

3/14/2012: Live Chat – 5-6 p.m. CT (premium)

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[3/14/2012: HawkeyeDrive.com live chat](#)

3/12/2012: State of the Big Ten, Volume 59 (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

The NCAA Tournament will be held for the 74th time, and once again, the Northwestern Wildcats aren't participating.

Northwestern came as close as it has ever come to making its first ever appearance in the 68-team field, but it just wasn't meant to be. The Wildcats had a chance to boost its résumé last week at the Big Ten Tournament, but bowed out in the first round by losing to 10th-seeded Minnesota in overtime, 75-68. That loss proved to be the ultimate dagger sending Northwestern back to the NIT once again.

At the end of the day, the Wildcats just didn't meet all the criteria needed. They could've skated by without a bad loss had a team like Michigan or Ohio State had beat them instead of Minnesota. The Golden Gophers did secure a 6-seed in the NIT, but that was a game Northwestern really should have won at Bankers Life Fieldhouse in Indianapolis.

It would have been a nice story and at some point, it should eventually happen. Northwestern may have higher academic standards than most other universities, yet schools like Duke, Harvard and Vanderbilt are all in this year's NCAA tournament field, so that excuse isn't as strong as it may have been in years past.

Bill Carmody has done a better job of recruiting. John Shurna's a player that evolved into the Wildcats' all-time leading scorer this season. Northwestern also has another player in Drew Crawford that should be able to make an NBA roster someday. The future also looks bright with guards like JerShon Cobb and Dave Sobolewski, who made the Big Ten's all-freshman team.

In other words, there's plenty in place over in Evanston. Not to mention the fact that the Big Ten was widely considered to be the toughest conference in college basketball this season. There's no guarantee that moniker will stick with the league next year, so this was definitely a missed opportunity by Northwestern.

But the question now becomes two-fold. Do you continue sticking with what's in place and hope it can get you there, or do ties with Carmody end up getting cut (maybe next year, not now) because one could only get to this juncture so many times without breaking through?

Is Carmody still a long-term answer for Northwestern? He has coached there for over a decade now and while he has made the Wildcats a team people should be discussing, at what point do

fans start thinking they've had enough?

Keep in mind that Northwestern didn't have a winning record in league play (8-10). Yes, the Wildcats had one win over Michigan State in league play. But that win obviously wasn't enough to put them over the top.

Right now, the outlook appears to be that Northwestern will probably be in a similar boat next season – a team that could be on the cusp of the NCAA tournament, but either might not have enough or might not do enough to get there. How much of this can those in Evanston take?

This isn't a cause to fire Carmody. Obviously, he's a good coach and a well-respected coach in the Big Ten? But look at Bruce Weber. As highly regarded as he was, he just got fired from Illinois after nine seasons that included an appearance in the 2005 national championship game. The point is if Northwestern continues to have seasons like each of the last three, fans are going to become restless with Carmody if they aren't already.

And make no mistake: He and Tubby Smith are the two Big Ten coaches sitting on hot seats now with Weber and Doc Sadler no longer coaching at their schools.

It's an interesting time in Evanston, and it will be interesting to see what direction the Wildcats ultimately take.

Woods, Ferentz ready for new

challenges



Iowa linebackers coach LeVar Woods discusses his new role with the Hawkeyes during a press conference held on Wednesday, March 7, 2012, at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City.

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – As former players, LeVar Woods and Brian Ferentz both left their marks on the gridiron of Kinnick Stadium and both found opportunities in the NFL as undrafted free agents.

These two Hawkeyes are now getting the opportunity to bleed Black and Gold once again, but coaching the positions they once played.

Woods and Ferentz were both officially named as assistant coaches back on Feb. 18, with Woods getting to coach linebackers and Ferentz the offensive line. Woods gets his opportunity after having spent the last four seasons as an administrative assistant for Iowa, while Ferentz returns to Iowa City after a coaching stint with the New England Patriots, whom he reached Super Bowl XLVI with just one month

ago.

For Woods, the chance to coach at his alma mater while being able to raise his family in his home state was something the former linebacker couldn't pass up.

