

Important update regarding HawkeyeDrive.com

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

In 2010, I created *HawkeyeDrive.com* with the vision of devoting reliable and responsible coverage of both the Iowa football and men's basketball programs to Hawkeye fans all over. The last four years have been memorable for me and I hope they have been for all of you.

Today, I have unfortunate news to share. I am discontinuing *HawkeyeDrive.com*.

Is my career as a sports writer done? I hope not. I'd like to think it isn't. Maybe a new opportunity presents itself. But it won't be with this site any longer and whether it's covering the Hawkeyes again someday for a well-established medium or even still working in the state of Iowa remains to be seen.

This site, *HawkeyeDrive.com*, was my full-time job for four years. The business goals I envisioned at the start never materialized like I hoped and this day became inevitable. Obviously, I would've preferred coming to this reality at a time that wasn't the first week of college football season and I would've preferred the reason being that I have a new endeavor already lined up. But with the best interests of all affected parties in mind, including my own, this was a decision that needed to be made.

There are a lot of people I need to thank. Obviously, I have to start with my family for their support throughout these last four years. I need to thank those of you out there who were paid subscribers to this site. Your loyalty as customers

meant a lot these past four years and I sincerely hope I gave you your money's worth over this time. I need to thank my friends for all their support they've provided over the last few years as well.

Others I need to acknowledge: My friend Amber Capps for her help designing the *HawkeyeDrive.com* logo back in 2010 when this journey started, my friend and former *Daily Iowan* colleague Nate Whitney for being one of the first people who openly encouraged me to pursue *HawkeyeDrive.com* when it was still an idea, the guy those of you on Twitter know as @hawkeyegamefilm for the wealth of football knowledge he shared with me through our interactions the last 2-3 years and Randy Larson for all of his help ensuring I provided timely PTL coverage over the past five summers.

As for those in the industry, the first person I need to thank is Dave Schwartz. During *HawkeyeDrive.com*'s infancy stages, Dave was someone I could turn to for advice and he gave me the best advice I ever received – “Do everything.” In other words, anywhere you could be, anywhere a story could develop, be there. Write about it. This is why I covered every Hawkeye football game and every Hawkeye men's basketball game on U.S. mainland I possibly could.

This is why I went to Johnston, Iowa back in 2011 when [Iowa Corn held that press conference acknowledging its Cy-Hawk Trophy was an abomination](#). This is why I went to North Liberty every summer night there was PTL, even if the story lines started getting stale. This is why I spent my Tuesday afternoons in the autumn attending Kirk Ferentz's press conferences. This is why every time Fran McCaffery had a teleconference with the local media, I called in no matter where I happened to be and made sure to ask him questions. This is why I covered events like [the “Heart of Gold Gala” that honored Brett Greenwood in 2013](#), [Norm Parker's “Celebration of Life” ceremony](#) and [Dick Vitale's fundraiser fighting pediatric cancer at Riverside Casino and Golf Resort](#).

The first event I ever covered for *HawkeyeDrive.com* was an I-Club function in the Amana Colonies where [Reese Morgan raved about this true freshman named Brandon Scherff arriving on campus](#). "Do everything." Dave, thank you.

I need to thank Bill Casey and everyone else I ever worked with at *The Daily Iowan* during my five years there. I wouldn't have been in a position to start up a site like *HawkeyeDrive.com* if not for the values and skills I learned working there. If I'm able to remain in sports writing, I hope to continue applying everything I learned there toward my craft. *The Daily Iowan* and the Adler Journalism Building will always be dear to me. So will all the working relationships I developed with everyone there.

I need to thank the guys at *Black Heart Gold Pants* for regularly linking to my work. Whether it was Planned Sick Days linking my work, Ross anointing me as a ["Friend of the Pants,"](#) or Patrick Vint being someone who appreciated early on how I operated this site, you guys will always have my respect and your site is one I'll continue visiting frequently no matter what my future entails.

One person from *BHGP* in particular I need to thank is Adam Jacobi, who was a colleague of mine when I spent roughly 10 months between 2011-2012 contributing additional Iowa football coverage for *CBS Sports* and its RapidReports network. It was Adam who convinced me to apply and after less than one calendar year running *HawkeyeDrive.com*, my body of work was enough for Tony Moss to offer me a position. Tony, Jon Gallo and all of my other RapidReports editors taught me how to become a more concise writer. Because of that experience, I'd like to believe I'm a better writer today than I was when I first started *HawkeyeDrive.com*. Adam, thank you.

To Jon Miller and Justin VanLaere (a.k.a. "Stormin' Spank"), thank you both. Like the guys at *BHGP*, you two never hesitated linking to my work on your *Hawkeye Nation* message boards. Both

of you also encouraged me along the way these past four years and I'll always appreciate that. This past spring, I was given the opportunity to contribute to the Iowa preview published by Dave Bartoo for *CFB Matrix*. It was Jon who made that possible. Jon, thank you for always thinking as highly of my reporting as you have.

To all my colleagues in the Iowa media, thank you. I said this when I left the *DI* and will say it again now, four years later – Hawkeye fans have it made. They really do. There's not a single person on either the football or basketball beats (print, online, TV, radio, past or present) I don't have the utmost respect for. Not one. The respect you all gave me as a fellow Iowa reporter through the years is something I always did and always will appreciate. I won't list every single one of you here for fear of omitting someone. But just know I truly respect each and every one of you and I can only hope the feeling is and remains mutual.

There are also plenty of other college football and basketball reporters (both local and national) I need to acknowledge. Whether it was because you gave me the time of day as a guest on "Talkin' Hawks" or because I shared worthwhile conversations with you during events we covered or just because of interactions we've shared on social media, the relationships I've established with reporters outside the state of Iowa – especially those covering other Big Ten schools – is something I appreciate as much as the relationships I made with those here in Iowa.

I need to thank Marty Tirrell and Trent Condon for all the opportunities they gave me to appear as a guest on "Mouth of the Midwest" and for helping me promote *HawkeyeDrive.com* any time I joined them. Trent even asked me once a few years back to help him co-host the show's first hour while Marty was on assignment and I had a blast doing that. I always enjoyed my encounters with them on "Mouth of the Midwest" and wish them both, as well as *1490 The Jock*, continued success in the

future.

To my good friend Chris Rowell, thank you. Chris signed on to be my weekly co-host on the "Talkin' Hawks" podcast in 2011 after I spent 2010 recording the podcast solo. Last year was a little more challenging because Chris moved back to Ohio, so we couldn't meet up and record it together in person like we had when he lived in Iowa City. But with respect to every other former Iowa football player I know, there's no one else I would've rather had as my co-host. Recording "Talkin' Hawks" with Chris was by far the one thing I always looked most forward to every week during football season and his contributions helped make Wednesday my favorite day of the week whenever we got together to record them. Chris, your loyalty to the podcast meant a lot. Your continued friendship means even more.

There are two well-known, well-established Hawkeyes I need to thank and those gentlemen are Bob Brooks and John Streif. From Day One on the football beat back in 2007, Bob always acknowledged me, treated me with the utmost respect and made me feel like I belonged. Knowing I earned Brooksie's respect was the highest of compliments and getting to know him these last seven years has provided so many memories. I'll still never forget the smile he cracked when I told him in 2010 I was starting this site. John is the nicest human being I've ever met. From a work perspective, he was always helpful and always gracious to me whenever I needed assistance. On a personal level, there's not a single time I can remember seeing John where he didn't greet me with a smile, wanting to shake my hand. The day these two men aren't regularly around Kinnick Stadium or Carver-Hawkeye Arena is the day Iowa will never be the same.

