

Iowa-UNI video: Brandon Scherff

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Iowa sophomore offensive lineman Brandon Scherff started at left tackle for the Hawkeyes on Saturday in their 27-16 win over Northern Iowa at Kinnick Stadium. Iowa compiled 429 yards of total offense.

Iowa-UNI video: Austin Blythe

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Iowa redshirt freshman offensive lineman Austin Blythe started at right guard for the Hawkeyes on Saturday in their 27-16 victory over Northern Iowa at Kinnick Stadium. Iowa compiled 429 yards of total offense.

9/14/2012: I-Club breakfast

video

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – As he does every Friday morning before a home football game, Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz spoke at the Johnson County I-Club Breakfast inside the Sheraton Hotel. This week, he discussed the Hawkeyes' upcoming game against Northern Iowa.

Ferentz was introduced by former Iowa defensive lineman Tyler Luebke, who played on both of Ferentz's two Big Ten championship teams in 2002 and 2004.

Below are videos of both Luebke's and Ferentz's speeches:

Iowa vs. Northern Iowa (What to expect)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

To get you all ready for Saturday's game between Iowa and Northern Iowa, I put together a list of things you ought to know before heading to Kinnick Stadium.

At the end, I'll provide what I think are three keys to an Iowa victory.

Iowa Hawkeyes (1-1) vs. Northern Iowa Panthers (1-1)

Kinnick Stadium; Iowa City, Iowa

Sept. 15, 2012

2:30 p.m. Central

TV: BTN (Tom Werme, Danan Hughes, Damon Benning)

Radio: Hawkeye Radio Network (Gary Dolphin, Ed Podolak, Rob Brooks)

Weather: [79 degrees; sun; wind from SSW](#)

Brendan's Three Keys to the Game:

1. Touchdown on opening drive

In each of Iowa's first two games, the Hawkeyes have marched down to the red zone and come away with points on the opening drives. However, those points on both occasions were courtesy of Mike Meyer field goals. Obviously, Iowa has to show it's capable of scoring touchdowns when they get down inside the opposing 20-yard line, but it's probably even more important to come away with a touchdown on the opening drive this week. If you recall, Iowa had to settle for a field goal on its opening drive the last time it played UNI back in 2009, and look at what ended up happening then. A 7-0 lead out of the gate gives the offense confidence it's currently lacking, it gives the defense something to build off of from the start and it allows the crowd to get into the game early.

2. Establish the ground game

Coming off a 150-yard rushing performance in his debut as Iowa's top running back, sophomore Damon Bullock only managed to pick up 53 yards on the ground last week against Iowa State. The strength of UNI's defense is its secondary and the Panthers have an inexperienced front seven, so I think this

would be a good week for Iowa to get a ground game going. If Bullock gets somewhere in the 20-25 carry range and true freshman Greg Garmon's able to get at least 10 carries while spelling Bullock, Iowa should be able to have some offensive success. And who knows? It might even open up the passing game a little for the Hawkeyes.

3. Strong first half from defense

Iowa's defense has done a good job this so far this season in being able to make halftime adjustments and be able to play strong enough second halves to keep the team in games. This is a week where Iowa can't be sluggish early on defensively, especially facing a redshirt freshman quarterback who isn't going to be intimidated by Kinnick Stadium since UNI has already played a game this season at Wisconsin. It all goes back to confidence. Iowa, as a whole, has to be able to play with more of it than it has the first two weeks. The defense has shown it can be capable of being that spark plug, but at some point, that has to show early on, too.

9/13/2012: Talkin' Hawks podcast (Iowa vs. Northern Iowa)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Every Thursday during the 2012 football season, *HawkeyeDrive.com* will feature "Talkin' Hawks," a podcast to get you ready for the Hawkeyes' upcoming game and

other college football action.

This week, we preview Iowa's game on Sept. 15 against the Northern Iowa Panthers at Kinnick Stadium. Former Iowa defensive back [Chris Rowell](#) joins me to provide insight on the Hawkeyes and share his thoughts on all the games featured in this week's [HawkeyeDrive.com Pick 'Em](#). Rowell will be a part of the podcast every week all season long.

