

2013 NFL Draft: One-on-One with Keenan Davis

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

As he waits to hear whether his name will be called at the 2013 NFL Draft later this week, former Iowa wide receiver Keenan Davis recently took time to talk with *HawkeyeDrive.com* about what he's doing to prepare himself for the next level, as well as reflect back on his time playing for the Hawkeyes.

If the Cedar Rapids native does get that call from an NFL team this weekend, it would be the second straight year an Iowa wideout gets picked following a 9-year span where no Hawkeye receivers went drafted by any NFL teams.

Below is a complete transcript of *HawkeyeDrive.com's* interview with Davis:

HawkeyeDrive.com (HD): How have these last few months been for you here since the last time we talked after the Nebraska game last November up until now?

Keenan Davis: You know, it has been good. I've just been working out. Definitely staying with the Iowa program and then I went to Arizona for like a week and worked out there, just to stay in shape. I worked on my routes a lot and just did everything I could to get ready for the all-star game and then the Pro Day.

HD: You mention working out in Arizona. How was that experience for you?

Davis: It was good. I actually got to run routes with [former NFL quarterback] Donovan McNabb and that was definitely a

great experience. You know, I just did some different things. Some position work, things that I hadn't done before and then when I got back, I went straight to the all-star game from there and that really helped me.

HD: You mentioned the East-West Shrine Game and I know you got a chance to go to that with Micah Hyde and James Ferentz. What was that experience like?

Davis: Oh, it was great. It was good to actually be able to sit down and talk with a lot of scouts. I did a lot of that. There were a lot of hours spent just getting questioned. You know, it's like a job interview. And then to play against other great athletes, it was pretty good just to compete and be able to have fun, especially being with Micah and James the whole time. It was a good time.

HD: When you talk about the different things you're doing with your route-running and what not, what are those areas that you've worked on and maybe feel you've improved on here over these last few months?

Davis: Coming off the ball fast and definitely come out of my routes, get out of that quicker. You know, try to get to my coming out speed faster, catch the ball with my outside shoulder, stuff like that. Just doing regular receiver things that I need to work on for the NFL.

HD: How has it been for you to juggle school along with everything else? I ask because a lot of your former teammates that have gone through this process usually take the 5-year route and have already graduated beforehand.

Davis: I mean, it's difficult. But we've done four years of it. Nothing different. You just got to manage your time, I guess. But, it's still all right. It's keeping me busy, so I'm not just sitting here eating all day or anything. I'm definitely going to class, going to school, so it's kind of keeping me focused.

HD: How many semester hours are you taking right now and are you graduating after this semester, correct?

Davis: Fifteen, and yeah, in May.

HD: I would imagine then you've done a lot of working out here in Iowa as well. How has that gone for you, knowing that you're still able to be around the football complex to get in what you need to do?

Davis: Oh, that's the good part. I mean, you're still at home and you're still around familiar faces, so that makes it more comfortable doing my workouts. Being with [Chris] Doyle and being with the other guys trying to make it to the next level, too. It's definitely comfortable being with the people you've been with the past four years and yeah, basically, that's it. Just being around the complex and stuff, having the same things right there for you that I could use to help me.

HD: Now I know you didn't get invited to the NFL Combine, so how anxious were you for your Pro Day and having that first real moment besides the Shrine Game to work out for NFL teams?

Davis: Yeah. Micah and James [Vandenberg] got to go to the Combine and they got to show what they can do pretty early and you know, you're just like, "Wow," after that. I was really kind of getting antsy for it. When it happened, I just let loose and I felt really comfortable. Not as nervous as I thought I was going to be, so I mean, that was good.

HD: What have the interactions been like for you with the teams you have gotten to speak with?

Davis: A lot of them talked about last season and then just regular basic stuff like background information. Then we talked about learning offenses and what I can do to help that team, how I feel about myself as a player. Basic questions like that.

HD: You brought up last year and you went through having to learn a completely new offense. How much did that come up in terms of teams trying to compare what you did earlier in your career playing in Ken O'Keefe's offense to what you did last year in Greg Davis' offense?

Davis: They just asked what happened, basically, and why was there such a drop. You know, I just replied by saying there were a lot of details that we didn't execute and just learning a new offense is tough. But we're just taking it as a learning experience and all the guys that are still there, they know that was unacceptable and they're going to get better. I'm going to take that learning experience harder and go out and learn offenses a little better, stuff like that.

HD: How do you view yourself as a receiver entering this next phase?

Davis: Well, I'm a bigger receiver. I feel like I'm quicker than most people think. You know, I feel like I catch the ball well. I'm a competitor, I'm tough. All those attributes I think will help me at the next level.

HD: How many teams have talked to you to this point?

Davis: I've talked to quite a bit. I talked to a lot of teams at the all-star game. Since then, it has been the Patriots, the Vikings. I talked to Miami. I think there's probably a good 3-4 more teams that I've talked to. Jacksonville. They just asked for some basic background information.

HD: Have you gotten a chance to visit any of these teams at their headquarters?

Davis: No. But the Patriots came to our place and they worked me out.

HD: As far as draft weekend goes, how are you going to spend it? Do you watch it with your family or is the draft coverage

something you try to avoid completely unless you get a call from someone?

Davis: I'll be with my family at home. I'm probably not going to try to watch it too much. I'll just wait for a call and hang out with my family. When I get the call, I'll be pretty excited about it.

HD: I read that Blake Baratz is your agent. Is that still the case?

