

Iowa-NIU video: Greg Castillo

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

CHICAGO, Ill. – Iowa senior cornerback Greg Castillo came in for an injured B.J. Lowery and recorded one pass break up, plus downed a punt by John Wienke at the 1-yard line, setting the stage for the Hawkeyes' come-from-behind 18-17 win over Northern Illinois on Saturday at Soldier Field.

Iowa-NIU video: Mike Meyer

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

CHICAGO, Ill. – Iowa junior kicker Mike Meyer connected on 4-of-5 field goal attempts, including a 50-yard field goal in the fourth quarter, as well as recorded three touchbacks in the Hawkeyes' 18-17 win over Northern Illinois on Saturday at Soldier Field.

Iowa vs. Northern Illinois

(What to expect)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

To get you all ready for Saturday's game between Iowa and Northern Illinois, I put together a list of things you ought to know before these two face off at Soldier Field.

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

Iowa Hawkeyes (0-0) vs. Northern Illinois Huskies (0-0)

Soldier Field; Chicago, Ill.

Sept. 1, 2012

2:30 p.m. Central

TV: ESPNU (Tom Hart, John Congemi)

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

Weather: [79 degrees, rain, wind from E/NE](#)

Brendan's Three Keys to the Game:

1. Strong outing from D-line

If Iowa's going to win this game, it'll have to be because of the play of its defense and to be specific, the defensive line. While the front four is the Hawkeyes' most inexperienced group entering the 2012 season, it couldn't ask for a more favorable match-up this weekend with Northern Illinois featuring five new starters along its offensive line, three of whom are redshirt freshmen. This is a game where Iowa's D-line should be able to create chaos throughout without the aid of

blitzing from the back seven.

2. Trust the TEs

Kirk Ferentz has said repeatedly how the tight end group might be the biggest strength not just with this offense, but with the entire team. Iowa could be playing up to four tight ends on Saturday, the most notable being junior C.J. Fiedorowicz. Whether it's him, Zach Derby or even guys like Ray Hamilton or Jake Duzey, trusting these guys to play like they've practiced could go a long way in terms of Iowa not only winning this game, but maybe winning somewhat comfortably.

3. Leaders leading

This is the first time since 2007 that Iowa has opened a season somewhere other than Kinnick Stadium. Also, one of Ferentz's biggest talking points throughout the preseason has been how this is the youngest Hawkeye team he has coached in 14 years. With those two things in mind, this is a game where the leaders on this team need to set the tone. This is a game where Iowa should be counting on big games from players like James Vandenberg, James Morris, Micah Hyde, and anyone else on this team who is highly regarded by teammates. This is the time for those guys to show why they're all in the leadership positions they're in.

**8/30/2012: Talkin' Hawks
podcast (Iowa vs. Northern**

Illinois)

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 season opener against Northern Illinois, which is taking place Sept. 1 at Soldier Field in Chicago, Ill. Former Iowa defensive back [Chris Rowell](#) joins me to provide insight on the Hawkeyes and share his thoughts on all the game's 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 Steve Nitz, who covers Northern Illinois football for [The Daily Chronicle](#) in DeKalb, Ill. This week's edition is approximately 60 minutes long, so enjoy:

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

Twitter handles:

HawkeyeDrive.com – [@HawkeyeDrive](#)

Brendan Stiles – [@thebstiles](#)

Chris Rowell – [@Crowell34](#)

Steve Nitz – [@HuskieWire](#)

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

8/28/2012: Iowa football notebook



Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz discusses the Hawkeyes' season opener at Soldier Field against Northern Illinois during his weekly press conference held on Tuesday, Aug. 28, 2012 at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City. Ferentz enters his 14th season as Iowa's head coach.

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Kirk Ferentz has made no secret this year about his team's youth, stating on numerous occasions – which includes his first weekly press conference of the season Tuesday – how the 2012 version of the Iowa Hawkeyes is the youngest team he has ever coached.

Perhaps where this point proves most evident is in the first

two-deep released by the team back on Aug. 24. Having been known in the past for rarely (if ever) including true freshmen on that two-deep prior to Iowa's first game, the depth chart sent out over the weekend included four true freshmen, including two running backs – Greg Garmon and walk-on Michael Malloy.