Joining as a guest this week in the podcast's middle segment is Jesse Gavin, who is the sports director at 1650 The Fan (KCNZ-AM) in Cedar Falls, Iowa. This week's edition is approximately 60-65 minutes long, so enjoy:

[Talkin' Hawks podcast \(Iowa vs. Northern Iowa\)](#)

Twitter handles:

HawkeyeDrive.com – [@HawkeyeDrive](#)

Brendan Stiles – [@thebstiles](#)

Chris Rowell – [@Crowell34](#)

Jesse Gavin – [@JesseGavin1](#)

***Intro sound byte credit to my former Daily Iowan colleague Ryan Young for putting that together.**

9/11/2012: Iowa football notebook



Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz discusses the Hawkeyes' upcoming game against Northern Iowa during his weekly press conference on Tuesday, Sept. 11, 2012 at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City.

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Two games into the 2012 season and the Iowa Hawkeyes have only managed to score one touchdown and a total of 24 points.

Those two figures – one touchdown and 24 points – have proven tough for head coach Kirk Ferentz to swallow, especially after a 9-6 loss to Iowa State last weekend where the offense was anemic. The poor showings offensively have led to some outside the program having concerns about the passing game, and perhaps more specifically, senior quarterback James Vandenberg.

In two games, Vandenberg has completed 41 of 75 pass attempts and tossed for 365 yards. The Keokuk native made it through Iowa's opener against Northern Illinois without turning the ball over, but wound up throwing two interceptions against Iowa State – one right before halftime and the other on what he acknowledged was an ill-advised throw that ultimately sealed the Hawkeyes' fate last weekend.

“There’s nothing to say,” Vandenberg said. “I mean, all 70,000 people are going to have their opinions. That was the wrong play. The interception was the wrong play, we got to execute better in the red zone, all of that’s true.”

Ferentz reiterated his belief in Vandenberg, saying how he thought the quarterback was the most invested player of anyone on the entire team during the offseason as Iowa was learning a new offensive system.

“If I have a worry about him, I worry about him putting too much pressure on himself,” Ferentz said. “It’s easy to tell a guy, ‘Don’t. Just play your position.’ Easier said than done. But that’s the way he’s built. He’s so respected because of that.

“He’s extremely tough mentally and tough physically and he’s an excellent football player.”

As for the rest of the team, they continue to view him as their leader, knowing that he’s not the only reason for the issues Iowa has had on offense. The evidence in their faith comes in the form of Vandenberg remaining one of the Hawkeyes’ team captains for this season.

“I think he sets a great example for the younger guys to look up to,” said senior center James Ferentz, who is also one of Iowa’s four captains. “When things don’t go your way, you’re going to look to your leaders and see how they respond and how they act. Starting on Sunday, I think James has done a great job of being the leader on this team and showing the younger guys that the sun does rise and now we need to put that behind us and move forward.”

Drops dooming the offense in defeat

While no one has placed more blame on themselves for last weekend’s loss than Vandenberg, the receiving corps feels accountability as well after dropping eight passes thrown by

their QB.

Three drops in the fourth quarter proved to be the most costly. In the first minute of the quarter, Iowa faced 3rd-and-Goal and Vandenberg rolled out. He threw it in the end zone to sophomore fullback Mark Weisman, who was covered, but had his hands on the football and wasn't able to haul it in. Instead of the Hawkeyes tying the game at the very least (a made extra point would've put Iowa up 10-9), they had to settle for a short field goal from junior kicker Mike Meyer.

"I could've made the play and it's a play I expect to make," Weisman said. "It just didn't happen on that play."

Then following a Cyclone turnover that led to Iowa having the ball near midfield, the Hawkeyes went 3-and-out after a pass on third down was dropped by junior tight end C.J. Fiedorowicz, and then turned the ball over on downs when junior wide receiver Don Shumpert dropped a Vandenberg pass.

"It was a critical point in the game and it was a good ball," Fiedorowicz said about the third-down pass he wound up dropping. "It's a play you want to make. When that happens, it's frustrating."

Sophomore wideout Kevonte Martin-Manley said when the receiving group got together Sunday to watch film, receivers coach Erik Campbell was able to pinpoint specifically what led to all the drops coming from them and the other skill players.

"He points out why you dropped it, whether you took your eyes off the ball, whether your hands weren't close together and if you dropped it when you're not supposed to, things like that," Martin-Manley said. "Ninety-nine percent of the time if you drop a ball, there's a reason why from a coaching standpoint, so we look at things like that."

"Taking your eyes off the ball, that's probably the biggest thing – trying to run before you catch it."

Hitchens emerging as key defensive player

If there's one encouraging sign for the Hawkeyes from their loss to Iowa State, it was the play of their linebacking corps. The junior trio of James Morris, Christian Kirksey and Anthony Hitchens combined for 40 of Iowa's tackles. Morris also made two big plays on a pair of second half Cyclone turnovers – recovering a fumble in the third quarter and intercepting a pass in the end zone and returning it up near midfield in the fourth quarter.

