

Ferentz's Hawkeyes will try to finish off unbeaten season

THE SPORTS XCHANGE

All that stands between Iowa and a perfect regular season is Nebraska.

The Hawkeyes travel to Lincoln, Nebraska, for the annual Heroes Game on Friday (3:30 p.m., ABC-TV) with the Big Ten West Division title and a ticket to the conference championship game in Indianapolis next week already in hand.

Iowa still has plenty of naysayers heading into a big weekend of college football. The national media isn't sold on the Hawkeyes' worthiness to be considered among the top teams in the College Football Playoff rankings but the selection committee is. The Hawkeyes moved up to No. 4 in Tuesday's latest rankings.

The game at Nebraska (5-6, 3-4 Big Ten) will provide Iowa (11-0, 7-0) with an opportunity to show the world it belongs with the elite.

The Hawkeyes know the Cornhuskers are a dangerous team with a record that's deceiving. Their six losses have

been by five, three, one, two, two and 10 points. They handed Michigan State its only loss three weeks ago and they need a win to become bowl eligible.

Nebraska also is coming off an extra week of preparation because of a bye. In other words, it's a team that's laying in the weeds waiting to attack while trying to salvage its first season under coach Mike Riley.

The Cornhuskers have one of the Big Ten's top passing attacks, led by quarterback Tommy Armstrong Jr., and their defensive line is big and talented.

"We've got to find a way, and we will," Iowa coach Kirk Ferentz said. "We have got good guys and they're working hard and they'll respond, but this is going to be a big challenge, too. This is a really good offensive football team, you know."

Ferentz was the head football coach at the University of Maine from 1990-92.

The ramifications of Friday's game are obvious for



REESE STRICKLAND | USA TODAY SPORTS
Iowa Hawkeyes head coach Kirk Ferentz leaves the field after beating the Purdue Boilermakers at Kinnick Stadium on Saturday. Iowa beat Purdue 40-20.

Iowa. Win out and the Hawkeyes more than likely remain in the CFP final four. Lose once and they can forget about the playoffs. The Hawkeyes aren't accustomed to that type of pressure.

"Yeah, we're trying not to focus on that," Ferentz said. "I've said this before: These

guys are in college. They're smart. Every one of them. They may not have a car, they may not have clothes, but they've all got a phone and technology. It's an essential in life anymore.

"They get more information than they need probably, so I don't think I have to re-

mind them about those kinds of things, but to me the reminder is how do we get to here. How do we get to this point thus far, and that's really the secret."

The potential for distractions is there, but Ferentz likes the way his team has handled its business this year.

"We try not to get too bogged down on that stuff, just like the College Playoff rankings that have been going on a couple weeks now. Right now, they really don't mean a lot," Ferentz said. "It's really about the competition and what's going on on the field. We're just going to try to keep our eyes on what's in front of us here, and see where it all takes us at the end."

Iowa only need to flip the calendar to remember how low it was a year ago after its collapse at home against Nebraska. Leading 24-7 late in the third quarter, the Hawkeyes gave up big play after big play that allowed Armstrong to rally the Cornhuskers to a 37-34 overtime win.

A promising 2014 season de-

teriorated into a 7-6 finish for Iowa and prompted Ferentz to make changes during the off-season that led to the turnaround this year. To put the Hawkeyes' success to date in historical perspective, the last time they finished with an unbeaten and untied regular-season record was 1922.

One of the catalysts for change in the program in January was Ferentz going with C.J. Beathard at quarterback over returning starter Jake Rudock, who is now at Michigan. Beathard's leadership qualities, a strong running attack with four capable backs and a hard-hitting defense accelerated the transformation.

"That game is a centerpiece for it, but there were signs along the way," Ferentz said. "We lost way too many close games, something we didn't do as a team very well last year. There's a lot of things we didn't do well. You can go right down the list, but that word "finish," it gets thrown out all the time in sports."

Jersey

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"We thought there was going to be a black bear head on the front but that [three flags] symbol is pretty cool. We'd like to wear them every game and see how it goes," Riley added.