Sophomore running back Damon Bullock is the most likely to start against the Huskies this weekend given how he actually has game experience in contrast to both Garmon and Malloy. But Ferentz made clear all three would get their chances.

"I have a plan to play all three guys and see how they do," Ferentz said. "I don't know to what extent. We'll see how that plays out."

In addition to the duo of backs, cornerback Kevin Buford and punter Connor Kornbrath also made appearances on the two-deep, with Kornbrath being awarded the starting spot at punter for Iowa's season opener Sept. 1 against Northern Illinois.

Ferentz said Buford had left an impression on the coaching staff from the get-go and described him as a "very positive young guy" that has "great attitude." As for Kornbrath, he finds himself starting after beating out senior John Wienke and junior Jonny Mullings for the punting duties.

"Basically, we chart those guys like we chart everyone else," Ferentz said. "Right now, we just feel like he gives us our best chance."

Playing in Chicago

This weekend's contest between Iowa and Northern Illinois will mark the second time they've played each other at Soldier Field, which is home to the NFL's Chicago Bears. Coincidentally, the previous match-up came on Sept. 1, 2007, which will be five years ago to the very date on Saturday.

For players like junior tight end C.J. Fiedorowicz, a native of Johnsburg, Ill., it's an opportunity that he can't help but feel excited about.

"I've been there several times watching the Bears," Fiedorowicz said. "To actually be able to play in there, it's a once-in-a-lifetime thing and I'm going to embrace it."

While these two teams are familiar with playing each other in the Windy City, this is still somewhat of a rarity for the Hawkeyes under Ferentz. In the 14 seasons he has been head coach, this is only the third time Iowa has opened any season away from Kinnick Stadium – one instance being the last Northern Illinois game in 2007, the other occurrence being in 2000 when the Hawkeyes played Kansas State at Arrowhead Stadium in Kansas City, Mo. Interestingly, those are also the last two times Iowa hasn't appeared in a bowl game of any sort.

Northern Illinois enters this contest with the nation's longest winning streak of 11 straight games. The Huskies won the Mid-American Conference last season, as well as the GoDaddy.com Bowl over Arkansas State. With this being the first time anyone on the current squad has opened a season away from Iowa City, the learning experience is one that could potentially prove valuable over the long haul.

"There have been past games where we come in and they're games we should win, possibly win by a lot of points. This game is going to be a tough game," senior cornerback Micah Hyde said. "In the Big Ten, every week is like that.

"Coach [Ferentz] said the other day, 'You can't come out, make a lot of mistakes and still win the game.' This isn't one of those games. They're going to be a tough opponent. They're coached well and they're very athletic."

Soldier Field playing surface

When some think of Soldier Field, they'll think of the Chicago Bears and all of their history and tradition. Others might think of how the exterior of the stadium resembles a spaceship since its renovations were completed in 2003.

Then there's the playing surface. In this case, it's not because Saturday's game is one of only three the Hawkeyes are scheduled to play on grass, but rather the reputation Soldier Field has developed as having the worst playing surface in the entire NFL.

"I've heard that from about everybody for the past week," senior quarterback James Vandenberg said.

Ferentz acknowledged not being impressed by Soldier Field's playing surface back in 2007, calling it "hard." He said the Hawkeyes would hold two practices this week – one of which was Tuesday afternoon – on the outdoor grass field behind the new indoor facility, which features the same FieldTurf surface used at Kinnick Stadium. It marks the first time the outdoor field – which is also new – will be used for practices, primarily because of the summer heat.

"Hopefully, the field this year won't be as hard as it was five years ago," Ferentz said. "If it still is, we'll still play."

From the players' perspective, it isn't so much playing on grass as opposed to FieldTurf, but rather being able to find the right kind of cleats to wear on game day. Hyde said he was recently cautioned about Soldier Field's surface by former safety Jordan Bernstine, who played in the Washington Redskins' preseason game against the Bears there on Aug. 18.

"You just got to get your cleats right and go out before the game starts, get your footing right and just know that you got to have your feet underneath your hips," Hyde said.

Iowa has played seven games on grass surfaces over the past

two seasons, posting a 2-5 record – the two wins came last season at Purdue and in the 2010 Insight Bowl against Missouri. In 2009, the Hawkeyes played four games on grass and were victorious on all four occasions.

