

The Daily Iowan

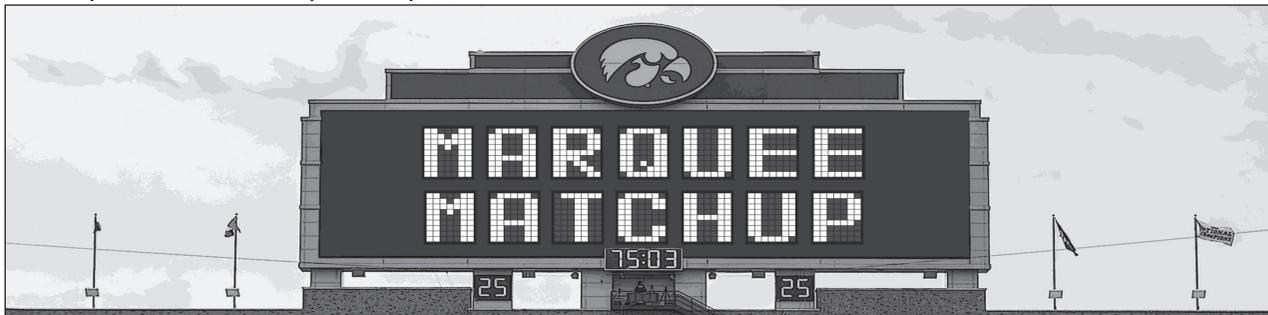
# PREGAME

Saturday, October 9  
Iowa vs. Penn State  
Kinnick Stadium

**TOO TALL?  
TOO BAD.**

Any worries over Jack Campbell's  
ability to play linebacker at  
6-foot-5 are gone.





Jerod Ringwald/The Daily Iowan

Iowa quarterback Spencer Petras gets ready for a play during a football game between Iowa and Maryland at Maryland Stadium on Oct. 1. Saturday's Iowa-Penn State game is a matchup between two top-tier defenses. Petras' ability to lead the offense against the Nittany Lions could decide the game.

No. 3 Iowa football's matchup with No. 4 Penn State at Kinnick Stadium Saturday will feature two of the Big Ten Conference's best defenses. The Hawkeyes are ranked first in the league in defensive efficiency, with Penn State nipping their heels in second. Iowa has racked up a conference-leading 12 interceptions in 2021. Penn State's seven interceptions are tied for second-best in the league with Ohio State. Iowa and Penn State also boast the Big Ten's best scoring defenses. Iowa leads the league in scoring defense, surrendering just seven touchdowns and three field goals in five games. The Nittany Lions sit just one spot back of the Hawkeyes, having given up six touchdowns and six field goals. Iowa has the Big Ten's third-best rush defense, while Penn State

has the fourth-best. With defense likely to rule the day Saturday, Iowa's offense will have to find a way to out-score Penn State's potent passing attack. Through five weeks of action, the Nittany Lions have the Big Ten's fourth-best aerial assault, statistically. Iowa's passing offense is rated ninth in the league, ahead of just Northwestern, Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan, and Minnesota. Hawkeye quarterback Spencer Petras has only thrown one interception this season. Though, the Nittany Lions' formidable secondary could give him some fits. The Nittany Lions have not surrendered more than 20 points in a game this season. The Hawkeyes have not scored fewer than 24 points in any of their contests this year. Something may have to give. - Austin Hanson, Sports Editor.

## Iowa Starters

WR	3	Tyrone Tracy Jr.	5-11	201	JR.
TE	84	Sam LaPorta	6-4	249	FR.
LT	78	Mason Richman	6-6	296	FR.
LG	64	Kyler Schott	6-2	294	SR.
C	65	Tyler Linderbaum	6-3	290	JR.
RG	77	Connor Colby	6-6	298	FR.
RT	56	Nick DeJong	6-6	292	SO.
WR	89	Nico Ragaini	6-0	191	JR.
QB	7	Spencer Petras	6-5	233	JR.
RB	15	Tyler Goodson	5-10	199	JR.
FB	38	Monte Pottebaum	6-1	246	JR.
PK	10	Caleb Shudak	5-8	178	SR.
LE	92	John Waggoner	6-5	266	JR.
DT	99	Noah Shannon	6-0	289	JR.
DT	85	Logan Lee	6-5	277	SO.
RE	97	Zach VanValkenburg	6-4	267	SR.
CASH	4	Dane Belton	6-1	205	JR.
MLB	31	Jack Campbell	6-5	243	JR.
WLB	44	Seth Benson	6-0	229	JR.
LC	8	Matt Hankins	6-0	185	SR.
SS	26	Kaevon Merriweather	6-0	211	JR.
FS	28	Jack Koerner	6-0	204	SR.
RC	33	Riley Moss	6-1	191	SR.
P	9	Tory Taylor	6-4	231	SO.