The three flags inside the crest represent the Orono campus' flagship status and symbolizes its mission of teaching, research and public service.

"We have some pretty superstitious guys out there so we would sure love to keep wearing them," said junior right wing Brady Campbell.

"I like the logo. It mixes things up a little bit. There are different colors out there. It looks good."

Campbell and sophomore center Cedric Lacroix said Gendron gave the team a talk before last Friday night's game about the university's history and the meaning of the crest and logo.

"It was pretty cool to know that the school has that much history behind it. We're very fortunate to be a part of it," said Lacroix.

"They look great and we played great in them. It

Men's college hockey

MAINE vs. PRINCETON

Time, site: Friday, Saturday, 7 p.m., Alford Arena, Orono

Records: Maine 2-8-3, Princeton 2-6

Series, last meeting: tied 5-5, Princeton 3-1 on Oct. 31

Key players: Maine — C Will Merchant (4 goals, 2 assists), C Cam Brown (2 & 4), LW Blaine Byron (2 & 4), D Dan Renouf (2 & 4), RW Steven Swavely (1 & 2), G Matt Morris (2-2-1, 2.55 goals-against average, .932 save percentage), G Rob McGovern (0-6-2, 2.45, .922); **Princeton** — RW David Hallisey (0 & 4), LW Eric Robinson (3 & 0), C Max Veronneau (3 & 0), C Ben Foster (2 & 1), LW Kyle Rankin (2 & 0), D Joe Grabowski (1 & 1), G Colton Phinney (2-6, 2.20, .943)

Game notes: Both teams are coming off productive weekends. Maine snapped an eight-game losing streak and finally dented the win column with 3-2 and 4-1 wins over Vermont while the Tigers upset Clarkson on Saturday 3-0 behind Phinney's 31 saves. These teams are ranked 58th and 59th among 60 teams in the country in goal production as Princeton has averaged 1.75 goals per game while Maine has scored 1.38. But Maine gained some confidence last weekend against Vermont. Princeton has the nation's top penalty-killing unit, operating at 95.8 percent efficiency. Phinney has the nation's seventh best save percentage (.943). He made 38 saves in the victory over Maine in the Capital City Classic consolation game. Maine's Merchant and Princeton center Michael Zajac are close friends and were longtime linemates at Eagan High School (Minnesota). Maine has to finish its checks, sustain its forecheck and make life difficult for Phinney by attacking the net and screening him.

works for me," said senior goalie Matt Morris, who backstopped the two victories. "When I first saw them, I thought, 'Wow, these are sharp.' We were pretty excited for the game."

Freshman left wing Dane Gibson thinks they should keep wearing them as long as they keep winning. He was also impressed with them.

"The light color and the logos are so cool, as is the fact it's the 150th anniversary of the school," he said.

Ritz said there wouldn't be any kind of color clash this

weekend because Princeton's colors are orange and black and they will be wearing their black jerseys.

But he expects the jerseys to be available just through the calendar year because there's "no sense" wearing them in 2016, since that represents the 151st year of the school's existence.

He added that he was pleased to see fans wearing the jerseys.

"I counted 15 of them," he said.

Gendron will make a decision Friday on what jerseys will be worn.

Vegas

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a tiny casino sits the Las Vegas Ice Center, the local mecca of hockey.

The Ice Center has two of Las Vegas' three ice rinks. It serves 41 adult leagues, more than 350 kids in travel and house leagues and is home to UNLV's club team.

"We're busier now than we ever have been," general manager Bob Della Rocca said. "People who come here are shocked. ... Hockey here is a love affair — a niche love affair."

Della Rocca is one of the more than 13,500 people who have paid season-ticket deposits for the team that doesn't exist.

"Would it make it here?" he asked. "I won't say it would be easy, but, yes, I think it will. I'm from Long Island and I saw the Islanders struggle for years. If you don't win, even with an established fan base, it can be tough."

