

10/2/2012: Iowa football notebook

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – With the Iowa Hawkeyes in the early portion of their bye week, head coach Kirk Ferentz is staying silent. Defensive coordinator Phil Parker filled in for Ferentz on the Big Ten teleconference Tuesday morning. Tuesday also provided the one press conference during the regular season in which Parker and offensive coordinator Greg Davis would speak to the media and share their thoughts publicly on what they've seen thus far in 2012.

Iowa sits at 3-2 overall after winning its Big Ten opener over Minnesota last weekend. What has made the Hawkeyes' season intriguing to this point is that both the offense and defense have had major roles in both wins and losses. The defense was critical to an 18-17 win over Northern Illinois, but also was a culprit in losing 32-31 to Central Michigan. Conversely, the offense could only muster six points in a loss to Iowa State, but managed to bounce back and score 27 points the following week against Northern Iowa.



Iowa offensive coordinator Greg Davis discusses the Hawkeye offense with

reporters during his press conference held Tuesday, Oct. 2, 2012, at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City.

As far as the offense is concerned, it has been a progression. After scoring a combined total of 24 points in its first two games, the Hawkeyes have averaged nearly 30 points per game since. Two of the major reasons why have been improved play along the offensive line and the surprising emergence of sophomore Mark Weisman as the team's featured back after starting Iowa's first three games at fullback.

After surrendering six sacks in their season opener against Northern Illinois, the Iowa O-line hasn't given up a single sack in each of its last four games. As for Weisman, he has rushed for 505 yards and five touchdowns on 70 carries since becoming the top running back following injuries to sophomore Damon Bullock and true freshman Greg Garmon in the contest against Northern Iowa.

"If you had asked me in August if I knew that Mark Weisman would be this productive, I would've liked to have said yes, but that would've been less than truth," Davis said. "We did work Mark in camp at tailback some. We had no idea he'd be as productive as he has been since he has jumped in there."

Davis said Weisman would remain at running back for the time being, but that when Bullock returns from his concussion, Iowa would like to use some packages like it did earlier in the season where both are on the field at the same time.

Also a heavy topic of conversation while Davis was at the dais was the play of senior quarterback James Vandenberg. Following a junior season where he tossed 25 touchdown passes, Vandenberg has only thrown two touchdowns through five games this fall.

While the numbers haven't been what either Davis or Vandenberg may have envisioned for this point in the season, the first-year offensive coordinator expressed optimism regarding how Vandenberg has been mature enough to manage the offense with the leeway provided to him by the coaching staff.

"In the red zone the other day, we probably had at least five passes that he checked off of and went to a run," Davis said, referring to Iowa's most recent game against Minnesota. "I mean, he had plenty of opportunities in the red zone to go to a pass, but he saw an advantage in the run and he went to the run."



Iowa defensive coordinator Greg Davis discusses the Hawkeye defense with reporters during his press conference held Tuesday, Oct. 2, 2012, at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City.

Defensively, one intriguing topic of conversation came when Parker was asked about adjustment making. Prior to last weekend's game against Minnesota, Iowa had gone three straight games – all at home no less – where opposing offenses drove down the field for touchdowns on their first possessions. In the two games against Iowa State and Northern Iowa, the only touchdowns given up came on those opening drives.

The Hawkeyes got off to a much better start against the Golden Gophers with junior free safety Tanner Miller making an interception on Minnesota's fourth play from scrimmage and the defense as a whole forcing three Gopher turnovers. What eventually transpired was Iowa taking a 24-0 lead with it into halftime.

"I don't think we schemed any differently," Parker said. "I think the guys played with a lot of energy and they came out ready to go and played the full 60 minutes. Their attitude was right and their energy was right and I think that's a big part of football today."

One player who has emerged along the defense this season – at least statistically speaking – is junior linebacker Anthony Hitchens. In his first season as a starter, Hitchens has recorded 63 tackles through five games. Not only is that a team-high and not only does that total lead the Big Ten, but at this point, his 63 tackles are a national high among FBS players.

"Sometimes, he has been in positions based on where they want to throw the ball, but obviously in the run game he has been effective, too," Parker said. "I'm pleased. We knew he was a tough, strong kid and he has made a lot of tackles for us."

While the Hawkeyes sit at home this weekend...

By Saturday's end, Iowa could find itself alone in first place atop the Legends Division. Right now, the Hawkeyes are one of three teams in the division at 1-0, with the others being No. 21 Nebraska and No. 24 Northwestern.