I need to thank Gary Dolphin. During the 2010 football season, I met Gary at Carlos O'Kelly's every Wednesday night after he taped "Hawk Talk" and conducted weekly one-on-one audio segments with him that I posted on *HawkeyeDrive.com* for

subscribers. Gary, thank you for giving me that opportunity. I enjoyed all those conversations we shared.

I need to thank Kirk Ferentz and Fran McCaffery. I'm sure there were instances where they probably didn't feel like talking to me, but did so anyway and treated me fairly in the process. Fairness is a journalistic value I believe to be extremely important and whether something I wrote was positive or negative, I hope both of them feel I was as fair with my coverage of their programs as they were with me.

I need to thank everyone in the Iowa Sports Information Department for giving me the opportunity to establish *HawkeyeDrive.com* as a credible news outlet. I specifically need to thank Phil Haddy. I know he retired two years ago, but *HawkeyeDrive.com* never would've been possible without his approval back in 2010 and I will always be grateful to Phil for opening that door. The same can be said for both Steve Roe and Matt Weitzel. Just like the two coaches, I'm sure there were times we didn't always see eye-to-eye, but Steve and Matt were always available to answer any questions I had and I want both of them to know I respect what they do and appreciate everything they've ever done for me.

Along these same lines, I need to thank Scott Chipman and his staff at the Big Ten for their assistance through the years. Whether it was answering an email about Big Ten Spring Meetings or making sure the Wi-Fi worked at either Big Ten Media Days or the Big Ten Tournament, Scott has always been helpful and I appreciate that he and the conference acknowledged *HawkeyeDrive.com* as an accredited outlet these last four years.

Lastly, I need to thank each and every one of you reading this because chances are most of you came to this link via Twitter. I'll get asked on occasion, "Why do you tweet so much and follow so many people?" When I first started tweeting in 2009, one of our editors at the *DI* suggested following back those

who follow you and interact with them. I've enjoyed many of my interactions with Hawkeye fans on Twitter these past five years and hope to continue communicating with those who choose to continue following me. You're the ones that inspired me to pursue *HawkeyeDrive.com* in the first place.

In closing, I just want to say it was a privilege to serve all of you who did subscribe to *HawkeyeDrive.com*, and even those of you who never subscribed, but frequently visited and read, watched or listened to any of my content on *HawkeyeDrive.com*. It was a privilege to cover Iowa football and write a story like [this one about James and Greg Morris](#) and [everything else featured in the "24 Heisman Road" archive](#). It was a privilege to cover Iowa men's basketball and write a story like [this one about Chris Street](#) and [everything else featured in the "40 Street" archive](#). It was a privilege putting together [all the videos I posted](#) after games and various events I covered for *HawkeyeDrive.com*.

I hope I earned your respect as an Iowa football and men's basketball reporter because that's all I could have asked for. I hope in one way or another that I made a difference in how these two programs are covered by others going forward while also maintaining the core values and ethics I believe every accredited reporter should possess, no matter the medium. I hope the next ambitious sports writer that starts an independent site covering college sports gets the same opportunities I had in terms of access and being able to build connections on both a local and national level.

Thanks for reading.

Iowa vs. Northern Iowa Game Notes, 2-deep

OFFENSE:

WR 4 Smith, 18 Willies

LT 68 Scherff, 75 Boettger

LG 79 Welsh, 52 Myers

C 63 Blythe, 58 Simmons/57 Gaul

RG 65 Walsh, 74 Keppy

RT 78 Donnal, 64 Croston

TE , 82 Hamilton, 80 Krieger Coble

WR 11 Martin-Manley, 89 VandeBerg

WR 17 Hillyer, 22 Powell

QB 15 Rudock, 16 Beathard

RB Weisman/5 Bullock, 33 Canzeri

FB 42 Plewa

DEFENSE:

DE 34 Meier/98 Hardy, 49 Spears

DT 71 Davis, 56 Ekakitie

DT 90 Trinca-Pasat, 99 Bazata/67 Johnson

DE 95 Ott, 94 McMinn

OLB 39 Perry/41 Bower

MLB 52 Alston, 39 Perry/50 Gilson

WLB 6 Spearman/43 Jewell, 36 Fisher

LCB 13 Mabin, 28 Fleming

SS 37 Lowdermilk, 26 Ward

FS 27 Lomax, 12 Gair/32 Warfield

RCB 14 King, 7 Draper

SPECIAL TEAMS:

P 98 Kornbrath/16 Kidd

PK 1 Koehn/2 Ellis

LS 97 Kluver

PR 11 Martin-Manley

KR 33 Canzeri

HOLDER 98 Kornbrath/16 Kidd

[Iowa vs. Northern Iowa Game Notes](#)

8/21/2014: Big Ten preseason bowl projections

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

As I've done annually here on *HawkeyeDrive.com*, I conclude preseason coverage with Big Ten bowl projections. Now this

year is much different. For one, the College Football Playoff is now a thing. Also a thing is that this is going to be a much more challenging exercise now because the conferences have more say than ever about where these teams go. Because of this, I'm not going to project every bowl like I did last year.

I have two teams – Michigan State and Ohio State – playing in the group of major bowl games being used for the College Football Playoff. I do not have either the Spartans (my pick to win the Big Ten) or the Buckeyes being among the four teams in this year's College Football Playoff and because the Rose Bowl is one of the national semifinal games this season, I do not have a Big Ten team in these projections smelling any roses on New Year's Day.

In total, I have nine Big Ten teams making bowl games, but with two teams in the major bowls, I don't have the league filling its entire bowl allotment.

Below are my projections involving those nine teams:

Cotton Bowl – Michigan State (Big Ten champion) vs. UCLA (at-large)

Jan. 1, 2015; Arlington, Texas

Even before the news surfaced earlier this week about Ohio State quarterback Braxton Miller being out for the 2014 season with an injured shoulder, Michigan State has been and remains my pick to win the Big Ten this season. But since I don't have the Spartans making the College Football Playoff, I have them playing in the third New Year's Day bowl down at JerryWorld against a UCLA team that I believe wins the Pac-12 South this season. Speaking of JerryWorld (which is really called AT&T Stadium), this would be the Bruins' second trip there if this happened because they play Texas in Arlington on Sept. 13.

Fiesta Bowl – Ohio State (at-large) vs. Baylor (at-large)

Dec. 31, 2014; Glendale, Ariz.

Three things: 1. Even without Miller, have you seen the Buckeyes' schedule? I don't see them winning the Big Ten because at this moment, I don't see them beating Michigan State. However, every other game on Ohio State's schedule remains winnable. 2. Putting Ohio State here versus in the Orange Bowl (again) is pretty significant because if the Big Ten has a team in the Orange Bowl, it automatically relinquishes its Capital One Bowl bid over to the ACC. 3. Since the Big 12's tie-in is now the Sugar Bowl and that's one of this year's semifinals, I have Baylor returning for its second straight Fiesta Bowl to face the Buckeyes.

Capital One Bowl – Wisconsin vs. Florida

Jan. 1, 2015; Orlando, Fla.

Now because I don't have a Big Ten team in the Orange Bowl, I'm putting Wisconsin back here in the Capital One Bowl because I think the Badgers win the Big Ten West given the way their conference schedule is shaped. I also believe that even though the Big Ten gets more say in who goes to this game, the Capital One Bowl will continue to value assembling the best match-up it could. Now I have the Badgers playing Florida because it avoids two possible rematches – it avoids a rematch of last season's Capital One Bowl with South Carolina and it also avoids a rematch of Wisconsin's season opener against LSU next week in Houston.

Outback Bowl – Nebraska vs. South Carolina

Jan. 1, 2015; Tampa, Fla.