Davis: Yep.

HD: Let's say you don't end up getting picked and end up signing somewhere as an undrafted free agent. Is that a possibility you've prepared yourself for?

Davis: You know, the way I handle it is I just really want to compete. I don't care if I get drafted. If I'm a free agent, I just want to go somewhere and compete and be able to have that chance for a spot in camp.

HD: As you've gone through this process, I'm sure you've talked to a lot of former teammates who have done a similar thing. What sort of advice have they given you as you've gone through the last few months?

Davis: Basically, I talked to Marvin [McNutt] and Bernie [Jordan Bernstine] and they told me to just keep my head down and keep moving forward. Don't listen to outside noise. Do everything that can help you. That's about it. Stuff like that, along those lines.

HD: Has it been easier for you to go through this process with someone like Micah, for example, who you're close friends?

Davis: Yeah, definitely, and he's my roommate, too. I mean, having someone that close to me go through it, it helps a lot. Hearing advice from him, someone that close, it kind of kicks in more than from somebody from the outside. So I think it's

definitely a plus.

HD: When you look back on your last four years playing at Iowa, what will you remember most about your time as a Hawkeye?

Davis: Probably coming out of the tunnel every time. That's probably the most excited I'll ever see the fans and then the whole swarm, that's probably the best feeling for anybody, any Hawkeye, that has ever experienced that. Then besides that, probably the Orange Bowl.

HD: Last question – When the dust settles and you at least know where you're going to be, drafted or not, what makes you believe you'll be successful at the next level, playing in the NFL?

Davis: Just my competitiveness. I hate losing. I love going and doing my best, so I think me just going out there and working hard, showing that I can play, that I can compete, that's going to be a plus for me.

2013 NFL Draft: One-on-One with Micah Hyde

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

As Micah Hyde waits to find out when he'll be selected in this week's 2013 NFL Draft, the former Iowa defensive back recently took time to talk with *HawkeyeDrive.com* about both his future as a pro and his past as a Hawkeye.

Should Hyde get drafted, it would mark the sixth consecutive year at least one Iowa defensive back gets taken in the NFL Draft.

Below is a complete transcript of *HawkeyeDrive.com*'s interview with Hyde:

HawkeyeDrive.com (HD): Since we last spoke after the Nebraska game last November, what have these last few months been like for you as far as just going through the drafting process and everything you've had to deal with?

Micah Hyde: It has been really exciting. You know, it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to prepare yourself for the NFL Draft. I mean, we're at the end here and right now, it's just a waiting game and it's just kind of a real long process of waiting. There's nothing you can really do right now but work out, so it's just kind of not as fun a time right now.

HD: What have some of those workouts been like? I know you're still a student at the University of Iowa, but have you been going around and doing workouts at various places or have you mostly been in Iowa with your training regimen?

Hyde: Yeah, I've been mostly in Iowa. Teams will either send you to their facilities or you know, guys will come into Iowa City. I've been having school, so the best thing for me has been for teams to come to Iowa City. I've worked out for a couple of teams here. After the Pro Day, the workouts are kind of just to better stay in shape for after I hopefully get picked up and hopefully I can be in my best shape by the time I go to the first minicamp or whatever. But right now, like I said, it's just a waiting time. I'm just waiting to get picked up.

HD: How difficult has it been for you to just kind of juggle the time between still dealing with school with this being your last semester and also just everything you've had to do with football? I ask because I know a lot of your former

teammates I've talked to in the past have gone the 5-year route and have already graduated before they go through this process.

Hyde: Yeah. I mean, there have been a couple of instances where I've been kind of having something that went together. It has kind of been tough a couple of times. But other than that, it's something I've been able to work through. Coach [Chris] Doyle has done a good job. I let him know exactly what my classes are and from that, he'll know when to get me in and when to get me out. You know, I've only got nine hours this semester, which has really helped me out. Other than that, that's stressful and it has kind of swung together with the Combine and stuff like that. I missed a couple of days of class, so I had to let instructors know and stuff like that.

HD: Now I know back in January, you had the opportunity to play in the East-West Shrine Game with teammates Keenan Davis and James Ferentz. What was that whole experience like, just being in St. Petersburg, Fla., that week and getting the opportunity to play in an all-star game like that?

Hyde: Yeah, it was a fun experience. You know, I got to be down in Florida and it was an opportunity to meet a lot of guys that are in the same situation that you are, you know, trying to make the best of it. Practices were intense. You know, that's when all the scouts were there and that's when you got to show your stuff and it was kind of weird because you're going through a game and not as many scouts are there and it kind of wasn't as serious as the practices were. But like I said, it was a great opportunity for all of us going down competing against some of the best that will be at the end of the draft. You know, it's just kind of how you rank with other guys and I think we all did pretty good and we all showed our skill.

HD: You mentioned the Combine. What was the experience like for you being in Indianapolis and not just working out for all

those teams, but also knowing that with the coverage it gets, you're under even more of a microscope?

Hyde: Yeah. You see it on TV and in past years, I watched it on TV. I didn't understand how serious of an event this was. Going into it with an open mind, the only thing I didn't want to do was let it be stressful. I wanted to be loose and knock out the drills and see how I did with my 40, my shuttle, all that stuff. Yeah, I went in with an open mind. I wasn't nervous, but it was kind of weird. There are a ton of coaches, a ton of GMs, everybody there.

