

Ferentz, Barta issue statements following Paterno's death

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz and athletics director Gary Barta both issued statements Sunday evening after the death of former Penn State head coach Joe Paterno was confirmed earlier in the day:

Ferentz's statement: "It is certainly a very, very sad day. The passing of Coach Paterno is a huge loss; there will never be another Coach Paterno. Our thoughts and prayers are with the Paterno family."

Barta's statement: "Joe Paterno has meant so much to college athletics over such a long period of time. Our thoughts and prayers go out to his immediate family first and foremost, and then, certainly, to the extended Penn State family."

Ferentz, who grew up in the Pittsburgh area, finished with an 8-3 head-to-head record against Paterno in 11 meetings, with Penn State having won the most recent contest back on Oct. 8, 13-3. Also of note is that Iowa and Penn State went head-to-head in both women's basketball and wrestling on Sunday in State College, Pa.

Paterno died Sunday morning at the age of 85, two-and-a-half months after a child sex abuse scandal involving former defensive coordinator Jerry Sandusky led to Paterno's firing by Penn State's Board of Trustees. Shortly after his dismissal, it was revealed Paterno had lung cancer.

Former assistant taking over Dolphins

By Brendan Stiles

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Former Iowa offensive line coach Joe Philbin [was hired Friday as the new head coach of the Miami Dolphins](#), according to multiple reports from both Miami and nationally. Philbin had spent the last nine years as an assistant with the Green Bay Packers, including the last five as the team's offensive coordinator. During his stint with the Packers, Green Bay won Super Bowl XLV last season over the Pittsburgh Steelers, 31-25.

Before coaching in the NFL, Philbin was hired by head coach Kirk Ferentz when he took over prior to the start of the 1999 season. Philbin coached the offensive line for four seasons, with the last one culminating with a co-Big Ten championship and an appearance in the 2003 Orange Bowl, where Iowa lost 38-17 to USC.

During Philbin's time at Iowa, he coached two eventual first-round picks in Eric Steinbach and Robert Gallery, who won the Outland Trophy in 2003 after Philbin left for Green Bay and was the second overall pick of the Oakland Raiders in the 2004 NFL Draft.

Prior to his stint with the Hawkeyes, Philbin also worked for four seasons as an assistant to current Iowa offensive coordinator Ken O'Keefe at Alleghany College in Pennsylvania.

Philbin takes over a Miami Dolphins team that has made one

playoff appearance in the last 10 seasons and has had four head coaches during that same timespan. He also takes this job less than two weeks after his 21-year-old son, Michael, was [found dead after his body was discovered in Wisconsin's Fox River](#).

Derby leaves football team

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Redshirt freshman linebacker and Iowa City native A.J. Derby was granted a release from his scholarship, the UI announced Monday.

Derby is the fourth non-senior to leave the football team this month. Offensive tackle Riley Reiff announced he'd forego his senior season for the NFL Draft and running backs Mika'il McCall and Marcus Coker were both released from scholarships. McCall and Coker both were suspended from Iowa's 31-14 loss to Oklahoma in the 2011 Insight Bowl.

"We are sorry to see A.J. leave the program," Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said in a statement. "He has been a positive member of our team and a pleasure to coach over the past two years. We wish him the best as he moves forward with his career."

The news of Derby's departure comes three months following an arrest on charges of criminal mischief and public intoxication, which led to Ferentz suspending him two games. After serving his suspension, Derby, who began the season as the back-up quarterback to junior James Vandenberg, switched

over to linebacker and recorded a tackle on special teams against Indiana in what was his first game as a non-quarterback. Prior to both the suspension and position switch, Derby completed three of six pass attempts for 30 yards during games against Tennessee Tech and ULM.

“I would like to thank the University of Iowa and football coaches for the opportunity,” Derby said in a statement. “Unfortunately, I don’t feel this is the best fit for me personally to reach my goals as a student-athlete.”

A.J.’s older brother, Zach Derby, plays tight end for the Hawkeyes and will be a senior in 2012.

1/16/2012: State of the Big Ten, Volume 51 (premium)

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When Iowa lost to then-No. 6 Michigan State back on Jan. 10, the one moment fresh in the minds of those who witnessed took place during the second half. After a technical foul was called on the Hawkeyes, Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery took out displeasure of his team’s play on a folding chair, slamming it to the Breslin Center hardwood.

McCaffery said last week he had no regrets, mentioning how he was brought to Iowa to “change the culture.” While McCaffery wasn’t disciplined in any way for what took place, Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany told *USA Today* via email that future conduct would be examined closely.

In all honesty, this is much ado about nothing. The “Wrath of Fran” (as coined by members of the Iowa media) doesn’t come as a surprise to anyone around the program. In fact, when McCaffery was first hired, Iowa basketball’s campaign slogan was about getting “mad” again.