Iowa was just in this game last season and Nebraska has never been to the Outback Bowl. Since LSU was also in this game last season, I have South Carolina going here. At least Husker fans can take solace in knowing it's not another bowl game against

Georgia.

Holiday Bowl – Iowa vs. Stanford

Dec. 27, 2014; San Diego, Calif.

Keep in mind that the bowl selections are now done in tiers and the Holiday is in that first tier with the Capital One and Outback. Barring a win in the Big Ten Championship Game, I believe Iowa ends up in this bowl as long as it finishes in the top three of the Big Ten West because Nebraska played in this bowl frequently when it was in the Big 12 and prior to last season, Wisconsin had played in three straight Rose Bowls. Plus the Hawkeyes haven't played in the state of California since their last trip to the Holiday Bowl in 1991. I have Stanford as the opponent for two reasons. One is I only see two Pac-12 teams featured in those six major bowls. The other is the Cardinal's road schedule this season might be the most challenging of any team in college football. Stanford's road games are at Washington, Notre Dame, Arizona State, Oregon, archrival California and UCLA. If the Cardinal go 4-2 or better against that gauntlet, I will strongly consider voting David Shaw for National Coach of the Year.

Music City Bowl – Michigan vs. LSU

Dec. 30, 2014; Nashville, Tenn.

As far as I understand the stipulations, this can be either the Music City or Gator Bowl picking a Big Ten team here as long as both games feature a Big Ten team three times each over the next six years. Meanwhile, I believe this game's higher on the pecking order for the SEC than the Gator. With that in mind and because of the storyline this game would have with Les Miles coaching against his alma mater, I got Michigan facing LSU down in Nashville and the Gator Bowl settling on an ACC team this season.

San Francisco Bowl – Northwestern vs. Oregon State

Dec. 30, 2014; Santa Clara, Calif.

Even without Venric Mark or Christian Jones, I believe Northwestern has just enough of a bounce-back season to earn a bowl invitation and its reward is a trip to Levi's Stadium for a date with Sean Mannion and the Oregon State Beavers.

Pinstripe Bowl – Maryland vs. Louisville

Dec. 27, 2014; Bronx, N.Y.

I was tempted to project Maryland for Detroit since Randy Edsall spoke in such high regard of the Motor City back at Big Ten Media Days. But all kidding aside, I think the Terrapins have a decent enough season to reach six wins and assuming they do, this match-up would carry quite the intrigue with Maryland facing the very team the ACC replaced it with in Louisville.

Detroit Lions Bowl – Minnesota vs. Boston College

Dec. 26, 2014; Detroit, Mich.

At least it's not Houston again for the Golden Gophers? In all seriousness, I like what Jerry Kill has done with Minnesota and I do believe the Gophers will at least one of its games against TCU, Michigan or Northwestern to ensure themselves of bowl eligibility for the third straight year. Boston College is good enough to go 6-6 again, so I have it representing the ACC here just because.

Illinois – no bowl

I went back and forth on whether to place the Fighting Illini in the Heart of Dallas Bowl. Illinois has two home games in November against Iowa and Penn State and basically has to win one of those games to even have a shot at six victories. I think Illinois just barely misses out.

Indiana – no bowl

Just about everything was in place for Indiana to make a bowl last season and it failed to do so. Now the Hoosiers have a tougher schedule in 2014 which includes non-conference road games against Bowling Green and Missouri back-to-back weeks, one less quarterback on the depth chart and questions still exist about their defense. If Indiana wins its Big Ten opener against Maryland, maybe I'll have a change of heart about the Hoosiers here. Right now though, I'm just not seeing it.

Purdue – no bowl

Record-wise, Purdue should be better and I do think the Boilermakers are capable of possibly winning a game or two they shouldn't. But as far as making a bowl game, not yet. I think Darrell Hazell will eventually do some good things at Purdue, but I don't see it making this step just yet.

Rutgers – no bowl

I know Rutgers has a lot of experience back on both sides of the football. But the schedule is brutal and unless the pass defense significantly improves from a year ago, Washington State might be laying the blueprint on beating Rutgers for every Big Ten team when the Cougars and Scarlet Knights play up in Seattle next week. The absolute best-case scenario I see in Big Ten play for Rutgers is 2-6 with wins over Penn State and Indiana at home. I don't think that will be enough.

Penn State – ineligible for postseason play from 2012-15

Other noteworthy bowls:

Peach Bowl – Auburn (at-large) vs. Cincinnati (top non-Big 5 team)

Dec. 31, 2014; Atlanta, Ga.

I have Auburn as the third SEC team being picked for a major bowl game by the College Football Playoff Committee. Now there's a rule that the highest-ranked team from a non-Big 5

conference has to be picked for one of the six major bowls. Marshall's probably going to go 12-0 this season and because of that, the Thundering Herd will get strong consideration. But if strength of schedule plays a big role in determining these match-ups, I can see Cincinnati (my pick to win the AAC) leaping over Marshall and ending up here against Auburn. By the way, if this match-up happens, you'd have Tommy Tuberville coaching against his former school.

Orange Bowl – Georgia (at-large) vs. Notre Dame (at-large)

Dec. 31, 2014; Miami, Fla.

Since I don't see a second ACC team being selected for the Orange Bowl here, I have the committee killing two birds with one stone here because the Orange Bowl has tie-in agreements in place with both the SEC and Notre Dame. The one reason I think the Fighting Irish end up being pretty good this season is because they have Everett Golson back at quarterback after he missed all of 2013. I can also see Notre Dame being 6-0 when it goes to Florida State on Oct. 18 (if this happens, the amount of pre-game hype will be insane). Meanwhile, I have Georgia winning the SEC East and setting up the "What Could Have Been in 2012" game had the Bulldogs not run out of time against Alabama in that SEC title game.

2015 COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF:

Rose Bowl – No. 2 Oregon (Pac-12 champion) vs. No. 3 Alabama (SEC champion)

Jan. 1, 2015; Pasadena, Calif.

If this plays out like I think it will, my hunch is Oregon will eventually leap Alabama in the committee's rankings so this doesn't appear on the surface as disadvantageous to the Crimson Tide. Alabama's probably better than Oregon and if this match-up happened, I'd take the Crimson Tide to win. But the Pac-12 might actually be better than the SEC this season

(yeah, I said it). Plus the Ducks have that game early in the season at home against Michigan State.

Sugar Bowl – No. 1 Florida State (ACC champion) vs. No. 4 Oklahoma (Big 12 champion)

Jan. 1, 2015; New Orleans, La.

Florida State's the best team in the country and because I see the Seminoles staying No. 1 all year, the committee will reward them by giving them the semifinal in New Orleans (which geographically speaking is much closer to Tallahassee than Pasadena). Since I have Oklahoma winning the Big 12, I'm putting the Sooners back in the Sugar Bowl here to round out the first College Football Playoff.

National Championship – No. 1 Florida State vs. No. 3 Alabama

Jan. 12, 2015; Arlington, Texas

This would be quite the match-up for two reasons: 1. Jimbo Fisher was once an assistant at LSU under Nick Saban. 2. Alabama's likely starting quarterback this season, Jacob Coker, was Jameis Winston's backup at Florida State last season. This would also be the Seminoles' second trip to JerryWorld since they open the season there next week against Oklahoma State. I believe Florida State repeats because while both teams are loaded with NFL talent, I think the Seminoles have more of it and have fewer weaknesses. I also have a hard time believing Coker's a better QB than Winston because if that were the case, he'd be the guy starting for Florida State right now.

2014 Big Ten football previews: Iowa

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

As the 2014 season inches closer, we have discussed every single Big Ten team except for one. Our series of season previews concludes today with the Iowa Hawkeyes, who come off an 8-5 2013 season capped by a 21-14 loss to LSU in the Outback Bowl.

