

Hawkeyes handle Eastern Illinois in season opener

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – A strong first quarter for the No. 9 Iowa Hawkeyes propelled them to a convincing 37-7 victory over Eastern Illinois on Saturday, putting Iowa at 1-0.

It began on the opening possession when the Hawkeyes moved 65 yards down the field. Sophomore running back Adam Robinson capped it off with his first of three rushing touchdowns from four yards out, and Iowa was up 7-0 before the Panthers even touched the football.

After a three-and-out, the Hawkeyes moved the chains again, marching 56 yards and getting another score from Robinson, who finished the game with 109 yards rushing on 24 carries.

“It was a phenomenal effort from him,” senior left guard Julian Vandervelde said. “He was running real physical, and that’s something that I don’t think a lot of people thought that he was capable of.

“For him to come out and have ‘a statement game,’ where he comes out and doesn’t dance around people, doesn’t run through clean holes, but really takes it to the other team, it was impressive at the very least.”

The first-quarter domination from Iowa concluded in the final minutes, when senior running back Paki O’Meara blocked the second punt of his career and returned it 42 yards for a touchdown, putting the Hawkeyes ahead 21-0.

Offensively, Iowa showed balance. In addition to the strong showing from Robinson, quarterback Ricky Stanzi had a solid

start to his senior season. The Mentor, Ohio native completed 18-of-23 passes for 229 yards and had a fourth-quarter touchdown pass to senior fullback Brett Morse.

"We really got off to the right start with Rick," senior wide receiver Colin Sandeman said. "I think that just shows how we've been working throughout camp and the offseason. We've put in a lot of hours with him.

"It just felt to get out there and throw it around like we always have."

Stanzi didn't throw any interceptions, but there was a play involving the 6-4 quarterback in the second quarter that put a scare into the hearts of 70,585 spectators. On the Hawkeyes' opening series in the second quarter, Stanzi tucked the football and began running.

As he began running outside towards the Eastern Illinois sidelines, Stanzi caught his foot in the Kinnick Stadium turf and fell awkwardly. He managed to put weight on his leg, but the limp he showed caused sophomore James Vandenberg to enter the game.

Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said after the game it was a muscle/soft tissue-type of injury.

"His knee was stable, and Ricky wanted to go back in the ballgame," Ferentz said. "If there had been any grey area, we would have kept him out."

Vandenberg's only series of the afternoon resulted in the third score from Robinson.

Meanwhile, the Hawkeye defense proved suffocating, holding Eastern Illinois to 157 yards of total offense.

Panthers quarterback Brandon Large completed 13-of-20 passes, but those 13 completions only managed to compile 92 yards of offense through the air.

"They had some new plays, but once we got settled down and figured out what they were going to do, we did all right," senior defensive end Adrian Clayborn said.

Eastern Illinois had a couple of bright moments during the second quarter. Following O'Meara's blocked punt and touchdown for Iowa, the Panthers ran a fake punt with tight end Cody Bruns, who went 36 yards for a first down into Hawkeye territory. What resulted was their lone touchdown, as Large found tight end Von Wise for an 11-yard scoring strike.

Iowa was led defensively by senior defensive tackle Karl Klug, who had six tackles, three of which were solo. Also contributing up front was junior Mike Daniels, who had five tackles in his first career start at defensive tackle and recorded a sack.

It was a performance Ferentz seemed impressed with.

"Overall, I think we are all pleased right now," Ferentz said. "I think we did a lot of good things. It was good that we got to play a lot of guys in the fourth quarter. That was a real positive and we came out healthy."

The Hawkeyes now shift their attention to a 2:30 p.m. showdown on Sept. 11 against in-state rival Iowa State. The Cyclones won their opener on Thursday over Northern Illinois, 27-10.