Both the Cornhuskers and Wildcats face challenging road games this week against teams from the Leaders. Nebraska plays at No. 12 Ohio State, while Northwestern travels to Penn State seeking to become the Big Ten's first bowl-eligible team. Michigan also opens Big Ten play this week at Purdue. If the Cornhuskers, Wildcats and Wolverines all lose Saturday, Iowa

would then remain as the only Legends Division team without a conference loss.

TRANSCRIPTS (courtesy of UI Sports Info.):

[Greg Davis, Iowa offensive coordinator \(10/2/2012\)](#)

[Phil Parker, Iowa defensive coordinator \(10/2/2012\)](#)

10/1/2012: State of the Big Ten, Volume 67 (premium)

Every Monday, we will be running a weekly series titled "State of the Big Ten," which will be made available to all members of HawkeyeDrive.com. This series of columns will focus on one major headline regarding the conference and go in-depth on the subject at hand.

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Ohio State might not be allowed to participate in the Big Ten Championship Game or in any bowl game this season. But after the first five weeks of the 2012 football season, the Buckeyes are playing like the best team in an otherwise down-trodden Big Ten.

Defeating Michigan State 17-16 in East Lansing last weekend was significant for Ohio State, not only in the short term but the long term as well. Entering their showdown at home against No. 21 Nebraska on Oct. 6, the Buckeyes are the highest-ranked Big Ten team of the three who are currently ranked, sitting at No. 12 in this week's AP poll. With Saturday's game taking

place in the Horseshoe – not to mention it being a payback game for Ohio State after it blew a 21-point lead against the Cornhuskers in Lincoln last season – the Buckeyes should be capable of winning.

Then their next four games are as follows – at Indiana, vs. Purdue, at Penn State, vs. Illinois. While Purdue and Penn State will likely be tough games, they're not going to be any tougher than the game Ohio State played last weekend or is playing this weekend.

Basically, what I'm getting at is the Buckeyes could very well be 10-0 by the time they go into Camp Randall Stadium to play Wisconsin – the team that might wind up benefiting from Ohio State's postseason ban – on Nov. 17. If there weren't sanctions in place, this scenario would lead to the Buckeyes being discussed as a national title contender, and in essence, them playing for a national title might have led to the Big Ten getting two teams in BCS bowls again this season. Just look back at the last time Ohio State played in the BCS National Championship Game: An Illinois team that was 9-3 was selected to play in the Rose Bowl, where it got hammered by USC.

If this were the case, the Big Ten wouldn't be as heavily criticized like it currently is. Look at Florida State, who is currently ranked third nationally right now. The ACC isn't shaping up to be nearly as good as expected entering this season between teams like Virginia Tech and North Carolina State struggling and Clemson only having its stud wideout Sammy Watkins for two games thus far. But because the Seminoles have handled their business to this point, games that looked challenging earlier in the season now look more likely to be sure wins for Florida State. And make no mistake – if Florida State runs the table, it will be playing in Miami on Jan. 7.

Going back to Ohio State though, yes, it's not a good look for

the conference when its best team can't even play in the Big Ten title game or represent the conference in the Rose Bowl. But what Urban Meyer has done thus far has only reinforced the belief that the season endured by the Buckeyes last year was an aberration. Ohio State's only going to get better and better.

If the Buckeyes do run the table (or at the very least, end up being the only Big Ten team that finishes with double-digit victories this season), they will be the preseason favorite to win the Big Ten in 2013. Not only that, but come next August, Ohio State will probably be a top 5 preseason team.

With Meyer around, it'll probably stay that way over the long haul. His immediate success is telling because at some point, the rest of the conference has to keep up or watch the Buckeyes be regarded as the Big Ten's cream of the crop under Meyer like it was over the past decade under Jim Tressel.

If and when this conference starts getting talked about in a more positive light nationally, Ohio State's success (along with Michigan's success under Brady Hoke) will likely be the reason why.