There's a saying about how history tends to repeat itself and following a season where Iowa doubled its win total from the year prior, history is factoring into why expectations surrounding the Hawkeyes are high this fall. Because 2013 gets compared to years like 2001, 2003 and 2008, the natural inkling is that 2014 can be like 2002, 2004 and 2009, seasons where Iowa won a share of the Big Ten and/or played in a major bowl game. With that in mind, the question becomes this – how does this 2014 team look compared to those other highly successful squads coached by Kirk Ferentz?

Below is a list of 10 traits/observations the 2002, 2004 and 2009 squads all share in common beyond winning double-digit games:

1. All three teams featured quarterbacks entering their first full seasons as starters after gaining some playing experience as back-ups the year before. Brad Banks followed Kyle McCann in 2002. Drew Tate followed Nathan Chandler in 2004. Ricky Stanzi unseated Jake Christensen for good in 2008 once non-conference play concluded and after starting 11 games, went into his first full season as the starter in 2009.

2. All three teams had junior wide receivers that led the team

in receptions. Mo Brown led the Hawkeyes in all three of receptions, receiving yards and receiving touchdowns in 2002. Ed Hinkel led the Hawkeyes in receptions and receiving touchdowns (senior Clinton Solomon led in receiving yards) in 2004. Derrell Johnson-Koulianos led the Hawkeyes in receptions and receiving yards (sophomore Marvin McNutt led in receiving touchdowns) in 2009.

3. All three teams had tight ends taken in the following year's NFL Draft. Dallas Clark and Tony Moeaki both go without saying. Scott Chandler was only a sophomore in 2004, but the Hawkeyes had another tight end that season in Tony Jackson, who was taken in the 2005 NFL Draft by the Seattle Seahawks.

4. All three teams had upperclassmen predominantly starting at both offensive tackle spots. In 2002, it was Robert Gallery and David Porter. In 2004, it was Lee Gray and Pete McMahon. In 2009, it was Bryan Bulaga (when healthy) and Kyle Calloway (for all but two games).

5. All three teams had at least one defensive lineman and one safety go on to play in the NFL. In 2002, the front four featured Colin Cole (who still plays for the Carolina Panthers) and Iowa also had Derek Pagel and Bob Sanders playing the two safety spots. In 2004, Jonathan Babineaux and Matt Roth both had their names called in the 2005 NFL Draft, while Sean Considine was at free safety and went on to have a lengthy pro career. In 2009, Iowa's D-line featured three juniors that would all get drafted in 2011, plus Tyler Sash at strong safety.

6. All three had at least two returning starters at linebacker. In 2002, it was Fred Barr and Grant Steen. In 2004, it was Chad Greenway and Abdul Hodge. In 2009, it was Pat Angerer, A.J. Edds and Jeremiha Hunter.

7. All three had little question entering the season about whom would handle punting and kicking duties. David Bradley

was the returning punter for both the 2002 and 2004 seasons, while Ryan Donahue returned in 2009 after handling punting the previous two years. Nate Kaeding in 2002 goes without saying. Kyle Schlicher had established himself as Kaeding's replacement in 2004 and there wasn't any doubt in 2009 about Daniel Murray being Iowa's kicker.

8. All three teams had victories over the following Big Ten teams – Penn State, Michigan State, Minnesota and Wisconsin.

9. All three teams went undefeated during the month of October. The combined October record between the three teams is 13-0.

10. Since Kirk Ferentz took over in 1999, these are the only three Hawkeye teams to win back-to-back road games in consecutive weeks. In 2002, Iowa followed up a win at Indiana with its memorable 34-9 thumping of Michigan in The Big House. In 2004, Iowa won that infamous 6-4 game at Penn State and then won at Illinois the following week. In 2009, the Hawkeyes won at Wisconsin 20-10, then won 15-13 in the final seconds at Michigan State the very next Saturday.

Now let's look at the 2014 team and assess whether it features any of the similar traits:

1. At quarterback, there's an intriguing difference. Junior quarterback Jake Rudock returns after starting every game in 2013. Yes, C.J. Beathard made five appearances in relief last season, but Rudock started every game. Now again, Stanzi did start 11 games in 2008, but he didn't go into that season as the starting quarterback. There may have been a QB competition last year, but there was never a doubt Rudock would get the nod. Rudock has definitely shown improvements from last year, but how much those improvements show this fall will be interesting to see since there's more film of him now than there was of Banks, Tate or Stanzi heading into those other three seasons.

2. Junior wideout Tevaun Smith is certainly capable of becoming a No. 1 target of Rudock's this fall, but can he actually haul in more catches this season than senior Kevonte Martin-Manley barring injuries to either guy? Martin-Manley has led Iowa in receptions each of the past two seasons and it would be somewhat surprising if he didn't again in 2014. How much better Smith becomes over the course of this fall could be telling with this Hawkeye offense.

3. Tight end is the strongest group on this year's roster with four players Ferentz knows he can count on at any given moment. This group features one senior – Ray Hamilton. The question here would be this – is Hamilton capable of being drafted next spring, even if he doesn't end up leading this group in any receiving categories? If he is, that's an encouraging sign.

4. Here's one area of common ground and it's pretty important. Iowa not only has two upperclassmen at both tackle spots, but unlike those other three teams, both are seniors in Andrew Donnal and Brandon Scherff. Donnal falls in line with David Porter, Pete McMahon and Kyle Calloway in that all of them were seniors at right tackle. It's Scherff at left tackle that's different and Ferentz has already said on record that Scherff might go down as one of the best players Iowa has ever had.

5. On the defensive line, Carl Davis certainly looks like someone who should probably hear his name called during the NFL Draft next spring. The question here is whether John Lowdermilk or Jordan Lomax (or both) are capable of being NFL players themselves one day? Lowdermilk has the pedigree as his father Kirk played 12 seasons in the NFL. Lomax is playing free safety for the first time since high school and is coming off a season hampered by a hamstring injury. What Iowa gets from these two this season will loom large.

6. The biggest difference this team has with those other three

is lack of returning experience at linebacker. In fact, none of the three starters were players who started last season. This is pretty well-documented, so not much more needs to be said about this.

7. Here's another big difference – there's uncertainty with special teams. Junior Marshall Koehn looks to be the guy handling PATs, field goals and kickoffs in 2014, but Ferentz still hasn't said it's his to lose. Meanwhile, junior Connor Kornbrath handled Iowa's punting in 2014, but it's no guarantee he keeps that job given how junior college transfer Dillon Kidd has looked since arriving on campus.

8. Iowa won't play Penn State this season and can only play Michigan State if the two meet in the Big Ten Championship Game this December. The Hawkeyes do play both Minnesota and Wisconsin, however, and both those rivalry games come in the month of November.

9. The Hawkeyes only have two games during the month of October this season. On paper, both games appear to be winnable for Iowa with Indiana visiting Kinnick Stadium on Oct. 11 and the Hawkeyes then taking a trip to Maryland on Oct. 18. But the Hoosiers possess one of the most potent offenses in the Big Ten and the Terrapins feature the conference's best receiver duo in Stefon Diggs and Deon Long. Even with just two games, October will still be a crucial month for Iowa and especially for its defense.

10. Iowa has two pairs of back-to-back road games this season, meaning two opportunities to match those other three teams. The first chance comes in late September with road games at Pittsburgh and Purdue. Oddly enough, the only two times Iowa has ever followed up a non-conference road game with a Big Ten road game the following week under Ferentz, the Hawkeyes went 0-2 on both occasions (2004 to Arizona State and Michigan, 2007 to Iowa State and Wisconsin). The second chance comes in November with back-to-back road games at Minnesota and

Illinois. The odds of Iowa winning all four of these road contests are slim, but either a (more than likely) 5-0 start to the season or a winning streak of at least two games entering that mammoth showdown against Wisconsin on Nov. 22 would go a long way in the Hawkeyes' quest to play for a Big Ten crown on Dec. 6.