The interviews were tough. You know, they could ask you any question they wanted to. You know that everybody's going to watch it on TV, but you kind of got to put that past and just go out and do your thing, have fun with it. There are guys, just like the all-star game, that are in the same boat as you are. They're trying to get drafted and trying to showcase their best abilities. You're working out with them and that's kind of what made it easier because you all kind of help each other out and remain loose. It actually made it pretty fun.

HD: This is the only question I'm going to ask in regard to your arrest last October: Were you prepared for teams asking you about that while you were at the Combine and how often did it come up?

Hyde: Every meeting I had with a team, they obviously had brought it up to see what happened, what went on. I think a lot of guys ... there were guys that had way bigger issues than what that was. I mean, I'm not trying to blow it off like it was nothing, but it was in Iowa City. It happens a lot in Iowa City. The scouts, the coaches, they all understood that and I let them know that was the case, too, that it happens all the time in Iowa City and I didn't get charged with anything. I'm still fighting it. Every team that asked me about it, I told them the straight up story of what honestly happened. You know, I made a mistake and moved on from there and they didn't

ask again throughout the interviews.

HD: Now as far as the football side of things, when you've talked with teams – whether it was during the Combine or after your Pro Day or just when you're doing workouts – what are they talking to you about as far as where you'd fit in with their plans if they were to have interest in you?

Hyde: Well, there were a couple of teams that told me straight up, "We don't see you as a corner. We need a safety and if we think you're the best player to play safety, that's where we see you at." A couple of teams have said that and I told them straight up, "I'm fine with that." You know, I'm not going to be mad about that. I think I'm a versatile player, so I can play a couple of positions. I think a lot of these teams know me well through special teams, too. I'll go out there and I'll go play on special teams. So I've just been trying to let these guys know that I'm out there doing whatever I can and if it's corner, safety or whatever, I'm definitely going to play my best.

HD: In hindsight, how much do you feel the experience you got your junior season working as a free safety is benefiting you now as far as showing off your versatility to different NFL teams?

Hyde: Well, I mean, those were a couple of games that I really didn't play that well in. I think they know our coaches, our DB coach, all the trainers and I can say I didn't play that well. But it does show teams that I'm open to anything and that was a first-hand experience where I was a corner that moved to safety and really picked up the whole defense, which helped me out. It made me a better player overall, but I think teams see that and yeah, I watched it with a couple of guys that asked, "How did that go?" I said I didn't play that well in those first two games and they understood that. They were like, "It was tough on you having to play a new position," and I'm not trying to make excuses, but it was new and I wish I

could've played better. But I think teams know that and they know that I'm open to doing whatever.

HD: So if a team takes you and says they want you as a free safety, you feel you'd do a better job now just based on that experience.

Hyde: Exactly. And the thing that helped me the most was knowing the whole defense and stuff like that.

HD: Now if the team that drafts you comes up to you and says, "Corner, safety, do you have a preference?," they give you a choice, would you want to be a corner since that's what you mostly played at Iowa or would you want to experiment with playing safety?

Hyde: Like I said, I really don't care. But if they were to ask me straight up, "What do you want to play?," I'd probably say corner because that's where most of my experience comes from in college and that's probably what I feel more comfortable playing. I'd obviously be open to playing at free safety though.

HD: Have any teams talked to you at all about being a return man on special teams since you did handle punt return duties for two seasons at Iowa, or are you mainly be asked to play as a gunner on special teams?

Hyde: Well, I know a couple of teams asked me about it being something that I did. They were like, "Did you return punts?" I told them, "Yeah, I did." I actually should've had a couple [touchdown returns] that I ended up getting tackled, I think 1-2 times. But it's a position on the team that comes with my game. It means I'm a versatile player and actually, whenever our team was on the field – all day, every day – I let them know I was [a returner] and if I could've played some slot receiver or some quarterback, I would've done that, too. It's just another part that comes with my game and yeah, they've asked me about it.

HD: What are your plans going to be while the draft is going on? Are you going to be in Iowa City still or will you be back in Ohio with your family?

Hyde: I'll be in Ohio with my family.

HD: What are you anticipating when that day finally comes?

Hyde: It's actually really exciting because it's actually here. All these workouts and everything, watching film, it has actually paid off. It's right around the corner. But you know, I'm just going to stay focused. I'm going into it with an open mind. I'm not going to say I'm going in the third round and then be mad when my name's not called in the third round. I'm just keeping an open mind and if I'm the last pick in the draft, I'll be happy. I'll be a happy camper because at the end of the day, everybody has to work to make it on the team and I just want to get that shot.

HD: I read that Jack Bechta is your agent. Is that still the case?

Hyde: Yes.

HD: As far as you getting the chance to talk with former teammates of yours who have already gone through this and are in the NFL, what type of advice have they given you?

Hyde: Just exactly what I said – go in with an open mind. All it took, this whole process, was to impress one team and you got to hope that on draft day, that one team takes a shot on you. You go in there, don't be too stressed. They've pretty much said, "You're going to get a shot." Whether you get drafted or not, you're going to get a shot. Just go in there with an open mind and once you get that opportunity, just go out and make the best of it.

HD: When you do get a chance to look back on your time playing at Iowa, what are you going to remember the most?

Hyde: You know, just the memories that I have playing for Coach Ferentz. I'll probably forget all the practices and stuff like that, but just the games and the memories, the huge wins that we got under Coach Ferentz and just to see Coach Ferentz in the locker room after the game and see the look on his face. You know, he's an emotional guy. Just the big wins and I think the best one will be my freshman year when we won the Orange Bowl. Just to see Coach Ferentz in the locker room and how happy he was, how big of a win it was for our program and our staff and our players.