Use of multiple tight ends, rotation along D-line

When observing Saturday's game, there will be two things to keep an eye on throughout the afternoon. One being the usage of tight ends, which Ferentz has said is the strongest group on this year's team. The other is how rotations work along the defensive line, which he said was the most inexperienced.

By now, everyone knows what Fiedorowicz is capable of in Greg Davis' new offense, especially after the heap of praise bestowed upon him during the spring. Senior tight end Zach Derby has also proven as somewhat of a known commodity as well.

Then there are two other tight ends Ferentz said will see playing time against the Huskies – sophomore tight end Ray Hamilton and redshirt freshman Jake Duzey.

"They're both very detailed guys," Fiedorowicz said. "Ray's a big guy. He can block, he can catch the ball. [Tight Ends coach David Raih] has done a really good job coaching. Jake has got great hands. He has got the size. They both have got the size.

"At any time, I think any of us can play."

As for the defensive line, it's a group Ferentz said he has been pleased with in terms of progress made, but also one that could feature a rotation of anywhere between 6-8 players.

"I'm not sure we have somebody that can go out there and play 70, 75, 80 snaps right now," Ferentz said. "It's going to be a week-by-week process."

One of those surely to be included in the rotation is redshirt

freshman defensive tackle Darian Cooper. He said Tuesday he isn't sure exactly how many snaps he'll end up playing, but knows it'll be dictated largely by how he and the others all perform in practice this week.

"They're going to put out whoever they believe is the best for that situation," Cooper said when asked about how a possible rotation might be determined.

Nothing settled at strong safety yet

One position that remains up in the air is strong safety, as senior Tom Donatell and sophomore Nico Law continue to share reps with the first-team defense in practice and compete against each other to see who starts out there this weekend.

"We'll see how it goes," Ferentz said. "We're comfortable with either guy. I think whoever ends up getting the start, both will probably play some and they'll both play on special teams."

If it does wind up being Donatell, it makes for an intriguing story. Donatell was originally a walk-on and came to Iowa as a quarterback. He eventually found a role in the secondary, but was asked last season to move up to linebacker due to injuries plaguing the Hawkeyes at the position.

Donatell returns to being a defensive back, a spot he said is more "natural" for him. But he also said the knowledge he gained playing linebacker in 2011 has helped him immensely since making the switch back.

"Knowing the whole defense really helps on run fits and knowing where your help is, knowing your leverage and knowing where other guys need to be, getting other guys in position," Donatell said. "Playing linebacker helped me learn a lot of the defensive line stuff and the passing game. Just how everything works together has been really beneficial to me."

As for Law, he said the biggest improvement he has noticed from the start of fall camp up to now has come with his technique.

“Coverage, tackling, just everything,” Law said. “I’ve been more mentally focused.”

Team captains announced

As Hyde took questions from the media Tuesday afternoon at the new Kenyon Practice Facility, he was informed about being named one of Iowa’s four team captains for this weekend’s game. The news left him pleasantly surprised.

“Wow,” Hyde said. “It’s an honor. I’ve been trying to do a good job of leading this whole summer. It’s a great honor.”

In addition to Hyde, Ferentz announced at the start of his press conference that the trio of Jameses – Ferentz, Morris and Vandenberg – would also be team captains. This marks the second consecutive season Vandenberg has been voted a captain by the team.

8/28/2012: Iowa player audio with photos (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – On Tuesday, 16 members of the Iowa football team spoke with the media to discuss the Hawkeyes’ upcoming game on Sept. 1 against Northern Illinois, which is taking place at Soldier Field in Chicago, Ill.

Below is audio from each of the following players – senior strong safety Tom Donatell, sophomore strong safety Nico Law, sophomore left tackle Brandon Scherff, senior center James Ferentz, senior quarterback James Vandenberg, senior wide receiver Steven Staggs, senior defensive end Steve Bigach, junior cornerback B.J. Lowery, sophomore wide receiver Kevonte Martin-Manley, redshirt freshman defensive tackle Darian Cooper, junior fullback Brad Rogers, redshirt freshman right guard Austin Blythe, senior wide receiver Keenan Davis, senior cornerback Micah Hyde, junior tight end C.J. Fiedorowicz and sophomore defensive tackle Carl Davis:



Tom Donatell, Aug. 28, 2012

[Tom Donatell, senior strong safety](#)