As this all pertains to Iowa's current situation, there's a mixed bag. Some pieces are in place (mainly along both sides of the line of scrimmage), but some stars will need to align once again and a few firsts would have to happen in order for this current version of the Hawkeyes to reach that same level.

Can a quarterback who is proven like Rudock have the same type of success catching defenses off-guard like those others did? Can Smith raise his game to where he's talked about as Iowa's top receiving threat? Can Hamilton evolve into an NFL-caliber tight end if he's not one already? Can either Lowdermilk or Lomax evolve into NFL-caliber safeties if they aren't already? Can this defense succeed with a group of linebackers that have nowhere near the same playing experience? Can this team have success despite entering the season with kicking and punting concerns? Can this team win key rivalry games, show it can go on the road two consecutive weeks without losing, and avoid losing games during what appear to be key stretches in the season?

All of these questions could have a "Yes" answer by season's end and this would be a very successful season for Iowa if they do, but there also doesn't appear to be much margin of error. Given what this team brings back, what its schedule looks like and everything that has already been written and said about it, Iowa should match last year's win total and perhaps even improve off it.

But in order to reach that pantheon featuring those 2002, 2004 and 2009 squads, the 2014 Iowa Hawkeyes now have to show they can take that next step like those teams did. They need

history to repeat itself.

Click here to read our season previews of the other Big Ten teams, each of which include audio from players (please note you must have either a monthly or yearly paid subscription, or a three-day free trial, to HawkeyeDrive.com to access all of these): [Penn State](#), [Rutgers](#), [Michigan](#), [Ohio State](#), [Michigan State](#), [Indiana](#), [Maryland](#), [Purdue](#), [Illinois](#), [Minnesota](#), [Northwestern](#), [Nebraska](#), [Wisconsin](#).

Hawkeyes in the NFL: 2014 Preseason Week Three

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

The third week of the 2014 NFL preseason, also known as the “dress rehearsal” week since starters play the majority of the games, begins Thursday. As of Wednesday morning, 36 former Iowa football players currently remain on NFL rosters.

Below is a list of this week’s preseason games in the NFL, including which former Iowa players are on which teams. Included will be a list of television stations in Iowa carrying preseason games of three Midwest teams – the Chicago Bears, Kansas City Chiefs and Minnesota Vikings. The Bears’ game Aug. 22 against the Seahawks is also being nationally carried on NFL Network for those not listed in the Iowa markets below.

There are also seven nationally televised preseason games, including the Aug. 23 contest on NFL Network between the Tampa

Bay Buccaneers and Buffalo Bills, both of whom feature pairs of former Hawkeyes. The Buccaneers have Adrian Clayborn and Brandon Myers, while the Bills have Scott Chandler and Tony Moeaki.

Thursday, Aug. 21:

Pittsburgh at Philadelphia, 6:30 p.m. (NFL Network) – **Eagles:** *Bradley Fletcher (#24), Matt Tobin (#64), Julian Vandervelde (#61)*

Friday, Aug. 22:

Jacksonville at Detroit, 6:30 p.m. – **Jaguars:** *Ricky Stanzi (#2); Lions:* *Riley Reiff (#71)*

Carolina at New England, 6:30 p.m. – **Panthers:** *Colin Cole (#91), Charles Godfrey (#30), Marvin McNutt (#15); Patriots:* *James Morris (#52)*

NY Giants at NY Jets, 6:30 p.m. – **Jets:** *A.J. Edds (#47), Markus Zusevics (#76)*

Oakland at Green Bay, 7 p.m. (CBS) – **Packers:** *Bryan Bulaga (#75), Mike Daniels (#76), Micah Hyde (#33), Tanner Miller (#40)*

Chicago at Seattle, 9 p.m. (NFL Network)

***TV stations in Iowa carrying Bears/Seahawks:** KFXA-DT 28.1 (*Eastern Iowa*); KLJB-DT 18.1 (*Quad Cities*); KCWI-CW 23.1 (*Des Moines*); KPTM-DT 42.1 (*Council Bluffs/Omaha*)

Saturday, Aug. 23:

Tampa Bay at Buffalo, 3:30 p.m. (NFL Network) – **Buccaneers:** *Adrian Clayborn (#94), Brandon Myers (#82); Bills:* *Scott Chandler (#84), Tony Moeaki (#82)*

Tennessee at Atlanta, 6 p.m. – **Titans:** *Shonn Greene (#23), Karl Klug (#97); Falcons:* *Pat Angerer (#44), Jonathan*

Babineaux (#95)

Dallas at Miami, 6 p.m. – **Cowboys:** Anthony Hitchens (#59), Casey Kreiter (#49)

Washington at Baltimore, 6:30 p.m. – **Redskins:** Adam Gettis (#73); **Ravens:** Brett Van Sloten (#61), Marshal Yanda (#73)

St. Louis at Cleveland, 7 p.m. – **Browns:** Christian Kirksey (#58)

New Orleans at Indianapolis, 7 p.m. (CBS; shown on KMTV-DT 3.2 in Council Bluffs/Omaha and tape delay at 10:30 p.m. on WHBF-DT 4.1 in Quad Cities)

Minnesota at Kansas City, 7 p.m. – **Vikings:** Chad Greenway (#52), Shaun Prater (#27), Allen Reisner (#87)

***TV stations in Iowa carrying Vikings/Chiefs:** **Vikings:** KGAN-DT 2.1 (10:30 p.m. tape delay; Eastern Iowa); WHBF-DT 4.1 (Quad Cities); KCCI-DT2 8.2 (Des Moines); KPTH-DT 44.1 (Sioux City); KTTC-CW 10.2 (Mason City/Austin/Rochester); KSFY-DT 13.1 (Northwest Iowa/Sioux Falls); WKBT-MYN 8.2 (Northeast Iowa/La Crosse); KETV-DT 7.2 (Council Bluffs/Omaha); **Chiefs:** KD SM-DT 17.1 (Des Moines); KTV0-DT2 33.2 (Ottumwa/Kirksville); KMTV-DT 3.1 (Council Bluffs/Omaha)

Houston at Denver, 8 p.m. – **Texans:** Conor Bofelli (#66), James Ferentz (#78), C.J. Fiedorowicz (#87), Jeff Tarpinian (#52)

Sunday, Aug. 24:

San Diego at San Francisco, 3 p.m. (FOX)

Cincinnati at Arizona, 7 p.m. (NBC)

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

2014 Big Ten football previews: Wisconsin (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

We've discussed [Penn State](#), [Rutgers](#), [Michigan](#), [Ohio State](#), [Michigan State](#), [Indiana](#), [Maryland](#), [Purdue](#), [Illinois](#), [Minnesota](#), [Northwestern](#) and [Nebraska](#). Now our attention shifts to the Wisconsin Badgers. Iowa will play its third straight home game dating back to 2010 against Wisconsin on Nov. 22 at Kinnick Stadium.

The Badgers went through a somewhat radical change in 2013 when Gary Andersen was brought to Wisconsin as head coach. Offensively, the changes weren't entirely noticeable because Andersen recognized his offense's strengths and maximized them. Defensively, the Badgers evolved into a 3-4 team and while there was an evident transition period going on, the defense provided results.

Going into 2014, Wisconsin has been tabbed the favorite to win the Big Ten West and in all honesty, that label is justified, perhaps even more so than some will let on.

