

Ferentz names two more assistants

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

A pair of former Iowa football players were named assistant coaches on Saturday as former center Brian Ferentz and former linebacker LeVar Woods will be part of head coach Kirk Ferentz's staff in 2012.

Brian, who is Kirk's oldest son, joins the staff as the new offensive line coach two weeks after being in the Super Bowl as the tight ends coach for the New England Patriots. He not only replaces Reese Morgan, who was moved across the trenches to coach the defensive line, but will also have the chance to coach his brother, James, who has started at center each of the past two seasons.

As for Woods, he will coach the linebackers in place of Darrell Wilson, who is now coaching defensive backs. This announcement comes nearly two months after Woods served as the interim defensive line coach in the 2011 Insight Bowl after former defensive line coach Rick Kaczinski left for Nebraska.

The only position left to be filled is offensive coordinator after Ken O'Keefe resigned on Feb. 3 to become the wide receivers coach of the Miami Dolphins. No timetable has been given for when a new offensive coordinator will be named.

2/13/2012: State of the Big Ten, Volume 55 (premium)

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It's mid-February, which usually means in the world of college basketball, plenty of discussion and dissection will take place regarding bubble teams and which resumes warrant an appearance in this year's NCAA tournament.

One of the teams that is going to be discussed heavily here in the coming weeks is Illinois. The Fighting Illini are currently 16-9 and are in a four-way tie for seventh place in the Big Ten with a 5-7 conference record.

It seems that this discussion is taking place on a regular basis now when it comes to Illinois. That might not be a great sign for its head coach, Bruce Weber.

The Fighting Illini are an interesting case study here. Two years ago, they didn't merit being in the NCAA tournament, and as it turned out, Illinois was in the NIT back in 2010. Last year, the Fighting Illini were a No. 9 seed and did beat UNLV in the second round before falling to top-seeded Kansas.

This season, Illinois has racked up wins against the two teams that currently sit atop the Big Ten – Michigan State and Ohio State. However, the amazing thing is that those also happen to be its two most recent victories. Back on Jan. 19, the

Fighting Illini were sitting alone in first place of the Big Ten when they lost 54-52 at Penn State, who was alone in last place at the time and is currently tied for last place right now with Nebraska.

Since then, the Fighting Illini have been reeling. They've lost games to Northwestern, who prior to last week, hadn't won at Assembly Hall since 1999 when Illinois was the worst team in the conference. There have also been losses to Wisconsin at home, Minnesota, Indiana, and Michigan.

Looking at Illinois' remaining schedule, it has a huge home game coming up against Purdue on Feb. 15. Win that, and the Fighting Illini might be O.K. come March. Lose, and there's a distinct possibility of there maybe being two wins in the rest of the way. That would result in a 7-11 Big Ten mark and an overall record of 18-13 entering the Big Ten tournament.

Here's the thing, though: Even if Illinois reaches the NCAA tournament, Fighting Illini fans have already questioned Weber's job security. Given the fact Illinois has a new athletics director in Mike Thomas that wasn't hesitant about relieving Ron Zook of his coaching duties after six straight losses to close out the 2011 football season, Weber's seat is warmer than usual.

This is a program that ought to be able to land top recruits out of Chicago on a regular basis, yet that isn't always the case. And while it might not have been with "his players," Weber did coach Illinois to an appearance in the national championship game back in 2005, where it lost to North Carolina.

Weber has shown he can win with enough talent, and while the Fighting Illini entered this season with a slightly different look from a year ago in terms of player personnel, there's still talent on this team. Junior guard Brandon Paul is one of the league's top scorers and it'd be a shock at this point if

he wasn't first-team all-Big Ten. Meyers Leonard is being projected by some – perhaps foolishly – to be a lottery pick if he decided to leave early for the NBA.

But with the talent comes results, and if the results aren't showing improvement, there's going to be incentive to not retain Weber. Illinois has to be careful if it goes this route though. Letting go of Weber won't change things if his successor can't perform any better recruiting the Chicagoland area. That has been and will always be the key area for Illinois, especially the city.