Morris had the performance Kirk Ferentz called “phenomenal.” But Hitchens had the stat line raising plenty of eyebrows, recording 19 of those 40 tackles between the three linebackers. In fact, his 27 tackles two games into the 2012 season currently leads the Big Ten.

Hitchens might be the least experienced of the three linebackers, making just his second career start while both Morris and Kirksey have full seasons as starters under their belts. But Ferentz has been pleased with the progress Hitchens has made, especially in adjusting to becoming a player that excels when all he has to do is “read and react.”

“Coach believes that if you see it and you believe it, then you go,” Hitchens said. “When you're hesitant and you're shuffling, you're thinking about what you're supposed to do instead of just doing it, it's harder on yourself.”

What makes Hitchens' transformation into a key ingredient in Iowa's defense was how he became a linebacker in the first place. He originally was brought in as a running back, only to switch sides and work as a safety. It wasn't long after that he would be moved again to playing at linebacker.

Senior cornerback Micah Hyde recalled hosting Hitchens on his recruiting visit, a time when safety was going to most likely be his position if he played defense.

"I remember looking at him like, 'Wow, dude. You're pretty big. What position are you going to play?' And he was like, 'Strong safety,'" Hyde said. "So then I was just thinking in the back of my head, 'They're going to put 30 pounds on you. You don't even know it. You're going to be huge here soon.'

"He's definitely put on some weight, but it's the best for him because he can move now. He's at linebacker and added some weight, but he can also run from sideline to sideline."

Preparing for UNI

Now the Hawkeyes turn their attention to their second of four straight home games, playing Northern Iowa on Sept. 15 at 2:30 p.m. Central. The Panthers enter this contest with an expected 1-1 record with the loss being in their season opener at Wisconsin and the victory coming this past weekend against Division-II Central State.

But it's the loss at Wisconsin that had both Ferentz and his players talking on Tuesday. Trailing 26-7 in the fourth quarter, UNI scored a pair of touchdowns to get within 26-21 and had a chance in the final minutes to win the game, only for the Badger defense to force a fourth-down stop that secured a Wisconsin win.

The player who impressed Ferentz the most on film was UNI redshirt freshman quarterback Sawyer Kollmorgen, who won the starting job as the Panthers' signal-caller during their fall camp. Kollmorgen has thrown six touchdown passes to zero interceptions, but the two touchdown tosses in the fourth quarter of that game at Camp Randall Stadium is what caught Ferentz's attention the most.

"That's a tough place to go under any circumstance," Ferentz said. "For a first-year player to go up there and play the way he did, particularly in the second half, that says a lot about him. He's a very impressive young guy."

Defensively in that same game, the Panthers managed to keep Wisconsin running back Montee Ball in check. While Ball rushed for 120 yards on 32 carries, he only scored one touchdown after a season where he tied a record set by Barry Sanders of 39 touchdowns in 2011.

“They just play good fundamental defense,” said sophomore running back Damon Bullock, who only had 53 yards rushing himself against Iowa State after rushing for 150 yards in the 18-17 win over Northern Illinois on Sept. 1. “You know, Wisconsin couldn’t really push it as much as they wanted to, but they had a couple of mishaps and if they had executed on what they’re supposed to, they might have had more.”

Reliving a near disaster

Perhaps getting as much attention as the Panthers’ near-upset of Wisconsin at Camp Randall Stadium two weeks ago is what happened the last time Iowa and UNI met back in 2009. The Hawkeyes needed a pair of blocked field goals in the final seven seconds by then-defensive end Broderick Binns and then-linebacker Jeremiha Hunter to preserve a 17-16 win over the Panthers. It didn’t appear this way at the time, but in hindsight, it proved to be the start of a memorable season for Iowa as it went 11-2 and won the Orange Bowl.

While none of the current seniors were integral parts of the Hawkeyes’ game plan that afternoon, they did manage to pull away some memories from that particular contest. For Hyde and wide receiver Keenan Davis – who were both true freshmen at the time – it was their first game as Hawkeyes.

“I was talking with my mom after the game and I was like, ‘Wow. Why did I come here?’” Hyde said. “That was the craziest thing I had ever been a part of in my entire life.

“My freshman year when I came in, I thought it was just one of those games where you should roll over a team, one of them 42-0s. They’re here to compete. They see a Big Ten team on

their schedule and they're ready to play."

