 through the air, 13 on the ground). He was the Buckeyes' leading rusher with 1,271 yards on 227 carries, good for fourth in the entire Big Ten and second among Big Ten signal-callers. Ohio State might not want him being its leading rusher again in 2013, but being that dual threat is what makes Miller as good as he is.

Now it gets interesting in the backfield because senior running back Carlos Hyde is currently serving a minimum three-game suspension that could end up being longer. Hyde rushed for 970 yards and a team-high 16 touchdowns last season. If and when he returns to the field, he's going to end up being as important to the Buckeye offense as Miller. In the meantime, senior Jordan Hall is the most experienced back currently eligible, but it wouldn't surprise me to see Ohio State go "running back by committee" until Hyde returns (assuming he does).

Ohio State lost only two starters from last year's offense,

with one of those guys being wideout Jake Stoneburner. His absence might not be as enormous as one would expect though because both of the Buckeyes' top two wideouts (statistically speaking) in 2012 are back. Senior wide receiver Corey Brown had 60 catches for 669 yards receiving (both of which were team-highs) and three touchdowns, while junior Devin Smith emerged as a deep threat, hauling in 30 receptions for 618 yards and a team-high six TDs. Barring injuries, I would expect similar production from Brown in 2013 and even more from Smith. Ohio State also has a big-time freshman receiver that has caught the coaching staff's attention during fall camp in Dontre Wilson.

Part of the Buckeyes' success in 2012 also stemmed from having the same five starters along the offensive line for every single game. Four of the five are back this season and the left side of the line is going to be this group's strength with seniors Jack Mewhort and Andrew Norwell returning at tackle and guard, respectively. Center Corey Linsley and right guard Marcus Hall also both return for their senior seasons. Sophomore Taylor Decker is currently atop Ohio State's depth chart at right tackle, replacing Reid Fragel. This is probably the best O-line in the Big Ten and arguably one of the nation's best.

The defensive side of the ball has a bit more mystery to it. While 80 percent of the offensive line is back, the front four conversely lost all four starters from a year ago, including Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year John Simon. Junior defensive tackle Michael Bennett started the Buckeyes' game at Penn State last season, while the other three likely starters this fall are all true sophomores. Adolphus Washington and Noah Spence will be the names to watch at the two end positions, while Tommy Schutt will likely start inside along with Bennett. It's hard to say this group is a weakness, but right now, it's definitely a question mark.

Ohio State only returns one linebacker, but he might very well

be the best defensive player the Buckeyes have this season in junior Ryan Shazier. Because Shazier – who led Ohio State with 115 tackles and was second to Simon with five sacks in 2012 – is back, I don't expect too much off a drop-off here from these guys. Junior Curtis Grant started the Buckeyes' first three games last season and is listed as the starter at middle linebacker, while Joshua Perry's the likely candidate to fill the other outside spot opposite Shazier.

The good news regarding Ohio State's secondary is that it returns the Buckeyes' second, third, and fourth-leading tacklers from a year ago and both safeties – Christian Bryant (strong) and C.J. Barnett (free) – are seniors. However, it remains to be seen whether junior cornerback Bradley Roby will be with the team when the season begins due to legal trouble stemming from an arrest last month. This is a trio that accounted for combined totals of 190 tackles, 35 pass break ups and five interceptions in 2012. Junior Doran Grant will likely take over at corner opposite Roby, replacing the Buckeyes' interceptions leader in Travis Howard.

Senior placekicker Drew Basil will once again handle field goal and PAT duties, and will apparently also assume the role of Ohio State's punter in 2013, replacing Ben Buchanan. The return game will likely feature junior running back Rod Smith and the two wideouts – Brown and Devin Smith. Brown returned a pair of punts for touchdowns last season in games against Nebraska and Wisconsin.

Even with a road trip to Cal, who gave Ohio State a scare at the Horseshoe last season, the Buckeyes should get through their non-conference slate undefeated and be at 4-0 when they open Big Ten play at home against Wisconsin on Sept. 28. If Ohio State doesn't run the table in 2013, there are two games that I could see being slip-ups and both of them are on the road. One is Oct. 5 at Northwestern, and the other (of course) is Nov. 30 at Michigan.

I have a hard time seeing the Buckeyes losing any games at home, so if they're able to get out of both Evanston and Ann Arbor with wins, Ohio State will be in Indianapolis for the Big Ten title game looking at a potential berth in the BCS title game. Whether it's on Jan. 1 or Jan. 6 (and I really feel it will be the latter), I totally expect the Buckeyes' season to end in Pasadena and it would be quite the surprise if it doesn't after all the momentum Ohio State has gained leading up to this season.

AUDIO:

Urban Meyer, Ohio State head coach
– <http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Urban-Meyer-2013-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>

Braxton Miller, Ohio State quarterback
– <http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Braxton-Miller-2013-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>