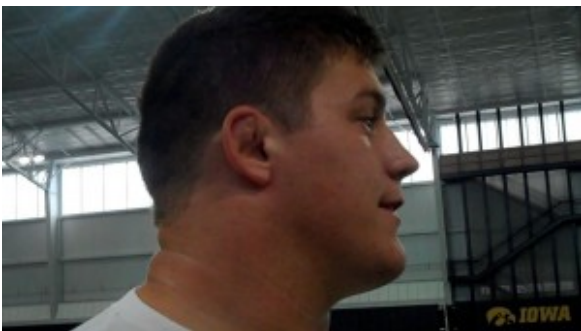
Nico Law, Aug. 28, 2012

[Nico Law, sophomore strong safety](#)



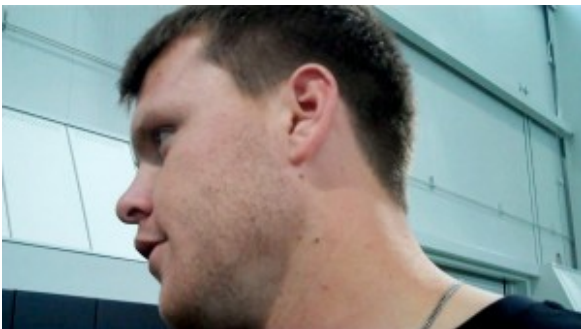
Brandon Scherff, Aug. 28,
2012

[Brandon Scherff, sophomore left tackle](#)



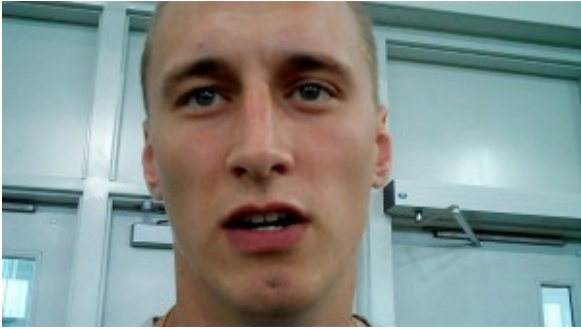
James Ferentz, Aug. 28, 2012

[James Ferentz, senior center](#)



James Vandenberg, Aug. 28,
2012

[James Vandenberg, senior quarterback](#)



Steven Staggs, Aug. 28, 2012

[Steven Staggs, senior wide receiver](#)



Steve Bigach, Aug. 28, 2012

[Steve Bigach, senior defensive end](#)



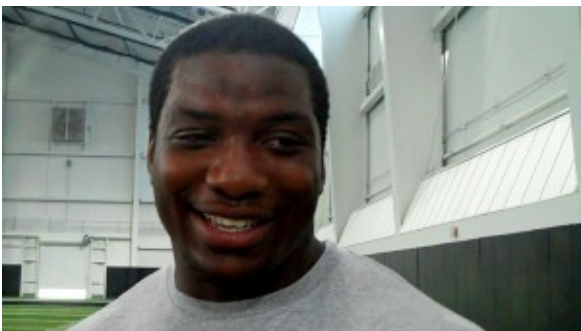
B.J. Lowery, Aug. 28, 2012

[B.J. Lowery, junior cornerback](#)



Kevonte Martin-Manley, Aug. 28, 2012

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



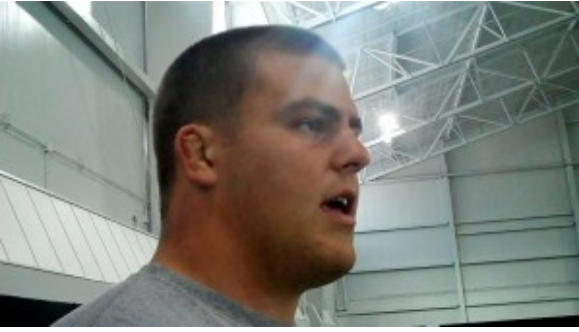
Darian Cooper, Aug. 28, 2012

[Darian Cooper, redshirt freshman defensive tackle](#)



Brad Rogers, Aug. 28, 2012

[Brad Rogers, junior fullback](#)