Then there are those like defensive lineman Steve Bigach, who was a redshirt freshman in 2009. He said while he hasn't thought too often about winning that game, he did say more of a memory of that afternoon has developed for him through time.

"I just remember going wild after we blocked the field goal that second time," Bigach said. "It's crazy. In the first couple of years here, you're almost moving so fast that your head's kind of spinning a little bit and you don't tend to remember all that much. But when you get older, things kind of slow down for you. You do remember the positive things.

"They came in and fought real hard. We're expecting them to do the same this year."

Ferentz said Tuesday would be the first time he'd make reference to that '09 thriller as a way of reminding his team how it shouldn't take UNI lightly. What he wasn't sure of yet was how often he'd bring it up.

"If we ignore that, then we're fools," Ferentz said.

9/11/2012: Iowa player audio with photos (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

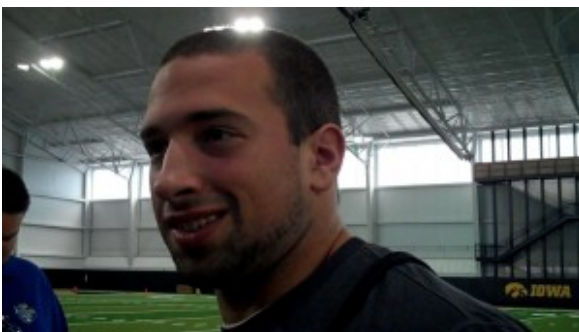
IOWA CITY, Iowa – On Tuesday, 14 members of the Iowa football team spoke with the media to discuss the Hawkeyes' upcoming game on Sept. 15 against Northern Iowa.

Below is audio from each of the following players – redshirt freshman defensive end Riley McMinn, sophomore fullback Mark Weisman, senior defensive lineman Steve Bigach, senior quarterback James Vandenberg, senior center James Ferentz, sophomore running back Damon Bullock, junior wide receiver Don Shumpert, sophomore wide receiver Kevonte Martin-Manley, junior tight end C.J. Fiedorowicz, junior linebacker Anthony Hitchens, senior wide receiver Keenan Davis, senior cornerback Micah Hyde, senior defensive end Joe Gaglione and junior free safety Tanner Miller:



Riley McMinn, Sept. 11, 2012

[Riley McMinn, redshirt freshman defensive end](#)



Mark Weisman, Sept. 11, 2012

[Mark Weisman, sophomore fullback](#)



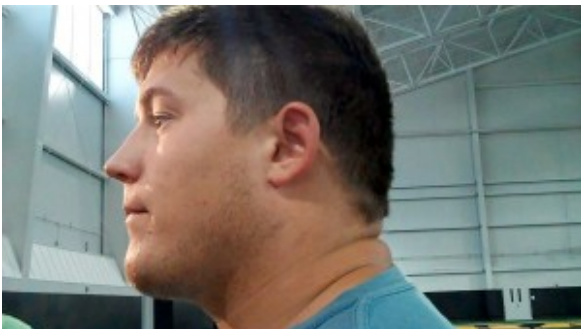
Steve Bigach, Sept. 11, 2012

[Steve Bigach, senior defensive lineman](#)



James Vandenberg, Sept. 11,
2012

[James Vandenberg, senior quarterback](#)



James Ferentz, Sept. 11,
2012

[James Ferentz, senior center](#)



Damon Bullock, Sept. 11,
2012

[Damon Bullock, sophomore running back](#)



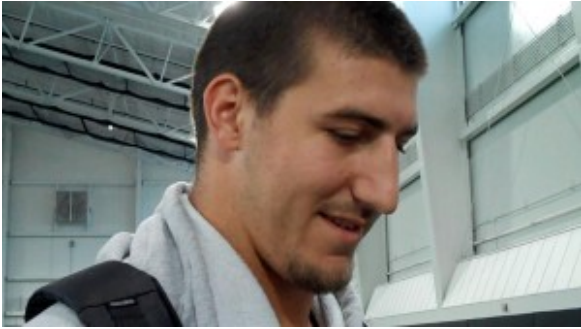
Don Shumpert, Sept. 11, 2012

[Don Shumpert, junior wide receiver](#)



Kevonte Martin-Manley, Sept.
11, 2012

[Kevonte Martin-Manley, sophomore wide receiver](#)



C.J. Fiedorowicz, Sept. 11,
2012

[C.J. Fiedorowicz, junior tight end](#)