## Penn State Starters

QB	14	Sean Clifford	6-2	219	SR.
RB	21	Noah Cain	5-10	220	JR.
WR	5	Jahan Dotson	5-11	184	SR.
WR	3	Parker Washington	5-10	207	SO.
WR	13	KeAndre Lambert-Smith	6-1	184	SO.
TE	86	Brenton Strange	6-3	250	SO.
LT	53	Rasheed Walker	6-6	325	JR.
LG	68	Eric Wilson	6-4	307	SR.
C	73	Mike Miranda	6-3	305	SR.
RG	70	Juice Scruggs	6-3	307	JR.
RT	79	Caedan Wallace	6-5	323	SO.
PK	98	Jordan Stout	6-3	209	SR.
DE	17	Arnold Ebiketie	6-3	256	SR.
DT	97	PJ Mustipher	6-4	326	SR.
DT	54	Derrick Tangelo	6-2	308	SR.
DE	40	Jesse Luketa	6-3	247	SR.
WLB	12	Brandon Smith	6-3	241	SR.
MLB	13	Ellis Brooks	6-1	241	SR.
SLB	23	Curtis Brooks	6-1	230	SO.
CB	5	Tariq Castro-Fields	6-0	194	SR.
S	1	Jaquan Brisker	6-1	200	SO.
S	16	Ji'Ayir Brown	5-11	205	SR.
CB	9	Joey Porter Jr.	6-2	192	SR.
P	96	Barney Amor	6-1	186	SR.

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# A 'special instinct' to the ball

Jack Campbell was told he was too tall to play linebacker. Now, he's one of the best at that position in the nation.

Robert Read  
Pregame Editor

Jack Campbell leaned on a podium down the hall from the Hawkeye football team's locker room after Iowa's September win over Colorado State at Kinnick Stadium. He resembled a boxer after a 12-round match: Cuts and bruises were scattered across his face; a bandage already covered a wound above his right eye.

It was minutes after the Iowa linebacker played potentially the best game of his life.

The junior from Cedar Falls clobbered running backs and receivers alike all game long in Iowa's fourth win of the season, recording a career-high 18 tackles, the most for a Hawkeye since Anthony Hitchens in 2012.

"I just try to get to the ball first and foremost," Campbell said in a raspy voice postgame. "And usually good things happen."

Before Campbell was a potential All-American linebacker for the No. 3 team in the country, there were concerns he wouldn't be quick enough to get to the ball at all. At 6-foot-5, Campbell is unconventionally tall for a linebacker, which is usually a position suited for athletes two or three inches shorter than he is.

Campbell recalled during his postgame interview that there were worries from certain coaches during his recruiting process that he wouldn't be mobile enough to play linebacker. They doubted

his ability to move from sideline-to-sideline at the Division I level because of the weight he'd need to put on to fill out his frame. Most NFL linebackers aren't even 6-foot-5.

Even after Campbell got to Iowa, some coaches didn't want him to play linebacker. That included head coach Kirk Ferentz — who preferred him to play defensive end or center.

Iowa may not have always been set on playing Campbell at the position where he's now excelling, but Iowa's coaches knew they wanted the physical, humble, team-focused three-star recruit out of northeastern Iowa three years ago, and figured he'd make an impact somewhere.

And somewhere turned out to be at middle linebacker for one of the best defenses in the nation.

## A special instinct'

A sharp wind made the bitter cold all the more uncomfortable during a 2017 first-round playoff matchup between Cedar Falls and Cedar Rapids Prairie at Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa.

Most players and coaches for both teams wore long sleeves and tried to stay close to the heaters on the sidelines. But not Campbell, who stood sleeveless and as close to the field as he could when he wasn't in the game. When Campbell was on the field, he was too busy making plays to worry about the weather, or

the college coach watching him from the sideline.

That coach was Reese Morgan, who spent 19 years recruiting players out of the state of Iowa for the Hawkeye football program, and before that was a championship-winning head coach at Iowa City West High School.

In his decades around high school and college-aged football players, had Morgan seen many 6-foot-5 linebackers?

"Not a whole lot, no," Morgan said.

Morgan first recalls watching Campbell play near the end of his sophomore year. This playoff game from Campbell's junior year, however, still comes to mind now when Morgan sees him dominate on the gridiron for the Hawkeyes.

It was an early indicator of Campbell's talent.

"I was just impressed how a guy of that size could move so well and get to the ball so quickly," Morgan said. "It was like he had a special instinct. He could diagnose [the play] and he had the speed to get there. And when he got there, he showed up from a physical standpoint."

Campbell has always been tall for his age, Cedar Falls head football coach Brad Remmert said.