Looking at the quarterback conundrum the Badgers are dealing with, no decision has been made yet whether junior Joel Stave will remain the starter or if junior Tanner McEvoy will unseat Stave. It seems pretty clear Stave will be under center when Wisconsin plays LSU in two weeks because if the plan was to go with McEvoy, wouldn't that have decision already been made? If it's this close, there's no reason for them to change.

Here's why this is even a discussion – Stave threw 13 interceptions last season to go along with his 22 touchdown passes. Obviously he needs to cut down on his turnovers, but given the identity of Wisconsin's offense, that's all he really should be worrying about.

Sticking with this point on offensive identity, the Badgers want to run the ball. A lot. Yes, they lost James White. They also have the best running back in the Big Ten (and maybe even the entire country) in junior Melvin Gordon. Last season, Gordon rushed for 1,609 yards and 12 touchdowns on 206 carries. In fact, he averaged 123.8 yards per game rushing. The only two Big Ten running backs who averaged more yards per game both had more carries than Gordon, who was splitting time with another 100-yard back in White.

One thing that will be similar is Wisconsin will continue using a 1-2 punch with sophomore Corey Clement complementing Gordon. Clement had 547 yards rushing and seven touchdowns on 67 carries and this was playing behind Gordon and White. Both Gordon and Clement are going to get more carries and more yards. The Badgers' ground game will remain the same.

The biggest concern with this offense outside of the QB situation is at receiver, where Wisconsin has a lot of unproven players. Junior wideout Jordan Frederick is probably the veteran of the bunch, yet he only had 10 catches for 106 yards during the 2013 season. One name that should become a bigger part of the Badgers' passing attack is junior Kenzel Doe. Senior Sam Arneson will also be more involved playing at tight end.

Up front, Wisconsin's as tall and beefy as ever. It's also as experienced as ever. Senior Rob Havenstein (6-8, 333 pounds) might be the Big Ten's best right tackle. Junior Tyler Marz (6-5, 321 pounds) started every game at left tackle in 2013. Next to Havenstein is senior right guard Kyle Costigan (6-5, 319 pounds). Sophomore center Dan Voltz (6-3, 311 pounds) and

senior left guard Dallas Lewallen (6-6, 321 pounds) make up the rest of the group paving the way for Gordon this fall.

Defensively, there has been concern expressed about the Badgers replacing their entire front seven. That's not something that can be diminished. However, all of these new starters along the D-line and in the linebacking corps have had a year to learn the 3-4 and understand the nuances of what they do.

On the D-line, the biggest loss is Beau Allen at the nose guard. Filling in at nose guard now is senior Warren Herring, who had only 17 tackles, but also recorded four sacks for the Badgers in 2013. As for the linebackers, two names to watch are seniors Marcus Trotter and Derek Landisch, who are both inside 'backers taking on the responsibility of replacing Chris Borland. Trotter had 23 tackles and a fumble recovery last season, while Landisch had 33 tackles, a sack and a fumble recovery. Point being, Wisconsin has guys that have played before.

The secondary, by default, is considered this defense's best attribute. Leading the DBs is junior strong safety Michael Caputo, who had 63 tackles for the Badgers last season. Holding down the two corner spots are junior Darius Hillary and sophomore Sojourn Shelton. Hillary recorded 30 tackles and five pass break ups in 2013, while Shelton had 36 tackles (31 unassisted) and team-highs of eight pass break ups and four interceptions. Teams that struggle running the ball against Wisconsin will struggle to win.

On special teams, junior Drew Meyer returns to handle punting duties, while placekicking duties will once again belong to junior kicker Jack Russell. Doe will be back handling both punt and kickoff returns again this fall.

Wisconsin gets a chance to make an immediate statement on Aug. 30 when it travels to Houston to face LSU. That evening, the

Badgers will be an underdog. After that evening though, there's a good chance Wisconsin wins each of its next nine games leading up to Nov. 22 when it visits Iowa. The two hurdles between those LSU and Iowa games are Oct. 4 at Northwestern and Nov. 15 when Nebraska visits Camp Randall Stadium.

If the Badgers somehow manage to escape NRG Stadium with a victory over LSU, not only will everyone become convinced that Wisconsin's the team to beat in the West, but all of a sudden, Gordon will start gaining more steam for the Heisman Trophy and the Badgers will start gaining more steam for the College Football Playoff should they meet expectations post-LSU.

Wisconsin has a nice enough schedule in place that as far as winning the West goes, it can afford a hiccup or even two since its crossovers from the East are Maryland at home and then at Rutgers the following week. There's definitely concerns, but the things to like about this team supersede those concerns because the Badgers have won this way before with a powerful O-line and excellent ground game and as long as those two things are established, they're always going to be a contender.

AUDIO:

Wisconsin running back Melvin Gordon –

<http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Melvin-Gordon-2014-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>

2014 Big Ten football previews: Nebraska (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

We've written about [Penn State](#), [Rutgers](#), [Michigan](#), [Ohio State](#), [Michigan State](#), [Indiana](#), [Maryland](#), [Purdue](#), [Illinois](#), [Minnesota](#) and [Northwestern](#). Now we set our sights on the Nebraska Cornhuskers. Iowa will play Nebraska on Nov. 28 at Kinnick Stadium.

Last season, Nebraska possessed a team talented enough to win the Legends Division. It just never materialized in big games and as a result, the hot seat kept getting warmer and warmer for Bo Pelini. In fact, it looked like he was doing everything possible to get fired right after the Cornhuskers lost to Iowa at home by three touchdowns on Black Friday. But Pelini and Nebraska managed a small bit of salvaging on New Year's Day, defeating Georgia in the Gator Bowl.

Now entering 2014, the Cornhuskers again have plenty of talent at their disposal. In terms of athletic talent and ability, they might even be the best that the Big Ten's West Division has to offer. But can it all come together, or will this prove to be another disappointing season for the faithful in Lincoln?

As unfortunate as it was for Nebraska that it spent most of last season without having Taylor Martinez, the positive from that was Tommy Armstrong, Jr., gaining game experience at quarterback. Now Armstrong, Jr., enters his sophomore campaign as the guy. In nine appearances last season, he threw for a team-high 966 yards, but had a touchdown-to-interception ratio of 9-to-8. Needless to say, this has to improve in order for Armstrong, Jr., and Nebraska both to take that next step.

Meanwhile, Nebraska is set at the other skill positions. The Cornhuskers might very well have the conference's best 1-2 punch at running back this season between senior Ameer Abdullah and junior Imani Cross. Abdullah's 1,690 yards on the ground last season were the most by any Big Ten running back. He also rushed for nine touchdowns while toting the rock 281 times. Cross had 447 yards rushing on 85 carries, but led Nebraska with 10 rushing touchdowns. More of the same from these two guys should be expected.

The receiving corps took a huge hit with Quincy Enunwa now in the NFL. Enunwa had 51 catches for team-highs of 753 yards receiving and 12 touchdowns. Now the good news for the Cornhuskers is they do have a big-time receiver returning in senior Kenny Bell, who had 52 catches for 577 yards and four touchdowns in 2013. It should be noted only two of those touchdown catches came courtesy of Armstrong, Jr. Three other receivers that will likely play greater roles in 2014 are sophomore Jordan Westerkamp, junior Sam Burtch and senior Jamal Turner.

Up front, the offensive line is a major concern because senior left guard Jake Cotton is the only regular starter from last season that's back. Senior Mike Moudy is currently listed as the starter at right guard, a position he held for two games last season against Minnesota and Northwestern. Junior Alex Lewis is a Colorado transfer in line to start at left tackle this season. At center, there's still a competition between junior Ryne Reeves and senior Mark Pelini (Bo's nephew). Junior Zach Sterup is the favorite to start at right tackle.