We all went out there and played our hardest the whole season and just seeing his face, that's why you play. And to see all the coaches' faces after the game, you develop such a bond with everyone every day in practice. It kind of seems like torture, but in the end, when you get a good win at the end of the week, it all pays off and everybody's happy.

HD: Last question for you – When the dust settles and you know where you're going to be starting this next chapter in your life, why do you believe you'll be successful in the NFL?

Hyde: You know, I think it just goes with playing for Coach Ferentz. He has a real professional way of running his program and I know that a lot of scouts and a lot of coaches come in to talk to him. They all say the same thing. Coach Ferentz knows what he's doing. He gets you ready for the NFL and that's why a lot of Hawkeyes stick in the NFL. Because when it gets tough, they know what they got to do. They handle their business and don't worry about anything else. I think that's what Coach Ferentz has given us the opportunity to do. I'm thankful for playing for him and I'm just going to take this opportunity and run with it.

2013 Spring Football position breakdowns: Special Teams (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

The biggest observation that can be made about Iowa's special teams this spring is the rejuvenation that has come from first-year assistant Chris White taking over and placing a major emphasis on football's third phase.

It wasn't that the Hawkeyes struggled on special teams in 2012 (aside from a horrendous blunder attempting to recover an onside kick against Central Michigan). Mike Meyer had as productive a season as any kicker in the Big Ten and wide receiver Jordan Cotton established himself as a bonafide return man on kickoffs. But the one thing that has become apparent this offseason is that Iowa's special teams has a little bit more juice to it.

For years, this was a group co-coached by former assistants Lester Erb and Darrell Wilson, both of whom left the program this offseason. Enter White, who took over Erb's duties coaching running backs and has also become the Hawkeyes' primary special teams coach, along with assistance from co-linebackers coach LeVar Woods and graduate assistant Kelvin Bell.

The one area where Iowa might benefit the most under a new special teams regime is with punt coverage. This spring, the Hawkeyes have run gunner-specific drills during their practices to get those who do see the field in 2013 to work on a craft that could make any of Iowa's younger players impact guys this coming fall.

Probably the biggest beneficiary of this is sophomore punter Connor Kornbrath. He handled a majority of the punting duties last season as a true freshman, but Iowa went with John Wienke in short-yardage punting situations (i.e. any time Iowa was across the 50-yard line). This is the one area Kornbrath will have to show improvement as he now has full punting reign, but he should be even better than before in situations where deep punts will be needed.

Meyer enters his senior year poised to hold onto the kicking duties again in 2013, but he'll continue to be battling with Marshall Koehn, who could be used as a kickoff specialist later this fall.

Then there's the return game. While Cotton will likely be back on kickoffs again like he was last year, the two questions Iowa has to answer are who will be back there with him on kickoff return and who replaces Micah Hyde fielding punts.

As far as kickoff returns are concerned, the name to watch might be sophomore running back Jordan Canzeri, especially if juniors Damon Bullock and Mark Weisman see the majority of the carries in the Hawkeye backfield this fall. Meanwhile, the most likely candidate to handle punt return duties is junior wide receiver Kevonte Martin-Manley. Another name to consider for both is redshirt freshman wideout Riley McCarron, who has shown potential during spring ball.

Special team is definitely an area that could change the complexion of Iowa's 2013 season one way or the other. This has been the case in years past under Kirk Ferentz and even with a new assistant overseeing special teams, this is one thing that probably won't be different any time soon.

2013 Spring Football position breakdowns: Secondary (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

In assessing the Iowa secondary, the takeaway here is this group being one that while experienced, needs to prove something in 2013. The Hawkeyes have first-string players returning to the field this year, but they're doing so after what was a disappointing season for the entire defense.

This was a group that at times, played like the strength of the defense as it was expected to be last year. Then there were also times where the secondary was responsible for some of the big plays that torched the Iowa defense throughout the entire 2012 season. If there was anything disappointing about the defensive backs last fall, it was the inconsistency that seemed to show up at inopportune times during games.

One defensive back no longer around is Micah Hyde, who is heading off to the NFL after being a three-year starter that concluded with him being honored with the Woodson-Tatum Defensive Back of the Year award by the Big Ten. Considering the leadership role Hyde had, his absence is significant.

But that isn't to say there isn't leadership in this group, however. Barring injuries, Iowa will likely be starting two seniors in the secondary with B.J. Lowery returning at cornerback and Tanner Miller back at free safety.

Both players have proven serviceable during their careers. Miller has started the majority of the past two seasons, but his play last season paled in comparison to what it was as a

sophomore in 2011. Lowery started the majority of last season at the corner spot opposite Hyde and showed glimpses of the type of player he's capable of being this year.

Those guys will be expected to lead. Then there's junior safety Nico Law, who appears poised to get his golden opportunity at strong safety this year after spending the majority of last year behind Tom Donatell. If there was ever a time for everything to start clicking for Law, now would be that time.

As for replacing Hyde, the front-runner to start at corner is junior Jordan Lomax, who missed all of last season due to a shoulder injury. Lomax likely would've played significantly in nickel and dime packages for Iowa last season had he not been hurt, much like Lowery did two years ago after he returned from his wrist injury.