"I feel very fortunate, like the most fortunate man in the world," Woods said. "I get to coach a position I played at the university I attended for a coach I have the utmost respect for.

"It was great for me to be able to start all the opportunities right here in a place that I love."

For Ferentz, the chance to reunite with his father (and his brother, for that matter) was one he called "a no-brainer" after he got a chance to follow the advice of the previous head coach he worked for, Patriots head coach Bill Belichick, and use the time following New England's 21-17 loss to the New York Giants to "decompress."

"We took some time, but it just felt right," Ferentz said about returning to Iowa. "To me, it was a no-brainer, if that makes any sense, to come home and coach here and to be a part of this program that I feel very strongly about and that's pretty special.

"It has a special place in my heart. It was a pretty easy decision at the end of the day."



Iowa offensive line coach Brian Ferentz discusses his

new role with the Hawkeyes during a press conference held on Wednesday, March 7, 2012, at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City.

Both were part of a major coaching transition that featured Iowa hiring new coordinators on both offense and defense. Ferentz likened it to dating for the first time following a divorce and said change could prove to be beneficial in the long run as the offensive coaches work from dusk until dark with newly-named offensive coordinator Greg Davis on shaping out what the 2012 Iowa offense will look like.

“It’s a really healthy thing and I think it has been healthy for everybody,” Ferentz said. “I think it will be really good for our players, too, to be exposed to some new things. We started that process and I think that’s exciting.”

In terms of recruiting, head coach Kirk Ferentz said his oldest son would handle recruiting in the state of Ohio, while Woods would be assigned to recruiting both Texas and the Kansas City area.

Having gotten a chance to fill in for Norm Parker on the coaching staff in 2010, as well as serve the role of interim defensive line coach shortly after Rick Kaczinski left to join the Nebraska staff, Woods was also able to experience recruiting trips and get a feel for what he’ll now be asked to do even more of.

“All of my recruiting that I have done up to this point has been here on campus,” Woods said. “It’s a whole different ball game when you’re sitting in the living room across from mom and dad and they are asking question that you’re not quite sure how to answer or know the answer to.”

Both assistants made clear there would be differences going forward. Woods mentioned how he stressed to his group of linebackers how he might ask them to read things differently or make a few tweaks to what had typically been done before.

As for Ferentz, he said his challenge between now and when the 2012 season does get underway is to earn the trust of the players he'll be coaching.

"Basically, we are working under the premise that they have my trust completely until they prove otherwise and I need to go earn theirs through the spring and summer," Ferentz said.

TRANSCRIPT: [Ferentz/Woods/Ferentz transcript \(March 7, 2012\)](#) (Courtesy: UI Sports Info.)

3/5/2012: State of the Big Ten, Volume 58 (premium)

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By Brendan Stiles

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For the second time in three seasons, the Big Ten found itself with a three-way tie for its regular season championship as Michigan State, Michigan and Ohio State all finished 13-5 in conference play.

What makes this year's triad of champions even more remarkable is that unlike the three-way tie that occurred during the 2009-10 season, all three teams tied this season went 1-1 against each other. The Buckeyes went into the Breslin Center in East Lansing, Mich., and walked out 72-70 winners over the Spartans.

That game on March 4 cost Michigan State an outright title and allowed both Ohio State and Michigan to join them. The Spartans still managed to secure the top seed in this week's Big Ten Tournament due to tiebreakers, but considering they were two games ahead of both the Wolverines and Buckeyes with two games left and couldn't separate themselves from those two teams, the season ended on a sour note.

While Michigan State backed its way into this three-way tie, Michigan and Ohio State both found themselves having to win a pair of road games in order for what transpired to even be a possibility. The Wolverines had games at Illinois and Penn State, while the Buckeyes played at Northwestern and Michigan State. Michigan hadn't beaten the Fighting Illini at Assembly Hall since the 1994-95 season, while Ohio State found itself needing a last-second shot from Jared Sullinger to escape Welsh-Ryan Arena with a win over the Wildcats.