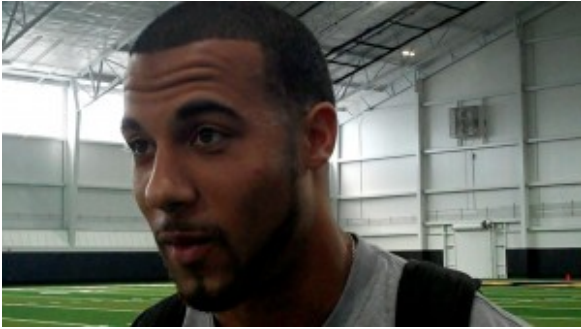
Anthony Hitchens, Sept. 11,
2012

[Anthony Hitchens, junior linebacker](#)



Keenan Davis, Sept. 11, 2012

[Keenan Davis, senior wide receiver](#)



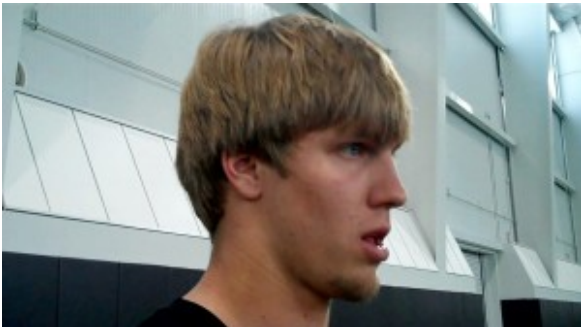
Micah Hyde, Sept. 11, 2012

[Micah Hyde, senior cornerback](#)



Joe Gaglione, Sept. 11, 2012

[Joe Gaglione, senior defensive end](#)



Tanner Miller, Sept. 11,
2012

[Tanner Miller, junior free safety](#)

9/11/2012: Kirk Ferentz press conference transcript

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Below is a PDF from the Iowa sports information department featuring the complete transcript from Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz's press conference on Tuesday in Iowa City:

[Coach Ferentz 9 11 12](#)

9/11/2012: Kirk Ferentz teleconference transcript (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Below is a written transcript of Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz's teleconference on Tuesday with the Big Ten media:

Ferentz's opening statement:

"Certainly, it was a tough loss for our team Saturday. It was a hard-fought game and both teams competed well out there and we came up short. Tough, tough pill to swallow. Credit goes to Iowa State and we moved on on Sunday. So we've turned our focus to Northern Iowa. They come in here this weekend and focus on getting ready for them and also focus on getting our

team to move forward."

On what needs to improve offensively going forward after only score one touchdown through two games:

"I'd say pretty much everything. You know, when you have one touchdown in two ball games, that says it all. So we've got work to do and we'll just continue at that work."

On why the passing game has struggled going downfield:

"If it is true, it's collective. The passing game isn't where we want it to be in any phase – downfield or in any regard. So we'll just continue to work on it. Obviously part of it is we have to do a better job when we get the ball down in the red zone area. We haven't converted touchdowns or done well in that regard either game."

On the play of linebacker Anthony Hitchens after he recorded 19 tackles against Iowa State:

"Yeah, I thought all of our linebackers did a good job. Anthony was really active when the ball came his way, so that factors in certainly. Chris Kirksey is playing well too on the other outside position. Typically, that guy doesn't get involved in as many plays as the other two inside guys. Anthony did a good job and James Morris played a phenomenal game and really gave us a chance to win with his big interception."

"First of all, it saved a touchdown down at our end of the field and then he brought the ball down to midfield. Unfortunately, we couldn't convert that into any points. But he's really playing a high level, too. Anthony's the least experienced of the three, but he's making progress with each time out there and we think he has got a chance to be a good player for us."

On how he'd evaluate the play of quarterback James Vandenberg

after two games:

"Well, you know, we haven't scored enough points. We haven't won both games so we haven't scored enough points. With everybody on our team right now, we're not where we want to be. James is doing a great job. He's practicing well. He's doing a good job of leading. The next step for us is we have to get in the end zone."

On what UNI does well:

"Well, I'd say they look like a typical UNI team, but that's probably not a good way to say it because they've changed a little bit philosophically offensively. The one thing they look like is another excellent UNI team. That does look the same. They do it in a couple of different ways. More recently, they ran the quarterback a little bit more."

"Now they've got a guy who is more of a thrower and showed tremendous poise in two games. He really didn't get tested last week, but in the opener, he just played phenomenal and brought his team back and gave them a chance to win in a hostile environment his first time out. He hasn't thrown an interception yet. They shifted the way they're doing things, but they've got weapons. Their guys do an excellent job. They're very, very well-coached."