Cedar Falls already had Campbell listed at 6-foot-3 as a sophomore. That year was when Campbell said he started playing linebacker full-time.

"Cedar Falls is where I learned the position, and



Jerod Ringwald/The Daily Iowan

Iowa linebacker Jack Campbell lines up against Colorado State running back A'Jon Vivens during a football game between Iowa and Colorado State at Kinnick Stadium on Sept. 25.

where I learned that I really love it," Campbell said. "You kind of get to manipulate the defense and also just get to be in the middle of the action. That's where I built that passion for this position."

Campbell's 10th-grade year was also his first of three years as a starter for the Tigers. Campbell played weak-side linebacker as a sophomore, before moving to the middle for his junior and senior years.

"I can't say enough about the kid and the impact he had on our program and our school. He's a special one," Remmert said. "There was never a thought of moving him out to the edge and playing defensive end. He was just too impactful up the middle for us. The way he worked sideline-to-sideline, that was never even in

consideration for us."

Campbell was a team captain and his district's defensive player of the year as a senior for a team that lost in the 4A state championship game. His 168 tackles that year remain a school record, as do his 338 career stops.

But this production wasn't enough to convince some college programs that Campbell could play linebacker at the next level. Worries about his ability to tackle ball-carriers in the open field and chase down receivers on the perimeter persisted.

Campbell said some programs thought he'd have to weigh as much as 260 pounds to play the position at his height. Campbell is listed at 243 pounds on Iowa's depth chart.

"Throughout my life, a lot of people have said, 'A 6-foot-5 linebacker? Oh, you must not be able to move,'" Campbell said. "A lot of people, because I'm tall, thought maybe I'm a defensive end and shouldn't be a linebacker ... I'm not going to say what coaching staff said this to me, but they said I didn't have the right ankle bend or something."

Four programs offered Campbell a scholarship — Iowa, Iowa State, Minnesota, and Northern Iowa.

The son of Dave Campbell, a former offensive guard for Northern Iowa, always knew he wanted to play college football himself. Following his dad and playing at UNI was, for most of his childhood, Campbell's dream.

But between Iowa's history of great linebacker play — Morgan referenced All-American Josey Jewell in his recruiting pitch — and the genuine feeling he got from Morgan and Iowa's coaching staff, Campbell committed to the Hawkeyes after his senior season of high school.

Above all else, Campbell wanted the challenge of proving he could play linebacker for a Big Ten program.

"I don't even know how to say this, but I kind of wanted to be a little more difficult on myself," Campbell said. "You've got to earn everything, and this is a place that will make you earn everything."

### **Practicing to be the best**

Campbell had just finished a two-handed dunk over one of his Cedar Falls basketball teammates during a practice his senior year, when the two guests observing off to the side of the gym erupted in applause.

"Jack was putting on a show," Cedar Falls boys' basketball coach Ryan Schultz said. "I remember looking over at coach Ferentz and coach Morgan and they were even standing up clapping, too."

Morgan and Ferentz, coaches who liked to watch their recruits compete in areas off the football field, were witnessing what both of them have since described as one of the best high school basketball practices they've ever seen. It was organized, Ferentz said, and flowed nicely with no wasted time.

Ferentz quickly learned that those great practice habits helped make Campbell a great practice player.

"He does things just at one

tempo basically all the time," Ferentz said.

"Every snap in practice, he goes as hard as he can," Morgan added. "There's that respect for guys who you know are going to give great efforts. They're tough, they're invested, and they care. They care about everyone else on the team, and the team becomes much more important than any individual."

Campbell's practice habits stem from the fact that he just wants to compete.

That competitiveness is why he volunteered to play special teams for Cedar Falls — sometimes uncommon for a star player. It explains why, on a different occasion after losing the state football championship as a senior, he was at a morning basketball practice the next day when he wasn't expected to be.

Maybe it's also why Campbell didn't mind doing the dirty work on the hardwood. Ferentz called Campbell a "foul waiting to happen" on the basketball court. Similar to his physicality on the football field, Campbell was drawn to contact. The former forward described his role on the Tigers basketball team as someone who fouled, rebounded, and played defense.

"I think he was short-changing himself just a little bit there. He was great in every way," Schultz said. "By the end he was scoring for us. He was doing a little bit of everything. He did a lot of those types of things too — the dirty work. He was definitely more than just a bruiser out there."

Campbell won back-to-back 4A state boys' basketball championships his junior and senior years, and could have played college basketball, even if he never looked into it.

Schultz said multiple college coaches, including some at the Division I level, reached out to him saying they thought Campbell had what it took to have a career as a basketball player.

But Campbell was set on playing football. And he was set on doing it as a Hawkeye.

And, hopefully, as a Hawkeye linebacker.