In the Ice Center's lobby is a list of the Sunday night league teams. Among them is one named "Wirtz." That's the team from Wirtz Beverage-Nevada, as in the company owned by the family that owns the Chicago Blackhawks.

To be clear, there is already

a hockey team in Las Vegas — and a relatively successful one. (And we don't mean the Blackhaws, who were in town this week for a little break between games in Vancouver and San Jose.)

Just east of the Vegas Strip is the UNLV campus, home to the men's 10-7 Rebel ice hockey club, part of the American Collegiate Hockey Association.

"We're trying to grow the visibility of the team in Las Vegas," Zee Khan, the team's general manager, said. "Hockey is growing like crazy here."

Speaking of college hockey, the University of North Dakota and University of Minnesota just agreed to play a game on Oct. 27, 2018, at the Orleans Hotel's ice arena. So Las Vegas has that to look forward to, but what many in the city — most notably billionaire Bill Foley — want is an NHL team.

They have an arena, or at least will in March when the \$375 million, 20,000-seat Las Vegas Arena MGM arena, rising next to the New York-New York hotel and casino, is finished.

They even have many suggestions for team names: Bones, Flamingos, Outlaws, Rat Pack, Dealers, Aces, Black Knights, Scorpions, Miners and our favorite, the Strippers.

"We've actually had hockey here for a long time," said

Steve Carp, a sportswriter for the Las Vegas Review-Journal. "There was a semipro team in the '70s, and the IHL had the Las Vegas Thunder in the 1990s and later the Wranglers of the ECHL for more than a decade in the 2000s.

Las Vegas, which has hosted the NHL awards, has also had a few NHL games, one of which was quite memorable.

On Sept. 27, 1991, in 80-degree heat, the Kings played the Rangers in an exhibition game on a portable rink in the Caesars Palace parking lot before a crowd of roughly 13,000 fans wearing T-shirts and shorts and very few hockey sweaters. It was the first outdoor game between two NHL teams.

Everything was going as planned until the tarp used to keep the sun off the rink fell. Then giant grasshoppers, attracted by the lights, swarmed onto the rink.

"They would land on the ice and freeze right there, so by the end of the second period they were everywhere — it was kind of funny," Luc Robitaille, Kings president of business operations and former player, told lakings.com.

The Kings won 5-2 with one of the goals scored by Wayne Gretzky.

Dodgers

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Hodgkins lymphoma four years ago, and since then his managerial stock has been on the rise.

Monday, he got the job.

Eleven years ago, the Red Sox and their fans installed him as a Red Sox hero for life. This latest opportunity only makes us feel prouder of our Dave Roberts.

He wears Dodger blue now, but for us, he'll always be remembered for wearing the home whites — the jersey and pants with the big streaks of red

Fenway dirt spread all over.

RED SOX NOTES: Hanley Ramirez told ESPN Deportes that his sore shoulder feels fine and that he plans to begin playing winter ball in the Dominican Republic next month.

A Red Sox spokesman said Ramirez' participation in winter ball has only "been discussed" and that the club could not confirm or deny the report.

"I have begun to train, I've been working out for the last two weeks," Ramirez told longtime ESPN Deportes reporter Enrique Rojas in Miami, his remarks translated from Spanish. Ramirez said that he no longer feels discomfort in his shoulder.

Stars place goaltender Lehtonen on injured list

THE SPORTS XCHANGE

The Dallas Stars placed goaltender Kari Lehtonen on the injured list and called up prospect Jack Campbell to take the NHL roster spot on Thursday.

The Stars also recalled defenseman Patrik Nemeth from the Texas Stars of the American Hockey League.

Campbell is expected to serve as a backup to Antti Niemi until Lehtonen returns. The 23-year-old has a 3-3 record with a 3.8 goals-against average and .873 save percentage this season in the AHL. A 2010 first-round draft pick, Campbell started the season on the team's non-roster list after suffering an injury during preseason.

Lehtonen entered Tuesday's loss to the Ottawa Senators in the second period as a replacement for Niemi but exited the game after just eight minutes with an upper-body injury.