2012 Big Ten football TV schedule: Week Six

Every week, we will post the TV schedule for all games featuring Big Ten teams. Here is where and when you can watch them this week:

Oct. 6:

Michigan State at Indiana, 11 a.m., BTN

No. 24 Northwestern at Penn State, 11 a.m., ESPN

Illinois at Wisconsin, 2:30 p.m., ABC/ESPN2

Michigan at Purdue, 3 p.m., BTN

No. 21 Nebraska at No. 12 Ohio State, 7 p.m., ABC

***All times listed are Central Standard Time.**

9/29/2012: Iowa 31, Minnesota 13 (Links)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Check out all of these links to content posted on Saturday after Iowa's 31-13 win over Minnesota at Kinnick Stadium. Please note, anything with "premium" in parentheses are links that can only be accessed by those logged in as either a paid subscriber or three-day free trial member to *HawkeyeDrive.com*:

RECAP: [Hawkeyes trounce Gophers to retain Floyd](#)

COMMENTARY: [O-Line "brings juice" \(premium\)](#)

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[Floyd of Rosedale postgame celebration](#)

[Keenan Davis](#)

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[Andrew Donnal](#)

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Hawkeyes trounce Gophers to retain Floyd

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – As senior center James Ferentz snapped the ball to senior quarterback James Vandenberg on the final play, the race was on.

Ferentz and the rest of the offensive line made a dead sprint towards Kinnick Stadium's visiting sideline. The rest of the team followed. Floyd of Rosedale was carried off the field and

back into the Iowa locker room for the first time in three years.

The Hawkeyes' 31-13 win over Minnesota on Saturday not only ended a two-year losing streak to the Golden Gophers. It was the culmination of what was a trying week in Iowa City, one that saw Iowa's character and mental toughness tested as it tried to rebound from a disheartening loss to Central Michigan just seven days earlier.

"I felt like throughout the week, there was sort of a sense that a significant portion of the fan base and the media had written us off," junior linebacker James Morris said. "For us, it was about getting a win for us, getting our confidence back going and knowing that if we can get it going together and get things clicking, we can play good football."

For the fifth week in a row, the Iowa offense put up points on its opening drive as junior kicker Mike Meyer connected on a 44-yard field goal to put the Hawkeyes ahead 3-0. The defense then delivered with one of the key plays of the entire game.

On Minnesota's fourth play from scrimmage, quarterback Max Shortell threw a deep ball down the sideline to wideout A.J. Barker that was initially ruled incomplete. However, junior free safety Tanner Miller took the ball away from Barker and came down in bounds with the ball possessed. The call on the field was overturned and Iowa took over at its own 20-yard line.

Shortell finished 20-of-33 passing for 197 yards, but was only 4-of-11 with 32 yards passing in the first half when the Hawkeyes were doing the bulk of their damage.

"I saw his eyes get pretty big, so I knew the ball was coming down there," Miller said. "So I just going to, at the least, knock it down and make sure he didn't catch it. Then the next thing I know, it's in my lap. It had all happened real fast and I didn't know if I had gotten a foot inbounds or anything

like that.

“It was a quick play, and it turned out to be a big play in the game.”

In the second quarter, Iowa would go on a scoring flurry. It began with sophomore fullback Mark Weisman scoring on the quarter's first play from eight yards out to make it 10-0. His touchdown came on a drive that featured consecutive carries of 27 and 44 yards.

To go along with his one touchdown, Weisman posted his third straight 100-yard rushing performance, compiling 177 yards on 21 carries with 155 of those yards coming in the first half alone.

“[The offensive line] is opening up more and more holes and I'm seeing them now, too,” Weisman said. “There were holes before that maybe I wasn't seeing as well. I'm seeing them a little better now and I'm more comfortable back there, more confident.”

“They're unbelievable, the O-line. They're making my life easy.”

After an ensuing three-and-out from the Golden Gopher offense, Iowa delivered its second biggest haymaker. Senior quarterback James Vandenberg's lone touchdown pass of the day came on a flea flicker. After Weisman tossed the ball back to Vandenberg, he found an open Jordan Cotton down the middle of the field for a 47-yard score that made it 17-0. The touchdown was the first of Cotton's career.

“I caught the laces first grab and I see Cotton,” Vandenberg said. “Cotton hasn't even turned his head yet and there's that clock in your head, especially on a flea flicker, like, ‘You better throw it.’ So it was just one of those things where I was going to throw it about as high as I could to make sure Cotton could turn around and make a play.”

Vandenberg would score on a QB sneak the next series and Iowa extended its lead to 24-0 at halftime. The Hawkeyes' final score of the afternoon came in the fourth quarter with Minnesota facing fourth down. Junior linebacker Christian Kirksey, who earlier in the second half recovered a Golden Gopher fumble, intercepted Shortell and returned his pick 68 yards for a touchdown that made it 31-7 with 5:15 remaining.

"It took a lot of pressure off our back and gave us a comfortable lead," Morris said. "That's what great players do. He stepped up and made a great play when he had the chance.