The Hawkeyes also have cornerbacks such as Sean Draper and Kevin Buford that both saw playing time as true freshmen in 2012, as well as junior safety John Lowdermilk in the event either Miller or Law play themselves out of a first-string spot.

One last thing worth noting is the coaching switch. Darrell Wilson is no longer around after taking a similar position at Rutgers last winter. Phil Parker, who is entering his second year as Iowa's defensive coordinator, will also assume his old duty of specifically coaching the secondary. If the workload doesn't prove to be too overbearing for Parker, this could potentially be a good thing for the Hawkeyes.

Iowa's secondary should be better in 2013, but the only way it's going to be is if the players who do get playing time make the most of their opportunities.

2013 Spring Football position breakdowns: Linebackers (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

The Iowa defense will have plenty of questions continue surrounding it between now and when the 2013 season gets underway. One area that won't be a major question mark, however, is its linebacking corps.

This group might be the Hawkeyes' most experienced and most veteran of the entire team, not just the defense. Questions about the linebacking corps will hold significant merit at this time next year, but for right now, it's a plus for Iowa to not only have three seniors in place, but to have three seniors in place that all have starting experience.

It's with the Iowa linebackers where the Hawkeyes' unquestioned leader resides in senior MIKE 'backer James Morris. The Solon native has taken ownership not just of the linebacking corps and not just of the defense, but the entire team. Joining him are seniors Christian Kirksey and Anthony Hitchens.

Morris and Kirksey both experienced being team captains during the 2012 season. Meanwhile, one year after both players were among the Big Ten's leaders in tackles, it was Hitchens who led the conference in tackles last season. Barring any injuries, this is a trio that will have to come up big again for the Hawkeyes if they're going to rebound in 2013.

Behind them is where things get interesting. Junior Quinton Alston continues to wait in the wings, but he did get the opportunity to start in a game last season against Michigan for an injured Morris. Another player who also saw some playing time in crucial games for Iowa was sophomore Travis Perry. These two guys, along with junior Marcus Collins and sophomore Cole Fisher make up the majority of the linebacking depth possessed by the Hawkeyes this spring.

One other intriguing storyline to mention with this group is the addition of former Virginia defensive coordinator Jim Reid to the coaching staff. Reid and LeVar Woods are working as co-linebackers coaches this year after Woods was brought onto the staff in 2012 and was the lone coach working specifically with the group.

Right now, Reid's focus has mainly been on MIKE (middle) linebackers such as Morris and Alston, while Woods is mainly working with WILL (weak side) and LEO (strong side) linebackers such as Hitchens and Kirksey. This is a very similar structure to what Iowa was once had under Kirk Ferentz where then-defensive coordinator Norm Parker and former assistant Darrell Wilson teamed up with coaching linebackers.

One thing mentioned by many within the program – both coaches and players – is the energy Reid provides working with the group. His persona comes off strikingly similar to that of Parker, which again makes the point about how Iowa once had co-linebacker coaches under Ferentz noteworthy.

This is a group that the Hawkeyes should be counting on and are going to need to count on to have success in 2013. The experience is there, as is the leadership. Morris mentioned how having a higher football IQ and being able to better communicate have been emphasized this offseason, and this is the group that would have to lead by example in those areas in order for Iowa to improve from what it was a year ago.

4/17/2013: Iowa spring football notebook

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Consistency and versatility are two things that for years have been synonymous with Iowa football.

These were also two topics that became prevalent Wednesday afternoon as the two Hawkeye assistants who coach inside the trenches – offensive line coach Brian Ferentz and defensive line coach Reese Morgan – spoke publicly for the first time since last August.

For Ferentz, this spring is about finding consistency along the offensive line, all while preparing his group to have moving parts in the event injuries occur. The six-game losing streak Iowa had to conclude 2012 started with a 38-14 loss to Penn State where the Hawkeyes lost two linemen – tackle Brandon Scherff and guard Andrew Donnal – to season-ending injuries.

“Can you move pieces in and out and can you move guys in and out and maintain a certain level of play, that’s always the trick,” Ferentz said. “I don’t feel like we did that very well last year. I don’t feel like we are doing it really that well right now.

“That’s something we need to improve, because if you sit around and you expect that not to happen, you’re preparing for failure.”

As for Morgan, versatility is something he’s starting to

notice along his front four. Players such as redshirt freshman Faith Ekakitie and junior Mike Hardy have gotten reps this spring working as defensive ends, even though both have primarily worked as tackles since arriving on campus.

“I think we would like to have the philosophy that we want guys that can play everywhere,” Morgan said.



Iowa defensive line coach Reese Morgan discusses spring practices during his press conference held Wednesday, April 17, 2013, at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City.

Finding pass rushers

Depth is being established inside along Iowa's front four. But the mystery with this group is what ends up happening in terms of outside depth.

Defensive ends such as senior Dominic Alvis and sophomore Drew Ott sit atop the 2-deep, primarily due to the amount of playing experience both received last season (in Ott's case, the last five games of the year). Morgan views Alvis in the sort of leadership role players such as Steve Bigach and Joe Gaglione held last year, and with Ott getting the work with the first-team, the mystery isn't who starts, but who else plays in the rotation at these spots.

“A year ago, we didn’t even have two deep,” Morgan said about the end spots. “We were struggling. We were taking guys in practice, just putting a body there to do that.”