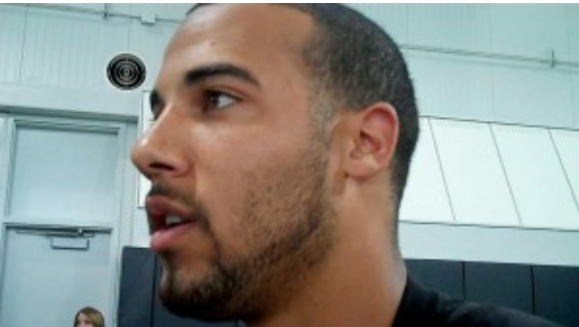
Austin Blythe, Aug. 28, 2012

[Austin Blythe, redshirt freshman right guard](#)



Keenan Davis, Aug. 28, 2012

[Keenan Davis, senior wide receiver](#)



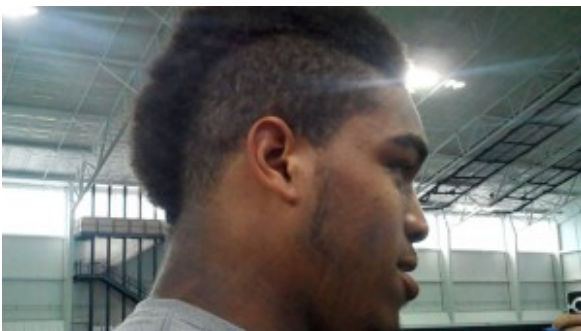
Micah Hyde, Aug. 28, 2012

[Micah Hyde, senior cornerback](#)



C.J. Fiedorowicz, Aug. 28, 2012

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



Carl Davis, Aug. 28, 2012

[Carl Davis, sophomore defensive tackle](#)

8/28/2012: 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:

8/28/2012: 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:

"I'm sure like most people, we're eager to get going here. Everybody has been practicing hard I know around the country and our team has done the same thing. We had, I think, a productive preseason and now we're into a new mode, certainly. We started school here a week ago and this is our first game week experience like everybody else. It's a new set of circumstances.

"All that being said, we're playing a very good Northern Illinois team. It's going to be a big challenge for us and we're eager to head up that way at the end of the week."

On whether he likes playing FCS opponents or if it's just something that has to be done:

"I don't know if I have a strong feeling either way. You know, I think it's just a sign of the times. It's very, very common across the country, so it's part of the pre-conference

scheduling if you will. You look at our game a couple of years ago, we had a good football team and we were very fortunate to beat [Northern Iowa]. It's kind of the way with us right now. We're looking for non-league games that look all very, very challenging. Certainly, Northern Illinois, that's the team we're focused on right now, that's going to be a great challenge for our team."

On how the running back position will be approached going into Saturday's game:

"Basically, anybody that's healthy and with us will play. We've got three guys figured out at the running back position. We've got Damon Bullock, who had a good spring and then two freshmen – Greg Garmon and Mike Malloy. We also have Brad Rogers and Mark Weisman back with us. They're our first five guys."

On how he was able to evaluate those five players during camp:

"Well, I guess the good news is they've all had plenty of opportunity to get work in. All five of the guys I just mentioned really did a nice job. Brad had some injury issues in and out during the course of preseason, but the other four guys got in a lot of work and all had a good camp."

On how many wide receivers and tight ends are expected to be used against Northern Illinois:

"I think it's probably reasonable to think that four of our tight ends will be in the game at some point. That's a group where I think we have good experience. C.J. Fiedorowicz really had a good spring and a good camp and I'd say the same thing about Zach Derby. Zach had his best spring and best camp, just like C.J., so those two guys are our most proven guys. Ray Hamilton has done a nice job and Jake Duzey is one of the younger guys that's coming along."

"At the receiver position, again, all of the guys that have

been practicing I think will be in the game at some point. It's probably a group that includes six guys, so it's just part of what we do. We play multiple tight ends and multiple receivers, so I think all six of those guys will play as well as the four tight ends."

On how he'd characterize what has happened at running back over the past years:

"I can't speculate on other guys. The guys we had played well. If you go back to 2009, we had a true freshman be the MVP of the Orange Bowl. He rushed for over 100 yards in that ball game. Then we had a true freshman be the MVP of the Insight Bowl rushing for over 200 yards.

"So we're used to playing younger guys certainly and, you know, you play the cards that are dealt to you. That's kind of what we've done at all positions, but the running back position has been one where we've had a lot of players playing and the good news is they've performed pretty well. I'm confident the group we have this year will do the same thing."