Campbell attended one of Iowa's recruiting camps after his sophomore year, before he committed to the Hawkeyes. Iowa's coaching staff had Campbell practice at defensive end, just to see how he would handle the position. Campbell was undersized to play on the line at the time, and had no experience at the position, but Morgan said he looked just as comfortable and aggressive there as he did at linebacker.

If Ferentz had it his way, Campbell would be playing defensive end or center for the Hawkeyes.

"I got nixed on both those, vetoed badly," Ferentz said.

Those vetoes were courtesy of defensive coordinator Phil Parker and linebackers coach Seth Wallace, who saw Campbell as the future of the Hawkeye defense at the second level.

The first taste of that future came in 2019, when Campbell became a rare Hawkeye who saw consistent on-field snaps during his freshman year. It took Campbell longer than he would have liked to build on that season, though.

Campbell was listed as Iowa's starting middle linebacker heading into his sophomore season, but mononucleosis kept him out for the first three games of the season.

But in the final five games, Campbell showed flashes of his potential playing weak-

side linebacker for the Hawkeye defense. Whether it was swarming into the backfield to force an errant pass against Wisconsin, or intercepting a pass in the back of the end zone in the very same game — Campbell always seemed to be around the ball.

"He really sets the tone both in practice and in games," safety Jack Koerner said. "He's made everyone on our defense, and really the whole team, better just by the way he goes about his business. He sets the tone in practice, and he really gets us flying around out there. He couldn't be a better guy."

Campbell was moved inside to middle linebacker ahead of his junior season in 2021.

His performance on the field as a sophomore led him to be selected as a preseason third-team All-Big Ten player by Athlon Sports. So far, Campbell is exceeding even that lofty honor.

Ferentz may have wanted Campbell on the offensive or defensive lines — and he could have excelled there, too — but the Hawkeyes found their fit with Campbell in the middle of the defensive unit.

"I think he's a guy who could play anywhere, and if you asked him to, he probably would play anywhere," said Morgan, who never coached Campbell at Iowa but remains close to the program. "If you're in the middle of the field and you can run like him, and you're a physical guy who can have an impact on the game, linebacker is the spot."

### **The leader of Iowa's defense**

Campbell sunk his head down after practice the week after he punished Colorado State's offense for four quarters. Ferentz just announced

to the team that Campbell had been named the Bronko Nagurski National Player of the Week for his performance against the Rams.

The day before, Campbell had also been named the Big Ten Defensive Player of the Week for the first time in his career. And Campbell wasn't quite comfortable in the spotlight.

"He's got great humility," Morgan said. "And he's so highly respected because of that."

Campbell is a man of many tackles, but few words — unless it's about a teammate. The enterprise leadership major's voice is often hoarse, but not because he's chatty. Campbell spends practice and game days yelling out calls and making sure his teammates are set up correctly.

Campbell has provided plenty of highlights through the first five weeks of the 2021 season, but often finds ways to pass on the praise to somebody else.

A fumble recovery for a touchdown against Iowa State? Campbell credited fellow linebacker Jestin Jacobs for jarring the ball loose.

Recording 18 tackles? The defensive line cleared lanes in front of him.

Even as a high schooler, Campbell didn't want to be recognized for the volunteer work he completed as part of the school's mentoring program.

"He's always been that way," Schultz said. "It's a special quality that he has. When I think of Jack, I think of the selflessness. He's genuinely happy for his teammates. He leads by example, but he also leads with his words and the way he treats others. It's something I've always respected about him and appre-

ciated that he brought that to our program."

Campbell's Hawkeye teammates will hype him up if he won't do it himself, though.

"How many did Jack have?" linebacker Seth Benson asked, before being told Campbell tallied 18 tackles. "Man, that's awesome."

"Jack is a monster," linebacker Jestin Jacobs said. "He really embodies the standard. Like when you look at Jack, he's always going 100 percent. He always knows what he's doing, and he's always trying to bring others along. I think when you have a guy like that on our defense, we don't really have a limit because he's just continuously pushing us."

Campbell ranks fourth in the Big Ten with 46 tackles through five games this season. The first-year starter is also stuffing the stat sheet with 1.5 tackles for loss, one sack, four passes defended, a forced fumble, two fumbles recovered, and a touchdown.

And he's doing this for a defense that leads the nation in takeaways and ranks second nationally in scoring defense.

"Jack's a hell of a football player," Ferentz said.

Not that there's any doubting that at this point.

"Iowa gets a lot of guys who might not run the best 40, jump the highest ... It's kind of something we talked about in the linebacker room," Campbell said. "We're kind of mutts and we just carry that mentality with us every single day."

"It's about having the belief in yourself and that you can do it. I feel like it all starts there. And then having your teammates believe in you too, that makes it all worth it."