Then came Sunday. The Wolverines traveled to State College, Pa., and edged out Penn State, 71-65. Afterwards, the team gathered around to watch the conclusion of Ohio State/Michigan State and found themselves celebrating once the Buckeyes came away with the win.

As far as how this sets up both this week and beyond, one intriguing aspect here is that these teams could very well have difficult quarterfinal games in Indianapolis. Illinois is the No. 9 seed, but managed to beat Michigan State this year in the teams' lone meeting. Northwestern is the No. 7 seed and with a win over Minnesota would get a third crack at a Michigan team that won both meetings this season between the

two in overtime. Finally, there's Purdue, who is the No. 6 seed and could very well be playing an Ohio State squad it only lost to by three points at Value City Arena in Columbus. Add in that the Boilermakers will have a bit of a crowd advantage given West Lafayette's proximity to Indianapolis, and the Buckeyes have a big challenge.

Looking beyond this week and towards the NCAA tournament, Michigan State still has a slim shot at a No. 1 seed, but would probably need to win the Big Ten Tournament this weekend in order to obtain it. Ohio State would likely secure a No. 2 seed should it win the tournament title game, or even reach the championship. Michigan is probably looking at a No. 2 or No. 3 seed depending on how it fares.

Either way, this season proved to be pretty remarkable in the Big Ten and these three teams tying for first place further suggests just how difficult the conference truly was this season.

Davis leaves first impression at Iowa



Greg Davis (right) was formally introduced as

Iowa's offensive coordinator during a press conference held on Monday, March 5, 2012, at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City.

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Seven days after being named Iowa's new offensive coordinator, Greg Davis finally got the opportunity on Monday to publicly discuss his new role after a year away from football. Davis, who was Texas' offensive coordinator for 13 years, took over for the departed Ken O'Keefe, who left to become the new wide receivers coach of the Miami Dolphins.

Coincidentally, the connection between Davis and head coach Kirk Ferentz was the man who snagged O'Keefe away from Iowa – Dolphins head coach Joe Philbin. Davis was being considered by Philbin as a possibility to join his staff in Miami, but that never materialized. When the vacancy at Iowa arose however, Davis reached out to Ferentz and conversations began to pick up.

While Davis wasn't offered on the spot, it became clear Ferentz had enough interest in him that he wanted Davis to make a return trip to Iowa City following the coaches' annual Hawkeye Cruise held the week prior to Davis officially being named offensive coordinator.

Because Davis' hire was classified as an emergency hiring by the UI, Iowa athletics director Gary Barta said Davis is basically serving an interim role for now and would have to eventually re-apply for the position.

But the long-term future isn't of immediate concern to Davis, who made clear his only concern in the present was to help lay

a foundation during the spring so he and the rest of the staff can identify who can step up and make plays for the offense.

“We want to remain physical,” Davis said. “We want to continue to be able to run the football. At the same time, we’re going to be in some ball games where we are going to have to throw the ball and we want to be proficient enough.

“Our definition of balance is being able to win the game either way.”

Davis will also take over O’Keefe’s other duty as quarterbacks coach, meaning he’ll be working extensively with senior-to-be quarterback James Vandenberg. After being able to watch all the game film from Iowa’s 2011 season, Davis came away impressed with his new signal-caller, not only for what he can do through the air, but with his ability to improvise and be able to run with the football when need be.

“James Vandenberg is an outstanding player. I think everybody agrees with that,” Davis said. “I’m excited about being able to work with him.”

One major point of emphasis made by both Davis and Ferentz on Monday was that of flexibility. Davis reflected back on the number of times he had to adapt his play-calling at Texas in order to utilize talents of those such as former Longhorn quarterbacks Vince Young and Colt McCoy and former running back Ricky Williams, who won the Heisman Trophy during Davis’ first season at Texas in 1998.

“He’s an outstanding teacher,” Ferentz said. “This came across from everybody I visited with and I think equally a big part of teaching is being flexible in your thinking.

“No matter where you’re coaching, it’s all about doing what’s best for the players that you have on your roster.”