On how much running back Jordan Canzeri has practiced since returning last week from a torn ACL suffered last spring:

"Yeah, he's in gear. But he's coming off an ACL repair. He's working. He's doing great. The recovery has gone really well. But I think realistically, we'll reserve judgment on that. I think we're looking at weeks or months before we even talk about him entering back into contact or anything live at all.

"You know, right now it's great that his rehab is going well. I mean, we're thrilled and it's great to get him back again. I think that makes him feel better and it helps the rehab process. But again, realistically, we're probably months away from having him return to action."

On how much the coaching staff has explored using Rogers as a running back vs. as a fullback:

“Yeah, again, we don’t have the deepest group right now. We’re basically the three running backs I mentioned a minute ago – Bullock, Garmon, Malloy – and then factor in Weisman and Rogers. Those are the guys that have gotten the most work. And Jonathan Gimm has done a really nice job, too. He’s purely at fullback. With Brad being in and out of camp, he looked really good last week, but I’d say the guys that have gotten the most work are the three guys I mentioned, plus Mark Weisman.”

On whether things done in practice get changed because of what has happened at running back:

“Not especially. We’ve really been pretty cautious with our tackling, live tackling in practice. That’s something that everybody has different philosophies on. I was talking to a pro scout the other day and they tackle frequently, which is really unusual, I guess, or at least not what I’m used to.

“But the places I’ve been and coming back here, we’ve always been pretty cautious, especially about guys that have been tackled. If a guy has been tackled in live competition, we really try to minimize those opportunities and with younger players, you do a little bit more. But it has been something we’ve been careful of.

“All that being said, it doesn’t ensure you’re going to keep guys healthy, but we feel good about that. The guys have worked hard over the last three weeks at all positions and we’re with probably most teams – we need to go out and play a game now.”

On how he’d assess the development of his defensive line at this point:

“I thought they improved during the course of spring practice and I would say the same thing about the last three weeks. Obviously, it’s a group that has a potential to improve and needs to improve. You know, we’re hardly experienced there. It’s probably our least experienced position on the football

team right now.

"But the good news is we did get Carl Davis and Dom Alvis back. We didn't have them in the spring. They weren't available. Those guys are working back into it and I think right now, it's fair to say we'll probably play six, seven, or maybe even eight guys during the course of a game. I'm not sure we have many guys or any guys that can play 75-80 snaps a game right now."

"We had that a couple of years ago. It's a different set of circumstances, but I think collectively, the group is going to play well and play effectively. I'm excited to see them play and see how they do."

On the impression Nate Meier has left on him and the position he'll be playing at:

"Yeah, Nate's doing a good job. We're not going to play, it doesn't look like right now we're going to play an awful lot of freshmen. But we have moved him to the linebacker position. He's a very aggressive, very tough-minded guy. It seems like that's going well right now, so at this point, he's a linebacker and I think he's a guy who could probably help us on special teams. I think we'll probably hold on that a little bit right now, but I think if we let him go, he'd probably be a guy that could help us on special teams."

On whether there's consideration for redshirting him yet:

"That would be the plan at this point. But, things are always subject to change, as you know."

Hawkeyes in the NFL: 2012 Preseason Week Four

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

The final week of the 2012 NFL preseason begins Thursday. After teams had to trim rosters down to 75 players by Aug. 27, there currently remain 38 former Iowa football players listed on NFL rosters. A pair of undrafted rookies were let go as former linebacker Tyler Nielsen was among those cut by the Minnesota Vikings and former punter Eric Guthrie was cut by the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

Below is a list of this week's preseason games in the NFL, including which former Iowa players are with which teams. For those in Eastern Iowa, KGAN-TV (CBS affiliate) will carry the Minnesota Vikings' preseason game on Thursday against the Houston Texans, while KFXA-TV (Fox affiliate) will provide coverage of the Chicago Bears' preseason game against the Cleveland Browns, also on Thursday.

In addition, there are three nationally televised preseason games this week including Thursday's contest on NFL Network between the Kansas City Chiefs and Green Bay Packers, which features a total of five former Hawkeye players.