These next few weeks are going to be very telling when it comes to the Fighting Illini – both in terms of how this season ends and how the program's future will be shaped. Because either way, decisions – tough decisions – will need to be made.

COMMENTARY: A complex read



Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz discusses changes made to his coaching staff during a press conference on Wednesday, Feb. 8, 2012, at the Hayden Fry Football

Complex in Iowa City.

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – As Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz took to his seat to a gathering of reporters and cameras staring directly at him, one wouldn't have thought his discussion of internal coaching changes Wednesday had an impromptu feel to it.

On one hand, it was only announced one day earlier that Phil Parker would be promoted to defensive coordinator after serving as Iowa's defensive backs coach for all 13 seasons Ferentz has been in command. It was one of three coaching moves that came about, and three more are still going to eventually take place. But on the other hand, this press conference inside the Hayden Fry Football Complex had been planned with one week's notice.

Of all the things that were brought up Wednesday, a few moments stood out, including two in Ferentz's opening remarks. He began, not by discussing who was on his staff, but who wasn't after Ken O'Keefe resigned last week as offensive coordinator to become the Miami Dolphins' wide receivers coach. Then as he began shifting his tune towards his current staff, Ferentz described Parker as someone he deemed to be "the best fit" as defensive coordinator.

"I just think he'll do an outstanding job in that role," Ferentz said. "It's about as simple as that."

Ferentz wouldn't provide a specific timeline into why he wound up promoting from within despite nearly two months passing since the opening was first posted by the UI. He did however stress that others were considered, which seems like a bit of a contradiction since he had earlier called Parker "the best fit."

Not everything was guileless – Ferentz had his moments where he danced his way around questions like Victor Cruz salsas after scoring touchdowns. For instance, he said LeVar Woods was still an interim coach without mentioning the capacity. Woods was the interim defensive line coach up until the decision was made to move Reese Morgan over to defensive line after he had served the last nine seasons as the offensive line coach.

With linebackers coach being vacant, one would assume this has Woods' name all over it. He played the position at Iowa, as well as in the NFL. To describe the thought of Woods not landing this job as puzzling would be an understatement.

Yet while Ferentz remained tight-lipped on that, he was straightforward in saying Darrell Wilson, who is now taking Parker's old spot as defensive backs coach after coaching linebackers, would still coach special teams as he has.

The best illustration of this came when he was asked about the approach for hiring an outside coach. He said he wouldn't call himself, "a résumé guy," but that he believes résumés can be telling while conducting a coaching search.

"I'm all for new ideas and what have you," Ferentz said. "But I think it's better if they – just like a player has got to buy into it – I think coaches have to buy into it, too. We've all got to share some common bond that way."

He said of the three current vacancies on staff, he thought two of them could be filled within the next two weeks. This is after saying he'd take as long as need be to ultimately finalize his staff, including naming a new offensive coordinator to replace O'Keefe. Spring practices were pushed slightly back, as the team will conduct its first practice on March 24 (a Saturday). This hasn't normally been the case.

Ferentz called it ideal to have everything in place around spring break, which is about one month from now. But he's also

not afraid, as he just showed with naming a defensive coordinator, to take his time and give the vibe of something being dragged out longer than need be.

“We’re not going to move fast if it costs us the chance of getting the right guy, the best guy,” Ferentz said.

Even in the most unusual instance (usually Ferentz stays mum between signing day and the first day of spring practice), Ferentz stayed consistent in his approach, one that leaves many fans puzzled, but also leaves many fans confident in what he does.

Some see him as stubborn and predictable. Others might view him as more ambiguous. Then there are those that place their trust in him as far as taking the Hawkeyes in what they believe to be the right direction is concerned.

Regardless, two things are clear now – 1. Ferentz is in charge. What he says, goes. It was his call to have Morgan coach the D-line, and that’s what’s happening; 2. The pressure’s on him now. This reshuffling of his staff will not only define the upcoming 2012 season, but future seasons that could be the difference between leaving a lasting legacy and wearing out a welcome.

To Ferentz, this was another day at the office. A significant day, but another day nonetheless. To everyone else on the outside, this was a microcosm of what the last two years have been like – some things feel different, yet the general feeling remains the same.