In addition to mentioning players such as Ekakitie and Hardy seeing reps at both end and tackle this spring, Morgan also said that players such as sophomore Riley McMinn and redshirt freshman Damauntas Venckus-Cucchiara will likely see reps at defensive end both this spring and come the fall.

Morgan said part of the challenge this spring has been developing depth on the outside, thus the reason for moving around players like Ekakitie and Hardy to see what they could provide.

“We are asking a lot of the guys, but they are responding,” Morgan said. “We know that’s an area that we have to improve upon.”



Iowa offensive line coach Brian Ferentz discusses spring practices during his press conference held Wednesday, April 17, 2013, at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City.

Inside battles

While the questions surrounding the defensive line are on the outside, the opposite holds true with the Hawkeyes’ offensive

line. Scherff and senior Brett Van Sloten appear set at the two tackle spots.

With Ferentz stressing that he wants to put the five best offensive linemen on the field, competition has really ratcheted up at the two interior guard spots specifically.

Right now, Iowa has senior Conor Boffeli listed as the starter at left guard and Donnal as the first-string right guard on its 2-deep. But neither spot is fully set in stone like the two tackle positions look to be. Sophomore Jordan Walsh gained some playing experience at guard last season while Donnal was injured and Ferentz also mentioned being pleased with someone like senior Drew Clark – listed at 6-4, 288 pounds – being capable of playing inside.

“We need to have depth there,” Ferentz said. “We need to have depth inside.”

Iowa has also gone through the process this spring of moving sophomore Austin Blythe over exclusively at center. After redshirting in 2011, Blythe started the majority of last season over at right guard and is now the heir apparent to former three-year starter James Ferentz (Brian’s younger brother).

Brian Ferentz made note of Blythe gaining reps working as a back-up center in practice last year and that the transition for him isn’t a completely new one. He also said he was pleased with what Blythe has shown to this point with making the switch.

“I’m pleased with how Austin has responded to what we have asked him to do,” Ferentz said. “At least we are getting the ball to the quarterback. That’s a good start.”

Blending old school and new school

One is more old-fashioned, the other more in tune with the

types of changes happening to the landscape of college football. But when it comes to recruiting, both the elder Morgan and younger Ferentz hold similar values and philosophies that are mixed together from the different perspectives they provide.

Part of the reason Ferentz feels compelled to be active with social media has to do with recruiting. He mentioned how he sees social media outlets being used more and more by high school players as a form of communication and finds importance in being cognizant of what's being used not just by recruits, but other coaches as well.

"It does make a difference," Ferentz said. "You have to do it or else you won't be able to talk to them because they certainly do not like talking on the phone. That has changed a lot."

Ferentz knows what's all out there – from Twitter to Instagram to Vine, a newer brand of social media that allows one to shoot videos. He also used his platform Wednesday to take exception to the outside notion of his father and the program being "archaic" with what they do.

"He has got an iPhone and he has got an iPad. Twitter, that's a personal decision everybody makes," Ferentz said in reference to his dad. "I think that's unique to every person. I really think if you saw our head coach on Twitter or doing those kinds of things, those aren't in his personality. That's not natural to him."

Meanwhile, Morgan said he has a rarely used Facebook account and joked about how he uses a flip phone still (he called it "an F-phone"). But while acknowledging he isn't as tech-savvy, Morgan also believes what happens in recruiting comes down to the relationships built during the process, regardless of who's doing the recruiting or how someone's being recruited.

"People know if you care about them," Morgan said. "You don't

have to write and I think we take great pride in developing relationships with our coaches and our parents through the recruiting process. Then there's a certain comfort level or a trust that comes in there."

[4/17/2013: Brian Ferentz/Reese Morgan press conference transcripts](#)

2013 Spring Football position breakdowns: Defensive Line (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Looking at the Iowa defensive line, it appears – at least during this spring football period – to be somewhat of a mixed bag. The names are familiar and some aspects of it have potential to be promising for the Hawkeyes, but there are also some questions that need to be answered between now and Iowa's season opener on Aug. 31.

Right now, the most promising aspect of the Hawkeyes' defensive line is inside at the two tackle spots. While junior Louis Trinca-Pasat is sitting out of spring practices following surgery to repair a torn rotator cuff, he'll be the lead anchor inside once he's able to return for summer workouts and fall camp.

As for the players who are able to participate this spring, another guy who looks to be a leader inside is sophomore Darian Cooper after he played significant minutes for the

Hawkeyes last season as a redshirt freshman. There's also the ongoing development of junior Carl Davis, who actually weighs more than he did last season but has trimmed down significantly this offseason in terms of his physique. Davis was somewhat behind the 8-ball last season after he had to sit out spring practices due to offseason surgery, but the coaches have been pleased with the amount of conditioning he has done over the last 5-6 months.

With others such as redshirt freshmen Faith Ekakitie and Jaleel Johnson entering the picture this offseason, depth appears to be solid inside.

The questions surrounding the Hawkeyes center around the two end spots, but not because of who's likely to start. Dominic Alvis returns for his senior season and will likely be viewed as the leader of this group, while sophomore Drew Ott appears to be the favorite to hold down the other end spot after burning his redshirt during a game against Northwestern and seeing significant playing time during the month of November.

Alvis and Ott will likely be the two starters when Iowa opens its season against Northern Illinois (barring injuries of course), but then it's a matter of figuring out depth behind them. Neither player (and really, no one on this D-line) is equipped to play 70-75 snaps per game and with someone like Reese Morgan coaching this group, rotations along the defensive line should be expected again in 2013.