Defensively, the strength of the Blackshirts this season will be the D-line, led by junior defensive end Randy Gregory. After transferring from Arizona Western Community College, Gregory burst onto the scene last season by compiling 66 tackles and leading the Big Ten with 10.5 sacks. Simply put, Gregory is the conference's best defensive player. Inside, the Cornhuskers have depth with junior Aaron Curry and sophomores

Vincent Valentine and Maliek Collins all gaining experience last season.

The back seven is where things start getting dicey with this defense. Sophomore linebacker Michael Rose was in line to start at middle linebacker, but was injured during fall camp and will miss all of the 2014 season. Rose also had 66 tackles for Nebraska last season. Without Rose, the Cornhuskers will become even more reliant on junior David Santos and senior Zaire Anderson. Santos recorded 87 tackles and two sacks in 2013, while Anderson had 52 tackles and three sacks.

Meanwhile, the secondary lost some key depth at safety during fall camp with junior Charles Jackson being injured for the entire 2014 season and sophomore LeRoy Alexander being suspended. The only returning starter is senior strong safety Corey Cooper, who led Nebraska with 91 tackles last season. The losses at corner of Cianté Evans and Stanley Jean-Baptiste – both had four interceptions each in 2013 – leaves the Cornhuskers vulnerable. Senior Josh Mitchell compiled 31 tackles, as well as six pass break ups and an interception last season, while junior Jonathan Rose will be seeing his first significant action this fall.

Sophomore Sam Foltz is back to handle Nebraska's punting after averaging 41.6 yards per punt in 2013. Meanwhile, junior Mauro Bondi is in line to handle placekicking, but whether he actually will or not remains unknown. Westerkamp will remain the Cornhuskers' punt returner, while Bell continues handling kickoff returns.

Now looking to Nebraska's schedule, there's no reason the Cornhuskers can't go 7-0 at Memorial Stadium this season. Their toughest home game might actually be on Sept. 20 when Miami (Fla.) visits Lincoln. The Big Ten slate features home games against Illinois, Rutgers, Purdue and Minnesota. Conversely, the road schedule is insane. For whatever reason, Nebraska is playing a non-conference game at Fresno State on

Sept. 13. Then its first road game in Big Ten play is Oct. 4 at Michigan State. The rest of the road slate includes trips to Northwestern, Wisconsin and Iowa.

This schedule (specifically the road portion) is honestly the lone trepidation. Nebraska is arguably more talented than Wisconsin or Iowa, but having to play both on the road in November is enough reason to not pick the Cornhuskers to win the West. That being said, keep an eye on that Michigan State game for this reason – even though Nebraska lost to Michigan State last season, it was one of the few teams able to move the ball at will on the Spartans' defense. Heck, the Cornhuskers even scored 28 points that afternoon. Five turnovers is the reason why they lost that game.

If they can stay clean with the football, they're one of the few teams that can actually hang with and even beat Michigan State. If Nebraska leaves East Lansing that night with a win, going into Evanston, Madison and Iowa City won't be nearly as intimidating.

AUDIO:

Nebraska running back Ameer Abdullah –

<http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Ameer-Abdullah-2014-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>

8/16/2014: Iowa football video (Kids Day)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – The Iowa Hawkeyes held their annual “Kids Day” practice on Saturday at Kinnick Stadium, which was open to fans and media alike.

Below are six videos from Saturday’s practice, five of which include footage throughout the 11-on-11 (or “live”) portion and one video at the bottom featuring Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz sharing his thoughts on how Saturday’s practice and the first two weeks of fall camp have gone for his team. One item of note from Ferentz is that junior fullback Adam Cox will miss the entire 2014 season after suffering a torn ACL earlier in the week.

KIRK FERENTZ:

2014 Big Ten football previews: (premium) Northwestern

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Thus far in our Big Ten season preview series, we have discussed [Penn State](#), [Rutgers](#), [Michigan](#), [Ohio State](#), [Michigan State](#), [Indiana](#), [Maryland](#), [Purdue](#), [Illinois](#) and [Minnesota](#). We now turn our attention to the Northwestern Wildcats. Iowa will play its second straight home game against Northwestern on

Nov. 1 at Kinnick Stadium.

Last season started off well for Northwestern and at one point, there was potential for it being as special as 2012 turned out to be for the Wildcats. But then came that marquee game against Ohio State, a game Northwestern would lose, and Pat Fitzgerald's team never recovered. What began as promising became nightmarish and instead of competing for a Big Ten title, the Wildcats went 5-7 and missed out on a bowl game altogether.

This offseason has only provided more turmoil for this program between unionization becoming a hot topic and more recently, having running back Venric Mark transfer and wide receiver Christian Jones suffer a season-ending knee injury in fall camp. Yet despite all of that, Northwestern could still very well be a team that stays in the Big Ten West conversation this fall.

At quarterback is senior Trevor Siemian, who no longer has to worry about splitting first-string duties with Kain Colter any longer. This is his team and his offense now. Last season, Siemian appeared in all 12 of Northwestern's games and finished with 2,149 yards passing, 11 touchdowns and nine interceptions. Obviously, his passing numbers need to improve. But since he's not nearly as mobile as Colter was, Siemian's arm has always been his best attribute and with more reps should come more productive numbers.

Now losing Mark at running back (and doing so two weeks before the season starts) is crushing, especially when considering how the Wildcats' offense was never the same last season after he got hurt. That being said, Treyvon Green did rush for a team-high 736 yards and eight touchdowns on 137 carries in 2013 and returns this fall looking to again fill that void left by Mark. Behind Green is sophomore Stephen Buckley, who rushed for 265 yards and a touchdown on 50 carries last season.

Watching Christian Jones go down to injury might be even more depleting for the Wildcats, especially they're going to need all the weapons they can get for Siemian this season. But Northwestern does have another Jones (no relation) to lead the receiving corps in Tony Jones, who caught a team-high of 55 receptions and had 630 receiving yards (only 38 fewer than Christian Jones had). Two other wideouts Northwestern will now need to step up are junior Cameron Dickson and senior Kyle Prater.

Another name to keep in mind when discussing the Wildcats' passing attack is junior super-back Dan Vitale. Only the two Joneses caught more balls last season than Vitale – who hauled in 34 catches – and he racked up 382 yards receiving and three touchdowns. His role only becomes more vital now for Northwestern's offense.

The most encouraging news for Siemian and the Wildcat offense is that the entire offensive line from last year is back. Seniors Jack Konopka and Paul Jorgensen both return at the two tackle spots, while senior Brandon Vitabile returns at center. Junior Matt Frazier started the last four games of 2013 at right guard and remains first-string there now, while junior Geoff Mogus remains the starter at left guard. Sophomores Ian Park and Adam DePietro both started games last season and are competing at the two guard spots.

Tyler Scott was Northwestern's most productive defensive lineman last season, recording a team-high of six sacks. He's gone, but the rest of that D-line from a year ago remains intact. A foot injury hampered defensive tackle Sean McEvilly last fall, but he returns for his senior season now looking to boost the Wildcat defense. Also returning is junior defensive end Dean Lowry, who is coming off a season consisting of 33 tackles, 4.5 sacks, two forced fumbles and two interceptions. Joining these two guys along the front four will be juniors Deonte Gibson and C.J. Robbins.

Northwestern's linebacking corps loses its leading tackler from last season in Damien Proby. But it does return arguably the best linebacker in the Big Ten this season in senior weak-side 'backer Chi Chi Ariguzo. In addition to recording 106 tackles, Ariguzo also tied for a team-high four interceptions in 2013. Also returning is senior middle linebacker Collin Ellis, who comes off a season featuring 78 tackles and three interceptions, two of which were returned for pick-sixes in the same game against California.