This press conference was the result of circumstances that over a span of 14 years would seem more unusual than they might actually be. The feel of this press conference, however, was far from unusual.

TRANSCRIPT: [Kirk Ferentz, Feb. 8, 2012 press conference](#) (Courtesy: UI Sports Info.)

Parker promoted, other coaching changes announced

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Iowa named Phil Parker as its new defensive coordinator Tuesday after a search that lasted over a month. Parker takes over in place of Norm Parker after serving as the team's defensive backs coach for the past 13 seasons.

Also announced Tuesday were two other position changes among the coaching staff. Reese Morgan, who was coaching the offensive line, will now coach the defensive line, while Darrell Wilson will move over to take Parker's old post and coach the secondary. Morgan takes over for former defensive line coach Rick Kaczinski, who left in December to take a similar position at Nebraska. LeVar Woods, a former linebacker who served as an administrative assistant, filled in as the interim coach for the Hawkeyes' 31-14 loss in the Insight Bowl to Oklahoma.

"Phil, Darrell and Reese have all done an outstanding job in our program for a significant period of time," Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said in a statement Tuesday. "I am confident they will have a very positive effect on our team as we transition forward."

Ferentz is scheduled to hold a press conference Wednesday at 4 p.m. Central inside the Hayden Fry Football Complex to discuss the coaching moves among other topics.

2/6/2012: State of the Big Ten, Volume 54 (premium)

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Last week saw the spectacle known as Signing Day come and go, as 17-18 year old kids across the country signed on to play college football in 2012.

According to numerous recruiting outlets, the Big Ten's top class was that of Ohio State's, which speaks volumes to what Urban Meyer has already accomplished in just slightly more than two months on the job. It also speaks volumes when considering that the Buckeyes have a postseason ban lying ahead of them next season.

Two of Ohio State's more recent commitments in the final days consisted of one kid who was committed to Mark Dantonio and Michigan State, and the other being committed to Bret Bielema and Wisconsin. This is significant and worth noting because last year's inaugural Big Ten Championship featured the Badgers and Spartans.

Both Dantonio and Bielema voiced displeasure over the recruiting tactics done by Meyer, which really shouldn't surprise anyone given how he had coached for six seasons in a

conference as cutthroat as the SEC was when he was at Florida and still is today. Is it right? Maybe not. But at the same time, it's not anything that can vented over publicly.

First off, both coaches critical of Meyer here have had recruits over the years they acquired at the last minute from other Big Ten schools. It happens all the time in college football. With Signing Day being more prominent than ever, it's worth reiterating that until the kid actually signs on the dotted line, he doesn't have to stick to his original commitment.

Just because a kid is committed to Michigan State or committed to Wisconsin for 6-7 months doesn't mean anything until the letter of intent is signed.

The other factor that needs to be considered here is this – Ohio is such a prominent state in recruiting, and it's the most important recruiting state in the entire Big Ten. Once the Buckeyes get their pick of the litter, almost every other Big Ten program is scouring the state for high school players rated anywhere between 2-4 stars that they think can be difference makers down the road. Many kids from Ohio grow up Ohio State fans, even if they end up attending a school like Michigan State or Wisconsin.

Now should Meyer be making a regular habit out of getting kids to change their commitments to Ohio State from other Big Ten brethren like Dantonio or Bielema? Probably not. But he's still allowed to recruit whoever he likes, as do the other 11 Big Ten coaches, and especially if the kid being targeted is from the state of Ohio in his case.

The other big storyline was with the NCAA wanting to start making scholarships good for four years. Nine of the 12 schools have adopted these new forms of scholarships – the ones who didn't were Indiana, Minnesota and Purdue. Over the long run, the four-year scholarships are the way to go. Why

those three schools that stick to one-year scholarships are doing so is fair to question and be critical of, because it really doesn't make sense. As flawed as the term "student-athlete" might be when it comes to football nowadays, this is at least a start back in the direction the NCAA wants its programs heading.

This is something that will be worth watching over time, because when it comes down to it, four-year scholarships make complete sense in today's world of college football, and really, college sports as a whole.