The differences between Davis and his predecessor make up a

short list. But one key difference is Davis will call plays and work from the press box as opposed to operating from the sidelines as O'Keefe did during his tenure at Iowa

"I've worked from the boundary before and you're just removed," Davis said. "It almost is like a video game in that you're not hearing all the collisions and all that and you can lay out all your charts and your information and that kind of stuff.

"That's the reason I like working from up there."

As far as actual play-calling is concerned, Davis said he wants to implement the best of both worlds – what worked for him at Texas, along with what has worked for Iowa in the 13 years Ferentz has been head coach. He mentioned no-huddle and tempo being discussed along with the zone blocking scheme the Hawkeyes have been known for.

"From the very first time Kirk and I started talking, it was about blending philosophy, about blending the way we call things and creating something that was 2012," Davis said. "That's what we are trying to do."

TRANSCRIPT: [Ferentz/Davis transcript \(March 5, 2012\)](#) (Courtesy: UI Sports Info.)

Parker embraces new role as defensive coordinator



Phil Parker was introduced as Iowa's defensive coordinator during a press conference held Friday, March 2, 2012, at the Hayden Fry Football Complex in Iowa City.

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Becoming Iowa's defensive coordinator wasn't a goal Phil Parker had set for himself. He had spent the last 24 seasons as a defensive backs coach, including the last 13 years in that position at Iowa. Offers to leave for other coaching gigs came over the course of those 13 years, but Parker and his family remained content being in Iowa.

The patience paid off for Parker, who spoke publicly for the first time Friday since being promoted to defensive coordinator on Feb. 7 by head coach Kirk Ferentz.

Parker said he was offered the position in late January, and the comfort zone both he and his family had was more than enough to accept the challenge.

"I think when you're in this profession, and I've been coaching for 24 years with the secondary, that you always have goals set," Parker said. "It just seemed like a good opportunity for me and my family."

As for how he would differentiate himself from his predecessor, Norm Parker, Phil said he plans to be himself, but that not a whole lot would be different. Iowa will still run a 4-3 scheme as it has since Ferentz took over as head coach before the 1999 season.

“There might be a little bit more things, how we prepare, how we look at things,” Parker said. “We may try to get a guy down a little bit more than we usually do. But really, when it comes down to it, you’re still teaching fundamentals and it’s going to come down to getting off blocks and making tackles and keeping guys from scoring.”

Ferentz reiterated Friday that Parker’s track record as an assistant coach was what ultimately stood out to him when making the decision to promote him on the coaching staff.

“He has got a very sharp mind, very inquisitive mind professionally,” Ferentz said. “Most importantly, his players have reflected his coaching on the field. They respond to what he has coached them to do and they’ve gone out and performed in a really admirable way.”

Parker, who had handled recruiting in the Ohio and Michigan areas, said he hopes he’s still able to use the recruiting connections he has in those states after he acknowledged he would be on the road less as a result of his promotion. After introducing Parker Friday, Ferentz said both Parker and newly-named offensive coordinator Greg Davis wouldn’t have official recruiting areas like the other assistant coaches would be designated but that both coordinators would play recruiting roles.

Davis will be introduced and hold a press conference at the Hayden Fry Football Complex on March 5, seven days after officially being named offensive coordinator. On Friday, Ferentz commented publicly for the first time on hiring the former Texas offensive coordinator, who will also handle

duties as Iowa's quarterbacks coach.

Ferentz said Davis would have all the play-calling duties and that he had no issues with Davis being away from football for a year after he resigned from Texas in 2010 following 13 seasons on Mack Brown's staff as offensive coordinator.

"I can just tell you this – he was out because he chose to be out," Ferentz said. "I would imagine he probably had a couple options. We're just really excited to have him."

TRANSCRIPT: [Ferentz/Parker transcript \(March 2, 2012\)](#)
(Courtesy: UI Sports Info.)

Davis named new offensive coordinator, quarterbacks coach

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Former Texas offensive coordinator Greg Davis has been named Iowa's new offensive coordinator, head coach Kirk Ferentz announced in a release sent by the UI on Monday. Davis, who will also be Iowa's quarterbacks coach, takes over both duties from Ken O'Keefe, who resigned Feb. 3 to become the Miami Dolphins' wide receivers coach.