Among the names Iowa fans should be keeping a close eye on are players such as sophomores Mike Hardy, Riley McMinn and Melvin Spears. Another possibility to watch out for is someone like Ekakitie (who has gotten reps this spring working at end) moving over outside or any of the other defensive tackles Iowa has that are versatile enough to play both in and out.

The bottom line is this for the Hawkeyes – the play of their defensive line is key to this upcoming season. Last season

exposed some of the weaknesses this group had and those weaknesses were on display against teams that could break contain regularly and carve apart the entire Iowa defense.

Any improvement out of the front four should (at least in theory) allow the Hawkeyes be a better team in 2013. Morgan's someone who constantly stresses fundamentals and while Iowa might have a better D-line in terms of doing the little things, it will still need to show it can make plays and take some of the pressure off the back seven.

2013 Spring Football position breakdowns: Offensive Line (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

If there's one group Iowa fans ought to feel encouraged about as the Hawkeyes continue navigating through spring football, it's the offensive line.

Yes, this is a unit that lost a pair of significant starters from 2012 in Matt Tobin and James Ferentz. Tobin emerged as a dependable player up front for Iowa and ended up starting games at both left guard and left tackle last season. Ferentz, meanwhile, started every game at center for each of the past three years.

However, one look at this group right now is enough to suggest it could be a real productive unit for the Iowa offense and in turn be an integral part of the Hawkeyes trying to bounce back

from a 4-8 season in 2013. When Iowa's season last year began to spiral downward, it coincided with injuries to linemen such as Brandon Scherff and Andrew Donnal.

Both players have returned from injuries this spring. Scherff is back at left tackle (the position Tobin occupied once Scherff was hurt) and assuming he's 100 percent healthy when the season starts, he has a chance to be as good an offensive tackle as there is in the entire Big Ten.

Iowa also appears to be set at its other tackle spot in senior Brett Van Sloten, who started every game at right tackle for the Hawkeyes in 2012. The other position that seems to be on lockdown now is center, where even though Ferentz is gone, sophomore Austin Blythe makes the move over to center after playing games as a guard last season.

Any question marks surrounding the offensive line at this point are placed squarely on the two guard spots, as that seems to be where the heaviest competition is taking place. One player who started to make an emergence late last season and (at least to this point) has begun carrying success over into the spring is senior Conor Boffeli.

For at least two years, Boffeli was listed on Iowa's 2-deep behind Ferentz at center. As injuries continue to deflate the Hawkeyes' depth along the O-line last year, Boffeli was given the opportunity late in the year to start games at left guard. As of this past Sunday, Boffeli was getting reps with the first-string offense at that same left guard spot during practice.

On the right side, there seems to be a battle brewing between Donnal (now that he's back from his season-ending injury suffered against Penn State last October) and sophomore Jordan Walsh, who got the opportunity to play some late last season after Donnal's injury. Walsh worked with the first-string offense during Iowa's most recent practice, but Donnal has

more playing experience given how he was starting up front prior to his injury.

One last name worth mentioning is Nolan MacMillan. While the senior isn't practicing this spring due to recovery from injuries, he's someone that has been around and when healthy could be a key part of the Hawkeyes' offensive line.

This is a group that's worth feeling good about right now, but the results still have to be there for it as well as the entire offense as a whole if Iowa's going to rebound in 2013.

4/14/2013: Iowa spring practice notebook

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

WEST DES MOINES, Iowa – Not every day does a FBS program like the Iowa Hawkeyes decide to hold a spring football practice two hours plus off campus. But Sunday afternoon proved to be a rare treat for those in the Central and Western portions of the state.

Iowa made its ninth of 15 spring practices open to the public. But instead of conducting the practice in its confines of Kinnick Stadium like what will take place two weeks from now, the Hawkeyes made the trek just outside the state capital and held its open event in front of an estimated crowd of 8,000 spectators at Valley Stadium.

The weather conditions proved less than ideal, as rain drizzled down and wind blew rapidly. But like most any other

football practice, the show went on. What took place on the field Sunday was no different from any other spring practice as nothing's completely finalized and plenty of mental errors were made by both sides of the football.

It appeared typical for something so atypical.

"It was just nice to have a little change of pace," Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said following the practice.

For one player in particular, it proved to be a reunion of sorts. As if working with the first-string offense at left guard Sunday couldn't have been enough for senior offensive lineman Conor Boffeli, the West Des Moines Valley product had the experience of returning to the stadium he called home in high school.

"This is a place where I had a lot of great memories and it was nice to come back with my current teammates and kind of share that with them," Boffeli said.

QB battle far from settled

As Ferentz stated from the get-go, all three quarterbacks competing for Iowa's starting job got the chance to work with all three units during Sunday's practice as they have all spring.

And at this point in time, Ferentz has zero intentions of anointing anyone as a starter.

The 3-way competition between sophomore Jake Rudock, junior Cody Sokol and redshirt freshman C.J. Beathard was on display for all to see Sunday. While the experience edge might favor Rudock as he enters his third season as a member of the football team, no separation has taken place yet.

"You know, it's kind of hit or miss right now and that's kind of how the whole offense is at this point," Ferentz said. "We're rotating them in, which is probably tough for them to

get a little bit of a rhythm going, but all three of them are doing some good things and all three still have some things to work on.

“I think at this point, it’s early to predict and we’re not going to. But we’re going to let the guys compete.”

