

Commentary: Consistency now the key for the Iowa offense (premium)

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HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – As I heard Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz and some of the Hawkeye players all talk about how they wanted to avoid a repeat to how 2009 started, I thought back to the opening drive of that particular game against UNI.

The Hawkeyes settled for a Daniel Murray field goal, and UNI responded with 13 unanswered points before Iowa came back and won.

Fast forward to Saturday's games against Eastern Illinois. I thought two things were essential for the Hawkeyes in order for them to win this game – scoring touchdowns early and often, and showing a balance with moving the football.

Check, and check.

First drive of the game, 65 yards. Touchdown. Senior quarterback Ricky Stanzi completes three passes for 54 yards, and sophomore running back Adam Robinson scores from four yards out.

Second series after the defense gets a three-and-out, 56 yards. Touchdown. Robinson becomes more of a focal point on this drive, but Stanzi continues to complete every throw he makes.

More importantly for the Hawkeyes, they moved the chains and found the end zone.

Those first two drives told me everything I needed to know with this game. Iowa was ready to play.

This is the type of attitude, swagger, whatever you want to call it, that great football teams have to distinguish themselves from good ones.

Now forget the opponent for a second here, because for all we know, Eastern Illinois might still have a productive season at the Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) level. If the Hawkeyes can stay this consistent to start games through the course of this 2010 season, they're going to be a great team.

All the hype surrounding the offense was with the receiving corps, and specifically the duo of junior Marvin McNutt and senior Derrell Johnson-Koulianos. Both had some contributions throughout. But those first two drives also featured players like Colin Sandeman and Brad Herman, who stepped up and made plays.

Sandeman wound up leading the team in receiving with four catches for 59 yards. But of the 21 catches made by the Hawkeyes in the passing game, eight of them came from three different tight ends, none of whom are named C.J. Fiedorowicz.

In fact, the one touchdown Iowa had through the air was a one-yard strike to Brett Morse, a fullback.

It didn't matter who was getting the ball. Stanzi was finding them and the chains kept moving when the Hawkeyes had the ball.

Of his 23 passes, Stanzi completed 18 of them, one of which was the one-yard touchdown pass to Morse. On 24 carries, Robinson rushed for 109 yards and had three touchdowns on the ground.

Good teams can score. Great teams can score with ease, regardless of whether they're more run-oriented or pass happy.

This equilibrium is what will make the Hawkeye offense go in 2010.

We've now seen what this team is capable of doing when it has the football. It should only get better next week when Jewel Hampton returns to the backfield and Iowa can showcase a one-two punch of him and Robinson.

It should continue to improve throughout the course of the fall, when guys such as McNutt and Johnson-Koulianos will be making more than three combined receptions in a game.

Will the rest of the season provide much bigger challenges as far as opposing defenses are concerned? Certainly.

But when an offense is finding ways to get as many players involved as the Hawkeyes did here against Eastern Illinois, it's a nightmare for any defensive coordinator coming up with schemes to stop or contain it.

Now the question becomes this: Can this offense stay consistent and play like this during the rest of 2010?

If the answer proves to be "yes," then fans of the Black and Gold are in for a fun ride.