Davis comes to Iowa one year after resigning at Texas, where he spent the first 13 seasons of Mack Brown's tenure overseeing the Longhorn offense. During that span, Texas won one national championship, played for another, and Davis

worked with quarterbacks such as Vince Young and Colt McCoy, both of whom were Heisman finalists and are currently in the NFL. Former Longhorn running back Ricky Williams won the Heisman Trophy during the 1998 season, Davis' first spent at Texas.

"Greg's units have demonstrated impressive production and they have done so using a variety of systems and styles," Ferentz said in a statement. "He has done an outstanding job of playing towards the strengths and abilities of the players with which he has worked.

"I am very confident he will be a tremendous asset to our program, campus and community."

Before arriving at Texas, Davis had also worked as an assistant at North Carolina, Georgia, Arkansas and Tulane, where he was head coach from 1988-1990 after working there under Brown. The former McNeese State quarterback began his coaching career at Texas A&M, where he spent eight seasons as the quarterbacks coach.

Davis became the latest addition to the Ferentz's coaching staff, which is now set for the 2012 season, as well as the second outside hire (the other being Brian Ferentz named as offensive line coach after serving as the New England Patriots' tight ends coach). Along with Davis and Ferentz being on board, former linebacker LeVar Woods was named linebackers coach after serving as the interim defensive line coach during the 2011 Insight Bowl, and assistants Reese Morgan and Darrell Wilson changed coaching duties following the promotion of Phil Parker from defensive backs coach to defensive coordinator earlier this month.

2/27/2012: State of the Big Ten, Volume 57 (premium)

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When the 2011-12 men's basketball season comes to an end, Nebraska athletics director Tom Osborne is going to have a difficult decision on his hands. That decision is whether or not to retain Doc Sadler as his men's basketball coach, and it's a decision that needs to be made as soon as possible, one way or the other.

Nebraska is one year away from opening Pinnacle Bank Arena, which will be the team's new basketball venue beginning in 2013-14. Along with it will be upgrades that are necessary in order for the basketball program to keep pace with the rest of the Big Ten.

Aside from there actually being a new facility where games will be played and practices will be held, the situation in Lincoln looks eerily similar to one that occurred in Iowa City two years ago when Iowa athletics director Gary Barta pulled the trigger on a coaching change right before renovations of Carver-Hawkeye Arena were completed.

The reason for this analogy is simple – Pinnacle Bank Arena ought to be used as a recruiting ploy and whether it's Sadler or somebody else coaching the Cornhuskers, that coach has to be allowed the opportunity to reap some of the rewards

himself.

If Osborne elects to keep Sadler on board, then Sadler deserves the opportunity to see everything through and get an opportunity to use whatever's new to the benefit of him and his staff. Keeping him around only to relieve him of his coaching duties won't do anyone any good.

Nebraska has to be able to sell something when that arena has its grand opening, anything that isn't a team completely rebuilding from scratch. The clamoring from Cornhusker fans to fire Sadler has gained steam over the last few weeks, not only because of the number of losses, but how some of the games Nebraska's losing have occurred. Last weekend, the Cornhuskers traveled to Michigan State and left the Breslin Center scoring a measly 34 points for the entire game.

Yes, Michigan State is the Big Ten's best team. And yes, Nebraska did lose its top player – senior guard Bo Spencer – to an ankle injury during that contest. But even with both of those things working against the Cornhuskers, they ought to have still been able to score at least 40 points. Heck, they scored 48 points during the second half of their 79-73 win over Iowa last month. That's 14 more points in one half alone than what was accumulated in East Lansing Feb. 25.

Sadler has been Nebraska's head coach for six years. Last season while finishing their tenure in the Big 12, the Cornhuskers played in the NIT and looked like a competitive basketball team. They've been plagued with injuries this season, but in comparison to some of the top programs in the Big Ten, the talent just isn't there right now.

If a new coach is going to be brought in, it has to be done this spring so that way that person, whoever it is, can at least be given a fair attempt to generate enthusiasm for the program as it enters its new digs. If it's really inevitable that Sadler isn't the solution long-term for Nebraska, then

why waste any time beyond the Big Ten Tournament if you're Osborne?