COMMENTARY: Upcoming season will be telling

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

In 13 years, Kirk Ferentz has built a solid reputation for both himself and the Iowa football program. He has led the Hawkeyes to a pair of Big Ten titles and nearly guided them to a third in 2009. Under his watch, Iowa has won six bowl games, including the 2010 Orange Bowl against Georgia Tech. He has coached players such as Brad Banks, Dallas Clark, Nate Kaeding, Robert Gallery, Shonn Greene and Marvin McNutt, all of whom had some of the best seasons any Hawkeye has ever had at their respective positions.

Yet one month into 2012, and it's becoming crystal clear – This season will play an enormous role in the way some folks will ultimately view Ferentz's legacy at Iowa.

Ferentz is now the longest-tenured head coach in the entire Big Ten by seven full seasons. Some of those eyes that for years were placed squarely upon Joe Paterno during his time at Penn State will now be placed on Ferentz. Right now, things appear shaky.

Gone are the two coaches who were Ferentz's left- and right-hand men – Norm Parker and Ken O'Keefe. Parker officially retired as defensive coordinator after the Hawkeyes lost the 2011 Insight Bowl to Oklahoma last December. On Friday, O'Keefe resigned as offensive coordinator to pursue another opportunity, most likely with the Miami Dolphins.

Both Parker and O'Keefe have been with Ferentz since the beginning. For 13 years, Ferentz had the luxury of having the same two assistants stick by his side through good and bad times. Now he has the monumental task of finding two new coordinators.

Those two new faces will inherit a team that has plenty of questions surrounding it entering next fall. Whoever takes over the defense will have an entirely new defensive line on his hands. Whoever commands the offense needs to figure out who fills the voids left by McNutt and Riley Reiff, who declared early for the NFL Draft.

Speaking of player personnel, Ferentz also has to deal with the fact that five other players – Marcus Grant, Dan Heiar, Mika'il McCall, Marcus Coker and A.J. Derby – have left the program this winter. Iowa does have 24 new recruits signed that will be coming in this fall, and maybe a handful of those 24 provide an immediate impact.

But with that being said, there are areas on this team that need heavy addressing, otherwise the Hawkeyes are going to be in for a long year.

At this moment in time, Ferentz will be able to leave Iowa on his own terms. That's how he wants it. Judging his entire 13-

year tenure from its starting point to the present, he has earned that. How he ultimately decides on a staff is going to go a long way in whether that still ends up being the case.

It's safe to say he hit home runs with Parker and O'Keefe. Even though both men received their share of scrutiny from fans, media, and others, they panned out exactly as Ferentz planned in the grand scheme of things. The years under Ferentz Iowa has had its greatest success, both were instrumental.

Regardless of whether one or both hires come from within or from the outside, these decisions will shape the future of this program. If both hires are home runs and Ferentz wins that third Big Ten crown within the next five years, then his legacy will be greater than that of Hayden Fry's. If after these hires are made, the same criticisms of O'Keefe and Parker over the years are being expressed towards their replacements, then all that frustration will start boiling over towards Ferentz.

Every coach is remembered for both their successes and their flaws, and 2012 might prove to be Ferentz's greatest challenge yet. How he handles things in the coming weeks and months will not only go a long way in dictating this upcoming season, but in how many – not just in Iowa, but around the country – will view him when the day comes that he does walk away from the coaching profession.

O'Keefe leaves program after 13 years

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Iowa offensive coordinator Ken O'Keefe has left the football program to "pursue another coaching opportunity," head coach Kirk Ferentz said in a release sent Friday. O'Keefe's departure [was originally confirmed by the Des Moines Register's Randy Peterson](#) and was later confirmed by the UI.

O'Keefe becomes the third assistant and second coordinator to leave Iowa this offseason. Former defensive coordinator Norm Parker retired following the Hawkeyes' 31-14 loss in the Insight Bowl to Oklahoma back on Dec. 30, and former defensive line coach Rick Kaczinski left for the same position at Nebraska. O'Keefe had spent all 13 seasons of Kirk Ferentz's Iowa tenure as offensive coordinator.