"Defensively, that way they are typical. They've looked the same for as long as we've been watching them. The common denominator is they're playing good defense. They do that time and time again. But I think overall, I don't know if anybody we played in 2009 played any harder than UNI on our schedule that year and that's what we're seeing on film, too. They just play extremely hard. They're tough guys and good football players. They're very well-coached and play well in all three areas."

On Vandenberg's confidence level at this point in time:

“He’s fine. That’s easier to say than maybe verify. We don’t have anybody more invested on our football team – and I say this with all respect to a lot of guys; we have a lot of guys working hard – but James is totally in. I’m sure he’s disappointed. I haven’t asked him, but I’m sure he’s disappointed right now. But the bottom line is we’re two games into this thing and we just have to keep working.”

“It’s going to get better. He’s going to be a big part of our improvement. There’s no question in mind because he’s a proven player, an outstanding football player. I’m just worried about him trying to do too much. All he has to do is just play his position.”

On if he’s seeing encouraging things in practice that just haven’t translated into games:

“Absolutely. I thought we were much improved in August from the spring. The next step is for it to show up on the game field and there’s no automatics in football, certainly. We’re going to have to make that happen. I don’t think we’re that far away. It’s just like last Saturday. When we made plays, when we executed, and we caught the ball and ran with it after the catch, those types of things, the ball moved fine up and down the field. But there were other times where we didn’t do that.”

“So you know, the trick is having team execution all around – all 11 guys doing their jobs. Again, that’s a lot easier to say than do, but that’s the challenge that we’re facing right now. I don’t think we’re that far away, but we just have to keep working hard.”

On how UNI potentially moving up to FBS would affect the talent pool in the state of Iowa:

“That’s the first I’ve heard of it, so I have no idea how to answer your question. I have no idea and that’s the last thing in my thoughts at this point. I don’t think it’s going to

affect the talent pool at all. We have great programs in our state. We've got three million people in our state. I don't think how they approach football is going to change things dramatically. That's news to me. You got me on that one."

9/10/2012: State of the Big Ten, Volume 64 (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

Two games into the 2012 season, and the Wisconsin Badgers have already undergone an assistant coaching change.

Mike Markuson, who was one of six new assistant coaches hired by head coach Bret Bielema this offseason after a bulk of his staff followed former offensive coordinator Paul Chryst to Pittsburgh, is no longer on staff after serving two games as the Badgers' offensive line coach.

This move being made in mid-September is troubling, especially considering how Wisconsin's M.O. as an offense is to pound the ball with linemen that all weigh over 300 pounds and in this year's case, feature a running back who shattered records and was a Heisman finalist last year in Montee Ball.

Coming off two straight Rose Bowl appearances, the Badgers

were viewed by many to be a legitimate threat to win the Big Ten again despite all the transition that took place with Bielema's staff and despite breaking in a new quarterback. Now Wisconsin could still wind up winning the Big Ten when it's all said and done. But it looked vulnerable in a 26-21 win over Northern Iowa and got exposed in a 10-7 loss to Oregon State this past weekend.

This team has a target on its back after many spent the summer assuming the Badgers would cruise to a Leaders Division crown with Ohio State and Penn State both currently dealing with postseason bans. That target's not going to go away, even if Wisconsin continues to show struggles over the coming weeks.

All the talk of them being a lock to play in Indianapolis on Dec. 1 ought to be placed on hold if it hasn't been already. What happened in Corvallis, Ore., this past weekend could happen again when the Badgers play Big Ten teams that are probably better than Oregon State. Teams like Nebraska, Purdue, Michigan State, Ohio State to name a few.

The Badgers were only able to muster 35 yards rushing and without a dynamic quarterback like what Wisconsin had last season in Russell Wilson, opposing defenses are going to key in on stopping Ball.

If this season becomes the epic failure it's currently on course to become, the heat's going to be placed heavily on Bielema. It's one thing if he hires new coaches and rides them out the entire season. But making a coaching change after just two games is a strong indicator that bigger problems are taking place in Madison.

Markuson is going to be portrayed as a scapegoat now if Wisconsin continues to struggle running the football. But this is a gamble Bielema better hope pays off for him. Otherwise, he's going to be the one that receives the scrutiny and it would be warranted in this case.

Expectations were high in Madison entering this season and understandably so. What happened Monday might be the first sign of a Wisconsin decline taking place in 2012. It won't be surprising though if this is just the tip of the iceberg.