What has to be remembered here is two things: 1. No one was harmed. 2. McCaffery’s anger was directed at his players, not the officiating. Seeing how the only people that truly know what was said during that timeout would be McCaffery and his players, what grounds could there even be for reprimanding him?

Those who attempt comparing this to Bob Knight throwing his chair across the court in 1984 have to recognize the difference here. McCaffery simply picked the chair up and slammed it down. That’s all he did.

If anything, this brings attention to what he’s doing at Iowa. Right now, the program remains in a state where any non-scandal related publicity is good publicity. He obviously got his players’ attention because they managed to respond and beat the No. 13 team in the country by 16 points at home over the weekend.

It also, to some degree, makes Iowa relevant in the sport again. Whether the publicity over “Chair-gate” was negative or not, national pundits on shows like “Around the Horn” and “Pardon the Interruption” and what have you were discussing Iowa basketball. That goes along with the part of changing the culture McCaffery alluded to late last week.

There’s nothing wrong with a coach showing emotion, at least

there shouldn't be. If they're not fully invested in doing whatever it takes to win, there's no reason to pay them the kind of money that some of them make. Now was what McCaffery did in East Lansing last week a tad over the top? Perhaps. But again, it's not like he berated an official or did something that warranted an ejection, fine or suspension.

In the end, McCaffery will grow from his. No one should expect him to change his personality or demeanor, and to be fair to Delany, I don't think that's entirely the case here. He'll probably be more aware and might think twice about slamming objects such as a folding chair when disgusted by his team's play, but the one thing that's clear is players feed off the energy he brings night in and night out. That's what Iowa paid for, and that's what the rest of the Big Ten is getting.

Five invited to NFL Combine

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

According to CollegeFootballNews.com, five former Hawkeyes have received invites to the 2012 NFL Combine, which will be held next month at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis, Ind. Those five players are wide receiver Marvin McNutt, offensive tackle Markus Zusevics, defensive tackle Mike Daniels, linebacker Tyler Nielsen and cornerback Shaun Prater.

The article states juniors have not received invites yet because the deadline to declare for the NFL Draft is Sunday. Offensive tackle Riley Reiff announced earlier this month he would forego his senior season for the draft and has been projected by multiple draft pundits as a first-round pick.

Prater and Zusevics will play in the East-West Shrine Game on Jan. 21, while Daniels and McNutt participate in the Senior Bowl held Jan. 28. Both games will be televised by the NFL Network.

Daniels, McNutt to Senior Bowl

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Former defensive tackle Mike Daniels and wide receiver Marvin McNutt will play in the 2012 Senior Bowl, which is scheduled to take place on Jan. 28 in Mobile, Ala.

Daniels, who started each of the last two seasons and was a team captain last season, finished with 67 tackles and nine sacks, with two of those sacks coming in the Hawkeyes' 31-14 Insight Bowl loss to Oklahoma back on Dec. 30. For his career, Daniels finished with 123 tackles and 15.5 sacks.

Meanwhile, McNutt, who was also a team captain in 2011, had one of the more memorable individual seasons of any former Iowa player. The St. Louis native was consensus first-team all-Big Ten with 82 catches for 1,315 yards and 12 touchdown receptions as a senior, all three of which are new single-season records. He also set new school records last season for most receiving yards and touchdown receptions in a career.

This announcement comes one day after it was revealed former players Shaun Prater and Markus Zusevics will play in the East-West Shrine Game on Jan. 21.

Coker withdraws from UI, released from scholarship

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

EAST LANSING, Mich. – Sophomore running back Marcus Coker has withdrawn from classes for the spring semester and will be granted a release from his scholarship, the UI announced in a release Tuesday afternoon. This comes after Coker was suspended from the 2011 Insight Bowl against Oklahoma for violating the UI's Student-Athlete Code of Conduct last December.

Coker becomes the second running back this calendar year to leave the program after freshman Mika'il McCall, who had been serving a two-game suspension handed down by coach Kirk Ferentz for a violation of team rules, officially left Jan. 3.

Iowa athletics director Gary Barta commented publicly on Coker leaving from the Breslin Center prior to the Iowa men's basketball team against No. 6 Michigan State on Tuesday. Barta said he spoke over the phone with Ferentz upon learning that Coker withdrew from classes Tuesday morning and that Coker would be granted the release.

He also said Coker's status for possibly returning to the team this spring hadn't changed and wasn't a factor in Coker's decision to leave.

"I didn't know what to expect other than I knew his status at some point would be adjusted one way or the other," Barta said.

Barta didn't disclose whether any restrictions would be placed on Coker's release and said a decision wouldn't be made until he got back to Iowa City. He also wouldn't comment on speculation from the outside.

"When we went into the bowl, he was suspended because he violated the Student-Athlete Code of Conduct," Barta said. "Beyond that, I'm not going to say anymore, and I know there's a lot of speculation."