Again, it's Osborne's decision to make – one way or the other. The decision just has to be made with the long-term interests of "Nebrasketball" in mind.

2/20/2012: State of the Big Ten, Volume 56 (premium)

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After further examination of what transpired over the past weekend in West Lafayette, Ind., Purdue head coach Matt Painter made a pair of wise decisions regarding player personnel and he deserves credit for making such decisions at such a crucial point in the season.

Purdue guard D.J. Byrd was arrested by Indiana State Police on charges of public intoxication following an incident that took place at a West Lafayette bar. As a result, Byrd was suspended from playing in Purdue's 76-62 loss to Michigan State over the weekend at Mackey Arena.

But the suspension wasn't the only punishment handed down by Painter. With Byrd at the time of his arrest was forward

Kelsey Barlow, a player who had prior baggage since becoming a Boilermaker. While Barlow wasn't arrested, his involvement was enough for Painter to dismiss him from the program altogether.

Now there could be ongoing debate as to why both Byrd and Barlow were out at bars late night as they were in-season, but that's another story for another time. No, here's what ought to be considered.

Painter could've left Purdue last spring when Missouri came offering with its then-vacant head coaching position, and he chose to stay in charge of the Boilermakers. He made the commitment to his players. Some of his players, evidently, didn't reciprocate the favor back.

Also consider Purdue's standing as a bubble team. On one hand, the Boilermakers have separated themselves enough from the Big Ten's middle pack that they ought to be a safe bet as far as making the NCAA tournament is concerned. But with that said, it's also not as though Purdue has really stood apart from others on a national level.

With that in mind, Painter needed to exert himself and use this incident as a reminder that he's in charge. Purdue has lost games this season that have left some of its fans in a state of disbelief. The last thing he needs right now is anything suggesting to those on the outside that Purdue might be unstable.

Byrd will get a chance to redeem himself, and the Boilermakers have a chance to grow from this episode. Given Painter's background and track record since becoming head coach, there's no reason to think they can't build off this and gain momentum entering the NCAA tournament.

Right now, Purdue's in a favorable spot as the No. 6 seed in the Big Ten tournament. It's favorable in the sense that the No. 6 seed has reached the championship game each of the last two seasons. Any sort of run two weeks from now in nearby

Indianapolis, and the Boilermakers would be a lock for March Madness.

This is a situation that could have gotten uglier than it did. If Barlow's dismissal and Byrd's suspension from a game Purdue probably wouldn't have won with him is the worst, then it's not all bad in West Lafayette.

There are situations around the country where coaches in similar predicaments as a bubble team are seeing their seasons spiral out of control (see Illinois for Exhibit A). Painter's hard-line stance during this time ought to resonate within that locker room going forward, and with players like Robbie Hummel leading the way, there's no reason to think Purdue won't have a run in them assuming everyone's on the same page again.

Not every coach would do what Painter did with three weeks left before the NCAA tournament. That's why he ought to be commended for what he did.

Seven Hawkeyes participating in NFL Combine this week

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

This week, seven former Iowa football players will be at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis, Ind., participating at the 2012 NFL Combine.

The group consists of four offensive players and three defensive players. The seven invitees are Marvin McNutt, Adam

Gettis, Riley Reiff, Markus Zusevics, Mike Daniels, Tyler Nielsen and Shaun Prater.

All four days of workouts at the NFL Combine will feature at least one former Hawkeye. Each player is slated to be in Indianapolis for four days.

Iowa's Pro Day has been set for March 19, [according to nfl.com](#). The 2012 NFL Draft will start on April 26 and conclude April 28.

Below is the schedule for when each player will participate in workouts. The NFL Combine officially starts Feb. 22, with the first set of workouts taking place Feb. 25.

Feb. 25, 2012: DAY ONE – Gettis, Reiff, Zusevics

Feb. 26, 2012: DAY TWO – McNutt

Feb. 27, 2012: DAY THREE – Daniels, Nielsen

Feb. 28, 2012: DAY FOUR – Prater