Now with Floyd of Rosedale back in its possession, Iowa enters its bye week, then plays four of its next six games away from Kinnick Stadium. The Hawkeyes' next game will be Oct. 13 at Michigan State, who fell to 3-2 after losing 17-16 to Ohio State on Saturday. The Spartans play at Indiana next week. Kickoff is set for 11 a.m. Central with television still to be determined.

COMMENTARY: O-Line "brings juice" (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – "Bring the juice." For the Iowa offensive line, this three-word sentence has become a mantra.

As the offensive line has progressed in 2012, so has the entire offense. Over the last three weeks, the Hawkeyes have accumulated 27, 31 and 31 points after combining for only 24

points total in their first two games of the 2012 season.

Over these same past three weeks, the offense has become more balanced. On the ground, a star has surfaced in sophomore fullback Mark Weisman, who made his second start at running back Saturday against Minnesota and rushed for 177 yards and one touchdown on 21 carries. This performance comes after a 217-yard outing the week before against Central Michigan. Through the air, senior quarterback James Vandenberg tossed a touchdown pass in his second straight game after going the first quarter of the season without throwing one.

There's one constant to this all – the offensive line. Iowa defeated Minnesota 31-13 on Saturday at Kinnick Stadium, why? Because of this group of players, one that felt it needed to “bring the juice” during a week where that juice was needed among the entire program.

For all the good the offensive line had showed up to this point, there was always something negative to counter what worked. Against Northern Illinois, the ground game clicked but pass protection was atrocious. Against Iowa State, pass protection was much better but Iowa couldn't muster any offense running the ball. On Saturday, everything was clicking for this group.

Consider this: Minnesota entered Saturday's game with one of the best defensive lines in the conference featuring the likes of Ra'Shede Hageman and D.L. Wilhite, who came in leading the Big Ten with 4.5 sacks this season. Hageman and Wilhite combined for three tackles. No one on Minnesota recorded a sack. A Golden Gopher defense that had the best turnover margin in the Big Ten didn't force a single turnover.

When the offense went to the run game, the offensive line opened enormous holes for Weisman to go through. Weisman had five carries of 15 yards or more. Those five carries alone made up 135 of those 177 yards rushing he had, or an average

of 27 yards rushing on just those five carries.

As good a back as Weisman is and has proven to be for this team, most running backs aren't picking up 27 yards on a single carry without the necessary blocking that comes at the first level.

When the passing game came into play, Vandenberg had plenty of time to look down field, which was perhaps most evident on a flea-flicker play where he connected with a wide open Jordan Cotton down the middle for a 47-yard touchdown pass that put Iowa up 17-0 in the second quarter. That play broke Minnesota's back. Vandenberg, Weisman and Cotton all made that play what it was, but again, the offensive line did its job there like it did throughout the afternoon.

Earlier in the week, center James Ferentz made the comment how one of the reasons Iowa had lost to Minnesota each of the last two years was because the Hawkeyes didn't match the level of excitement the Golden Gophers played with. That wasn't the case Saturday. Iowa looked more like the team that was 4-0 coming in than the team that actually was 4-0. Iowa played with more enthusiasm, with more of a mean streak. Why? Because of the offensive line.

So it was only fitting that when the team rushed towards Minnesota's sideline to repossess Floyd of Rosedale, it was the offensive line leading the charge towards the trophy. James Ferentz, Brandon Scherff and Matt Tobin, the three linemen that probably played the biggest roles of all on Saturday, hoisted the bronze pig just before the rest of the team was able to follow suit.

Weisman said how he owed the entire offensive line dinner after the performance he had Saturday. Chances are whenever that dinner takes place, the O-line will "bring the juice" then as well.

Iowa-Minnesota video: Joe Gaglione

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Iowa senior defensive end Joe Gaglione finished with three tackles in the Hawkeyes' 31-13 victory over Minnesota on Saturday at Kinnick Stadium.

Iowa-Minnesota video: James Morris

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Iowa junior linebacker James Morris finished with 10 tackles and one sack in the Hawkeyes' 31-13 win over Minnesota on Saturday at Kinnick Stadium.

Iowa-Minnesota Christian Kirksey

video:

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Iowa junior linebacker Christian Kirksey had five tackles and also recovered a fumble and returned an interception 68 yards for a touchdown in the Hawkeyes' 31-13 victory over Minnesota on Saturday at Kinnick Stadium.

Iowa-Minnesota video: Darian Cooper

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Iowa redshirt freshman defensive tackle Darian Cooper recorded five tackles in the Hawkeyes' 31-13 win over Minnesota on Saturday at Kinnick Stadium.