UPDATE: As first reported Tuesday evening by the [Iowa City Press-Citizen](#), Coker was identified as a suspect during an investigation into an alleged assault that took place at his Iowa City residence on Oct. 28, 2011. The report clearly states that charges were never filed against Coker nor has he been found guilty of any sort of wrongdoing.

Prater, Zusevics to play in East-West Shrine Game

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Former Iowa cornerback Shaun Prater and former offensive tackle Markus Zusevics will both participate in the East-West Shrine Game, which is slated to take place on Jan. 21 at Tropicana Field in St. Petersburg, Fla.

The Hawkeye duo will both play for the West squad in the game. Zusevics started every game at right tackle for each of the past two seasons, while Prater started 36 games in his career at cornerback, including each of the last 34 Iowa

football games.

Both are projected to be picked in the 2012 NFL Draft in late April.

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On Jan. 7, Penn State formally introduced New England Patriots offensive coordinator Bill O'Brien as its new head football coach. This introduction came nearly two months to the day former head coach Joe Paterno was fired in light of the child sex abuse scandal involving former defensive coordinator Jerry Sandusky.

Many different viewpoints have been expressed over the last couple of months, but a couple of things remain clear. One is that as much as Penn State would like to sweep everything that took place under the rug, that just isn't going to happen and thinking that finally naming a new football coach brings any type of closure to the situation couldn't be further from the truth.

Penn State, at one time, was considered to be among the most

highly-coveted head coaching jobs in all of football whenever the day came that Paterno was no longer at the forefront. For the school to end up hiring an NFL assistant who has never been a head coach at the collegiate or pro level and who was an assistant at three different ACC schools not named Florida State, Miami or Virginia Tech speaks volumes to just how toxic this situation still is.

It was difficult enough on the current players to see three different teams they beat leap over them in the bowl pecking order for something they had nothing to do with. Ending up with someone whose most recent claim to fame was a sideline blow-up with Tom Brady was definitely not what people in State College thought would take place.

Now O'Brien could very well end up being a solid hire for the Nittany Lions. It sounds as though at least a few assistant coaches from the previous regime will stick around, which could actually be somewhat beneficial to O'Brien, who prior to this past weekend had no ties to Penn State whatsoever.

But with that being said, it's becoming clear that more of those who are former players and have strong ties to the university are dissatisfied with the whole hiring process and it resulting in O'Brien taking over than those who are content with it. It's one thing to be upset with the process, which took nearly two months and was as secretive to the outside world as Paterno was. But the one thing Penn State got right was hiring someone with no previous ties to Paterno. It had to start anew.

It remains to be seen whether Nittany Lion fans ultimately give O'Brien a fair shake. Right now, it's hard to envision the man lasting that long as head coach, not because of wins and losses, but because of the fact that this whole mess will continue to follow Penn State for years. Sure, there might be a day when closure finally takes place, but that day isn't happening anytime soon. Heck, someone else might succeed

O'Brien as head coach before that day comes.

Part of the reason O'Brien was hired was because those who oversaw the hiring considered him to be a man of integrity. While that's noble to say and there's (at least right now) no reason to think O'Brien isn't an admirable human being, it also means that even the most minor slip-up O'Brien makes on or off the field will be magnified nationally.

Right now, he's basically in a position to fail at a place where failure can't afford to happen. Failure on the field would lead to fan apathy. Failure off the field would put Penn State in even more of a negative light, which seems nearly impossible given everything that has gone on.

Time will tell if O'Brien proves to be the right guy for the job. Hopefully Penn State fans keep things in perspective and give him a fair chance, because there could be plenty of things beyond O'Brien's control that could ultimately dictate the future of the football program and the university.

Reiff to NFL Draft, McCall leaving program

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

A pair of Iowa offensive players have made decisions to leave the football program on Tuesday for differing reasons.

[According to a report in the New York Times](#), Iowa junior offensive tackle Riley Reiff informed head coach Kirk Ferentz of his decision to forego his senior season and enter the 2012

NFL Draft. Reiff, who has been touted as a first-round pick by numerous draft gurus, said during Insight Bowl Media Day on Dec. 28 he had filed paperwork with the NFL Draft's advisory board and would wait to hear on an evaluation from them before making his decision.

The 6-6, 300-pounder start every game at left tackle the past two seasons for the Hawkeyes after playing a prominent role on the offensive line as a redshirt freshman in 2009.

As for McCall, [he told the Cedar Rapids Gazette on Tuesday](#) of his intent to leave the team after being suspended the past two games for a violation of team rules. His suspension came down from Ferentz just three days after McCall had two carries against Purdue in what was his first game back from an ankle injury suffered in the Hawkeyes' season opener against Tennessee Tech.

McCall finished the 2011 season with 65 yards rushing on 11 carries.