"Ken's work contributed greatly to our program's success during the past 13 years, and more impressively, to the growth and development of the young men in our program," Ferentz said in a statement Friday.

During his signing day press conference Wednesday, Ferentz said he hoped to have a new defensive coordinator named next week. No timetable has been set for when an offensive coordinator would be introduced.

One source has told *HawkeyeDrive.com* that the "coaching opportunity" Ferentz was referring to is with the Miami Dolphins, who hired former offensive line coach Joe Philbin as their head coach [back on Jan. 20](#). Philbin was on staff during Ferentz's four seasons before becoming an assistant with the Green Bay Packers, where he had spent the last nine seasons.

O'Keefe and Philbin had crossed paths on two occasions prior to both landing in Iowa City with Ferentz in 1999. Philbin played for O'Keefe at Worcester Academy, and later spent four seasons as one of O'Keefe's assistant coaches at Alleghany College.

Attempts to reach the Miami Dolphins with regards to O'Keefe possibly joining Philbin's staff were made by *HawkeyeDrive.com* Friday evening. No official word has come from the Dolphins yet.

**UPDATE: O'Keefe was officially named the Dolphins' new wide receivers coach in an announcement made by the team on Feb. 4.*

Iowa football recruiting: Class of 2012

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – The Iowa Hawkeyes' 2012 recruiting class consists of 24 players – 22 out of high school and two junior college transfers – matching the number set with the 2011 class.

This is the official list of recruits listed by Iowa as of Wednesday:

C.J. Beathard QB 6-2, 175 lbs. *Franklin, Tenn.*

Kevin Buford DB 5-10, 170 lbs. *Canton, Mich.*

Sean Draper DB 6-0, 175 lbs. *Cleveland, Ohio*

Faith Ekakitie DE 6-3, 275 lbs. *Lake Forest, Ill.*

Maurice Fleming DB 6-0, 185 lbs. *Chicago, Ill.*

Anthony Gair DB 6-2, 195 lbs. *Plano, Texas*

Greg Garmon RB 6-1, 200 lbs. *Erie, Pa.*

Barkley Hill RB 6-0, 210 lbs. ***Cedar Falls, Iowa***

Jaleel Johnson DL 6-4, 300 lbs. *Westchester, Ill.*

Mitch Keppy OL 6-5, 290 lbs. *Port Byron, Ill.*

George Kittle WR 6-4, 200 lbs., *Norman, Okla.*

Connor Kornbrath K/P 6-6, 215 lbs. *Bridgeport, W.V.*

Ruben Lile DB 6-3, 200 lbs. *Detroit, Mich.*

Greg Mabin WR 6-2, 190 lbs. *Plantation, Fla.*

Nate Meier ATH 6-2, 235 lbs. ***Tabor, Iowa***

Drew Ott DL 6-4, 245 lbs. *Trumbull, Neb.*

Eric Simmons OL 6-2, 295 lbs. ***Madrid, Iowa (Iowa Western)***

Tevaun Smith WR 6-0, 185 lbs. *Kent, Conn.*

Cody Sokol QB 6-2, 215 lbs. *Phoenix, Ariz. (Scottsdale CC)*

Laron Taylor LB 6-0, 215 lbs. *Detroit, Mich.*

Daumantas Venckus-Cucchiara DL 6-5, 230 lbs. *Weston, Fla.*

Ryan Ward OL 6-5, 275 lbs. *New Lenox, Ill.*

Cameron Wilson WR 6-1, 195 lbs. *Dublin, Ohio*

[2012 Class](#)

[Coach Ferentz – 02 01 12](#)

1/30/2012: State of the Big Ten, Volume 53 (premium)

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With the majority of the Big Ten sitting at the halfway point of the conference schedule, the contenders have slowly but surely begun to separate themselves from the pretenders.

Just two weeks ago, the Big Ten looked about as unpredictable as one could envision it being without having any preconceived notions beforehand. Now, it appears that 4-5 teams remain in terms of having a legitimate chance to win what many believe to be the deepest conference in college basketball.