Nemeth completed a 14-

day conditioning assignment with one assist in eight games for Texas. He has played in two games for Dallas this season. In 22 games last season for the Stars, the 23-year-old had three assists

Predators recall Sissons

The Nashville Predators recalled forward Colton Sissons from Milwaukee of the American Hockey League on Thursday and placed forward Miikka Salomaki on injured reserve.

Sissons, 22, has appeared in five games for the Predators this season, scoring a goal and posting a plus-4 rating in his season debut on Nov. 10. In 22 career NHL games, the 6-foot-1, 200-pound center has posted five points (two goals, three assists) and nine penalty minutes. Named Milwaukee's team captain for the 2015-16 season, the North Vancouver, British Columbia, native has amassed eight points (three goals, five assists) in 12 AHL games. He was taken by Nashville in the second round of the 2012

NHL draft.

Salomaki, 22, has played in eight games with the Predators this season, with one goal and four penalty minutes. The Raahe, Finland, native has one goal and one assist in four games with Milwaukee. He has a career AHL total of 70 points (28 goals, 42 assists) in 116 games. The 5-11, 208-pound left winger was Nashville's second choice (52nd overall, second round) in the 2011 draft.

Canadiens sign GM Bergevin to extension

The Montreal Canadiens signed general manager Marc Bergevin to a multi-year contract extension, the team announced Wednesday.

The deal will keep him with the Canadiens through the 2021-22 season.

Bergevin, 50, became the team's 17th general manager in Canadiens history on May 2, 2012. Since his appointment, Bergevin turned around a team that had just finished with 78 points in the standings, the third worst record in the NHL.



GREG M. COOPER | USA TODAY SPORTS
Notre Dame Fighting Irish head coach Brian Kelly steps out of the dugout before their game against the Boston College Eagles at Fenway Park on Saturday. Notre Dame won 19-16 and plays Stanford this Saturday with a top-four ranking on the line.

Irish

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The best way for the Irish to continue to do that is to dish out punishment like men against the Cardinal.

"I don't think there's anger," linebacker Jaylon Smith said of the rankings.

But time is knocking. It has other places to go. From first out (fifth) in the first rankings, to last in (fourth) in the second and third, to second out (sixth) in the latest set, Notre Dame has lost any control it had of its destiny.

And it has itself to blame. An uninspiring, five-turnover performance during a 19-16 victory last weekend against 3-8 Boston College didn't help. Neither did a 28-7 win against 3-8 Wake Forest the week before in which the Irish were outgained. A 24-20 victory at No. 25 Temple was OK but hardly convincing.

Winning at Stanford

might not be enough. But it's both everything and the only thing that can keep hope afloat for the Irish, who lack a signature victory despite two against Top 25 teams (Navy and Temple).

"They're in a position to accomplish the mission, and that was to have an opportunity to be one of the four teams selected for the playoffs," coach Brian Kelly said. "They know that they don't control that. But they know that they control the way they prepare and the way they play on Saturday."

Linebacker Joe Schmidt categorized the notion of Notre Dame having to score style points against the Cardinal as "ridiculous." Maybe he's right. Maybe not.

The Irish's biggest "victory" this year was a two-point loss at No. 1 Clemson during a tropical storm. Committee chairman Jeff Long contradicted himself when he said "a loss is a

loss," only to follow that with "all losses are not the same."

So which is it?

"We look deeper and see how a team lost," Long said. "How they played in that game, the closeness of that loss is something that's discussed. We don't speak in terms of bad loss/good loss."

Which leaves me at a loss to understand losses.

There could be more losses to come. Alabama could fall at Auburn this weekend. Oklahoma — which lost to Texas, which Notre Dame beat by 35 — could lose at Oklahoma State. Iowa could trip at Nebraska. Michigan State faces Penn State. Not to mention, outside of the Big 12, there are conference championship games to be played.

For now, and forever more, all the Irish can control is Saturday, when they can't lose to Stanford without losing a chance to "complete the mission."

Even Sheldon Day can't pretend not to know that.