Wednesday, Aug. 29:

New England at NY Giants, 6 p.m. (NFL Network) – **Patriots:** Jeff Tarpinian, Markus Zusevics (reserve/non-football injury list), Brad Herman (IR); **Giants:** Tyler Sash

Tampa Bay at Washington, 6 p.m. – **Buccaneers:** Dallas Clark, Adrian Clayborn; **Redskins:** Jordan Bernstine, Adam Gettis

Miami at Dallas, 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, Aug. 30:

Atlanta at Jacksonville, 5:30 p.m. – **Falcons:** Jonathan Babineaux

NY Jets at Philadelphia, 5:30 p.m. – **Jets:** Shonn Greene, Matt Kroul; **Eagles:** Marvin McNutt, Julian Vandervelde

Buffalo at Detroit, 6 p.m. – **Bills:** Scott Chandler; **Lions:** Ryan Donahue, Riley Reiff, Amari Spivey

Kansas City at Green Bay, 6 p.m. (NFL Network) – **Chiefs:** Rob Bruggeman, Tony Moeaki, Ricky Stanzi; **Packers:** Bryan Bulaga, Mike Daniels

Minnesota at Houston, 6 p.m. (KGAN-TV) – **Vikings:** Christian Ballard, Chad Greenway, Allen Reisner; **Texans:** Mitch King

Cincinnati at Indianapolis, 6 p.m. – **Bengals:** Shaun Prater (IR); **Colts:** Seth Olsen, Pat Angerer (injured), A.J. Edds (IR)

Carolina at Pittsburgh, 6 p.m. – **Panthers:** Charles Godfrey

Baltimore at St. Louis, 6 p.m. – **Ravens:** Sean Considine, Marshal Yanda; **Rams:** Bradley Fletcher, Bryan Mattison

New Orleans at Tennessee, 6 p.m. – **Titans:** Karl Klug

Chicago at Cleveland, 6:30 p.m. (KFXA-TV)

San Diego at San Francisco, 9 p.m. – **Chargers:** Nate Kaeding

Oakland at Seattle, 9 p.m. – **Raiders:** Brandon Myers

Denver at Arizona, 10 p.m. (NFL Network)

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

8/27/2012: State of the Big Ten, Volume 62 (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

It's amazing to think that it has been five years now since the Big Ten Network was officially launched. Back in 2007, there were so many questions as to whether or not a television network that focused specifically on one conference could stand the test of the time. It was clear the Big Ten had a plan in place, but so many things had to materialize in order for BTN to become the network it is today.

All across Big Ten campuses, there were disputes between BTN and cable providers throughout the Midwest. The cable providers wanted to know why they should have a channel that was considered to have niche programming be a part of their basic lineups. For example, it was nearly a full calendar year before Mediacom, a cable provider that serves states such as Iowa, came to agreement with BTN about adding the channel. So for a full calendar year, those in Iowa who didn't have satellite or another cable provider that did carry BTN were out of the loop on Iowa football and men's basketball games.

What's even more amazing to think about now though is seeing how BTN has managed to adapt over the years and become more

well-renown. On one hand, some of the simple things about the network haven't changed. BTN's most prominent names like Dave Revsine, Mike Hall, Rick Pizzo, Gerry DiNardo, Howard Griffith and Jimmy Jackson have been there since Day One.

Yet it also seems that through BTN, every single one of those aforementioned names have been reasons why the quality of programming has improved. For instance, BTN's football coverage has grown significantly over the last five years. From the amount of shows, to the fact that guys like Revsine, DiNardo and Griffith have been able to tackle enormous off-the-field stories such as what has transpired in recent years at both Ohio State and Penn State.

Now this isn't to say there haven't been failures. One of the things BTN attempted to combat the whole "niche programming" stigma was to provide educational programming featuring each of the Big Ten universities. Just recently, it realized those shows weren't getting any ratings, so they were ditched.

But there's three things that may have defined the network's success more than anything else: 1. The fact that non-revenue sports are being televised. Sports like field hockey and gymnastics aren't going to get the ratings football or basketball get, but the dedication shown by BTN towards every sport the conference is involved in speaks volumes. 2. The fact that all 12 schools are benefiting financially from all the revenue being brought in. 3. The fact that other conferences like the Pac-12 and SEC are now forming their own networks, following the lead set by the Big Ten.

On Aug. 30, BTN turns five years old. It's amazing to think how far it has come from the network that was barely being watched due to cable disputes to what it is today, a network that has proven its worth in numerous fashions.