Entering Monday, No. 3 Ohio State found itself alone in the first place after beating Michigan at home over the weekend. The Buckeyes are the highest-ranked Big Ten squad among the five in the most recent top 25, and for good reason. Right now, Ohio State has proven to live up to its reputation as the top dog in the league.

The one team with the best opportunity of hanging neck-and-neck with the Buckeyes between now and the week of the Big Ten Tournament is Michigan State, who is now ranked ninth nationally. The Spartans have yet to play Ohio State and will face the Buckeyes twice, including the regular-season finale on March 4 at the Breslin Center.

In addition, Michigan State still has home games left against both Michigan on Super Bowl Sunday and against Wisconsin on Feb. 16. As long as the Spartans hold serve on their home court – and there's no reason to think they can't – they'll remain in the thick of the conference race.

Speaking of the 23rd-ranked Wolverines and 19th-ranked Badgers, these might be the next two teams in line. Both have huge contests coming up this week. Michigan has an opportunity to sweep the Spartans, get payback against Ohio State, and it already possesses the head-to-head over Wisconsin. But beforehand, the Wolverines will be looking to avenge an earlier loss to Indiana this season when they face the Hoosiers at Crisler Arena.

And then there's the Badgers, who bounced back from a 1-3 start to conference play to win five straight and now sit in a position to possibly be in first place by the end of the week with victories at Penn State and then at home against Ohio State. This is a golden opportunity for the Badgers this week and how they fare in these next two games could go a long way in dictating where they stand come Big Ten tournament time.

Indiana, who now sits at 20th, has a chance to put itself in this conversation, but the Hoosiers have big trips this week to both Ann Arbor and West Lafayette. Win these next two road games, and Indiana's back in the discussion. Split or lose both of these games, and the Hoosiers will probably be playing in the first round of the Big Ten Tournament.

These five teams have all personified throughout the season thus far just how grueling the Big Ten actually is. That's not to say other Big Ten teams won't be dancing next month, either. But it has reached the point where these are the teams distinguishing themselves from the pack, and thus are the ones that deserve to be further examined over the course of the next month.

1/23/2012: State of the Big Ten, Volume 52 (premium)

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The past 48 hours were surreal. It began with an inaccurate report on the evening of Jan. 21 that former Penn State head coach Joe Paterno had died. Hours later, on the morning of Jan. 22, Paterno did eventually succumb to lung cancer at the age of 85.

What then followed were the mixture of emotions nationwide regarding Paterno's death. Some took the time to remember Paterno for the way he was regarded the majority of his life – as one of the most iconic figures the sport of college football had ever seen. Others remembered Paterno in a darker light, one that portrays him as evil because of his role in what is the most disturbing scandal college football had ever seen.

One way or the other, what remains clear is there is no middle ground. After living a life where he was always viewed by others as being in the right, one wrong decision completely tarnished his entire legacy.

While the man, Joe Paterno, is no longer on Earth, his death

is far from the final chapter of this entire ordeal involving Penn State.

There's nothing wrong with mourning the loss of someone who, for generations, was the face of his university. Like it or not, he was someone's father, grandfather, relative, coach, mentor, and/or friend. The role he played in the numerous lives of those who have done and continue to do good in society can't be forgotten.

That being said, those who view him in a negative light also have every reason to do so. For one, freedom of speech is something valued strongly by all of those who live in the United States. Those who were victims of child sex abuse, or know victims of child sex abuse, have every right to remain upset with Paterno for not doing more upon being told one of his former assistants was allegedly making life a living hell for a 10-year-old boy in the showers of his practice facility.

Paterno's story will be polarizing no matter how it's told. The two perspectives are forever linked, and really, there's no way around that. One can't tell the story of his legendary coaching career without mentioning its downfall and the man's final hours alive. One also can't tell the story of this horrific ordeal without mentioning why Paterno's role was so prominent to begin with, and thus why acting sooner or in a much different manner could've made an enormous difference.

However anyone out there chooses to remember Paterno, context is always going to be needed with that remembrance. In order for any story to be told, or for any life to be remembered, the good and the bad ought to both be acknowledged. From there, opinions – one way or the other – can then be truly formed.