The secondary returns all four starters from 2013. Senior safety Ibraheim Campbell and junior cornerback Nick VanHoose are the leaders of this group. Campbell had 73 tackles, five pass break ups and four interceptions, while VanHoose recorded 61 tackles and a team-high eight pass break ups. This group also returns junior safety Traevon Henry, who had 77 tackles last season. Sophomores Matt Harris and Dwight White both started games at corner in 2013, but Harris currently has the edge for that last spot.

On special teams, Northwestern has to replace Jeff Budzien at kicker, which it doesn't appear to have done just yet. Junior Chris Gradone returns after handling 11 of Northwestern's punts last season. With Mark gone, Tony Jones and Harris are among the likely candidates to now handle punt and kickoff return duties for the Wildcats.

Northwestern has two intriguing non-conference games at home right away with California and Northern Illinois both visiting Ryan Field. The Wildcats also play at Notre Dame on Nov. 15. That being said, Northwestern has a six-game stretch in Big Ten play prior to the Notre Dame contest that will tell a lot. This stretch starts on Sept. 27 with a trip to Penn State, followed by a home date with Wisconsin, a road trip to Minnesota and a home game against Nebraska. Then following the bye week, Northwestern travels to Iowa on Nov. 1 and plays Michigan at home on Nov. 8.

Between the other six games, the Wildcats should be able to win at least 4 (if not 5) of those contests. With the exception of Penn State, Northwestern lost to all of those other Big Ten teams last season that it plays during that stretch and some of those defeats were snatched from victory. If the Wildcats are to have a bounce-back year, going at least .500 during those six weeks would be most ideal for them.

While it's hard to envision Northwestern being able to actually win the Big Ten West, there's enough senior leadership around to suggest a bounce-back season is still possible. The question now is whether or not the Wildcats can start catching some of these breaks they haven't been getting since last October.

AUDIO:

Northwestern safety Ibraheim Campbell –

<http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Ibraheim-Campbell-2014-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>

2014 Big Ten football previews: Minnesota (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

After examining [Penn State](#), [Rutgers](#), [Michigan](#), [Ohio State](#), [Michigan State](#), [Indiana](#), [Maryland](#), [Purdue](#) and [Illinois](#), we now shift our attention to the Minnesota Golden Gophers. For the fourth time in the last five years, Iowa will visit TCF Bank Stadium in Minneapolis, Minn., on Nov. 8.

Coming off a 6-win season in 2012, the feeling at this time last year was Minnesota would take a step back. It easily could have when head coach Jerry Kill was forced to take a leave of absence following another epileptic episode. But instead, the Golden Gophers played inspired and put together a memorable 8-5 campaign in 2013. A shot at making a third straight bowl game in 2014 isn't unrealistic, but it could also prove more challenging.

At quarterback, Mitch Leidner returns for his sophomore season and with Philip Nelson out of the picture, the burden of leading this offense has been placed on Leidner, who started four of the 10 games he appeared in last year. When he was under center, Leidner was effective as a runner, compiling 407 yards rushing on 102 carries and tied for a team-high seven touchdowns on the ground. But it's his passing that needs the most improvement. Leidner only threw the ball 78 times in 2013 and completed 43 of those attempts for 619 yards and three touchdowns. These numbers should improve now that he's the guy, but they're going to need to improve for Minnesota to have any chance offensively.

The Golden Gophers' best offensive player is their running back, senior David Cobb. He led Minnesota in rushing last season with 1,202 yards and seven touchdowns on 237 carries. He also had 17 catches for 174 yards receiving, good for third and fourth respectively on the team. He's the one player Minnesota can ill-afford to lose at any point this fall.

The receiving corps is a glaring question mark, especially when you tack on Leidner's lack of passing productivity a year ago. Sophomore tight end Maxx Williams returns after leading the Golden Gophers in receiving with 25 catches for 417 yards and five touchdowns (all team-highs). The two most experienced wideouts are senior Isaac Fruechte and sophomore Drew Wolitarsky. Fruechte had 13 catches for 154 yards receiving last season, while Wolitarsky had 15 grabs for 259 yards and a touchdown. This is also a group where younger players could

potentially emerge and provide an immediate impact.

One thing Minnesota has going for it offensively is experience up front, as it brings back five O-linemen whom started games in 2013. The cogs of this line are senior left guard Zac Epping and junior right tackle Josh Campion, both of whom started every game last season. Senior center Tommy Olson and junior right guard Foster Bush both face similar predicaments having started the last four games of last season, yet competing for those same spots in 2014. Olson's currently battling junior Brian Bobek at center, while junior Jon Christenson is looking to unseat Bush at right guard. Sophomore Ben Lauer is on pace to start at left tackle, where he started four times in 2013.

Minnesota brings back seven starters on defense, including three defensive linemen. But that front four has an enormous void to fill this year after the Atlanta Falcons drafted Ra'Shede Hageman last spring. Junior Scott Ekpe faces the task of replacing Hageman inside. Meanwhile, junior Theiren Cockran is back at one D-end spot after leading the Golden Gophers with 7.5 sacks last season, while senior Michael Amaefula occupies the other end spot. Senior Cameron Botticelli returns at defensive tackle after recording 23 tackles in 2013.

At linebacker, senior Damien Wilson returns to the middle after recording 78 tackles playing that spot last year. But Wilson will have new faces alongside him in 2014. Junior linebacker De'Vondre Campbell started a game at Indiana in place of Wilson last season and is expected to take over at the weak-side spot. As for the strong-side vacancy, it looks as though sophomore Jack Lynn will emerge there.

Much like the defensive line, Minnesota's secondary brings back three starters from a season ago. But the one void at cornerback is enormous with Brock Vereen now playing for the Chicago Bears. Senior strong safety Cedric Thompson returns after leading the Golden Gophers with 79 tackles, two fumble

recoveries and an interception. Junior Antonio Johnson started Minnesota's final seven games at free safety after Vereen moved over to corner and finished 2013 with 69 tackles and three pass break ups.

Junior Eric Murray started every game last season at corner and managed to not only record 52 tackles (44 unassisted), but also lead the Golden Gophers with 10 pass break ups. The other corner spot is a battle between junior Briean Boddy-Calhoun and senior Derrick Wells, both of whom started games at corner last season before Vereen switched positions.

Minnesota is still unsettled at kicker, but returns junior punter Peter Mortell after he averaged 43.3 yards per punt in 2013. Senior Marcus Jones will handle punt and kickoff return duties after returning one of each for touchdowns last season.

Now when it comes to the schedule, the Golden Gophers are going to want to rack up as many wins as possible before the month of November. Following a bye week that first November weekend, Minnesota concludes its regular season with a four-game stretch consisting of Iowa and Ohio State visiting TCF Bank Stadium, followed by consecutive road trips to Nebraska and Wisconsin.

The Golden Gophers have three key games before this stretch and will need to win at least one of them if they want to go bowling for a third straight year – Sept. 13 at TCU, Sept. 27 at Michigan (Minnesota's Big Ten opener) and Oct. 11 against Northwestern at home. Every other game in September and October is winnable. These three contests will make or break Minnesota's season because on one hand, they're all difficult contests, but on the other hand, these are games the Golden Gophers could realistically win if enough breaks go their way in any one of them.

There's no question Kill has this Minnesota program going in the right direction. But while this isn't a make or break

season for the Golden Gophers, it's one that could set the tone for what lies ahead in their future.

AUDIO:

Minnesota quarterback Mitch Leidner –

<http://hawkeyedrive.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Mitch-Leidner-2014-B1G-Media-Days.mp3>