From a teammate perspective, all three signal-callers have the respect of their peers. While the separation hasn’t occurred, their teammates all see different qualities that allow them to be leaders.

As for the competitive aspect, Sokol – who was the only quarterback who spoke to the media following Sunday’s practice – doesn’t feel he’s at either an advantage or disadvantage.

“This spring has been the first time we’ve all been able to actually repeat what we’ve started,” Sokol said in reference to learning a new offense under now-second year offensive coordinator Greg Davis. “Everyone’s kind of coming in fresh, more understanding and getting the same amount of reps.”

Potential for a crowded backfield

As expected, junior running backs Mark Weisman and Damon Bullock saw their fair share of carries during Sunday’s open practice. But it’s also fair to say a third back could be entering (or in this case, returning) to the fray.

After missing all of last season due to a torn ACL suffered last spring, sophomore running back Jordan Canzeri made the most of his opportunities Sunday when the ball was in his hands. While the 2-deep might not be listing him as a starter anytime soon, the running back who looked poised to become Iowa’s starter prior to his injury is making his case for some additional carries.

“Even if I have a good day, I always tell myself that I can strive to be better,” Canzeri said. “I just keep working on

the little things and working more on my fundamentals.”

Ferentz said Sunday was the first time since Canzeri tore his ACL that he was tackled during a practice to what he called “a great extent.”

Meanwhile, Iowa also showed its package that involves both Weisman and Bullock together in the backfield, with Weisman lined up as the fullback in an I-formation. Bullock also saw his share of reps at receiver, a position he played on and off as a true freshman in 2011.

And then there was the use of the zone read, which Iowa ran a few times while the offense was lined up in a spread formation.

“I feel like it’s a great play,” Bullock said. “Our defense, they see it every day and they still can’t stop it, so it’s good.”

Energy of new coaches on display

While most of what took place Sunday was similar to past open practices Iowa has held, the differences that did exist were quite noticeable to those on hand at Valley Stadium. To be more specific, those notable differences were a byproduct of the three coaching changes Ferentz made this offseason.

On the offensive side of the ball, there’s Bobby Kennedy, who took over as Iowa’s wide receivers coach. During the beginning portion of the team’s practice Sunday, the receiving corps was performing new drills such as lunging and high stepping before cutting back to the middle of the field for a catch.

“He’s a good receivers coach and we’re all ready to get going, get the season going with this new guy,” said sophomore wide receiver Jacob Hillyer, who saw himself working plenty with the first-string offense during Sunday’s practice.

Defensively, there’s the addition of Jim Reid as c0-

linebackers coach. LeVar Woods still works with the outside linebackers specifically, but Reid has come in to help with the inside 'backers and try to make what's easily the strength of this year's defense even stronger.

"It kind of helps us focus more, you know, focus on the fundamentals and the little things," senior linebacker Christian Kirksey said. "Sometimes when you have one coach teaching three different linebacker positions, it's kind of hard. So I think it's better to have two coaches where you can kind of break up and get focused more on the little things."

And then there's special teams, a group primarily overseen by Iowa's most recent coaching addition – Chris White.

After spending the past four seasons as a special teams coach for the NFL's Minnesota Vikings, White joined Ferentz's staff last February not only as the Hawkeyes' new running backs coach, but also to add some fire to Iowa's special teams unit. Working on drills that specifically focus on the gunners during a punt, for instance, is something that took place during the team's practice Sunday that was a new wrinkle.

"Chris has had some different ideas and it's really all he has done for four years now," Ferentz said. "He came in with some new ideas and when we sat down and talked, it was really interesting to hear some thoughts and it has been fun to watch him work with the guys. I think they're enjoying it.

"I think they've enjoyed his style and the things he's doing with them and I've seen some good things on not only the field, but the film afterwards."

Davis adding weight, but getting leaner

With Iowa missing junior defensive tackle Louis Trinca-Pasat for the spring following surgery to repair a torn left rotator cuff, another junior defensive tackle has gotten those first-team reps and to this point, has made the most of his

opportunity.

Carl Davis is now listed at 315 pounds, adding an additional five pounds to his frame from last year. However, Davis looks slim and more agile as a result of the added weight, which he feels has played a part in him looking as good now than at any point prior in his playing career.

“It takes a lot of hard work conditioning and trying to get yourself in great shape,” Davis said. “It’s tough, but I’m getting better and that’s one of the things that I think I’ll always have to work on.”

One point Ferentz made when asked about Davis’ strides was how at this time last year, Davis was missing spring practices due to offseason surgery, which combined with still being a sophomore didn’t allow him to develop to the point he’s starting to now.

“Players develop and they develop confidence with experience,” Ferentz said. “That set Carl back a little bit, but he had a really good winter. I think the strength staff was really pleased with the way he worked and it just seemed like he was starting to mature a little bit.”

4/14/2013: Iowa spring practice video

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

WEST DES MOINES, Iowa – The Iowa Hawkeyes conducted their first of two open spring practices Sunday afternoon, but opted

to showcase themselves for this first open practice at Valley Stadium and in front of their fans in the central and western portions of the state.

Below are three videos from the 11-on-11 portion of Sunday's spring practice, plus video of Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz meeting with the media afterwards to discuss the Hawkeyes' progress a little over halfway through their spring football period.

PRACTICE VIDEO #1:

PRACTICE VIDEO #2:

PRACTICE VIDEO #3:

KIRK FERENTZ POST-PRACTICE: