

# 9/27/2010: Penn State "Film Study" (premium)

*Every Monday throughout the course of the 2010 Iowa football season, we will have a weekly series titled "Film Study." In this series, we go back and watch the previous game of Iowa's upcoming opponent and put together a list of observations. This week, we examine the No. 22 Penn State Nittany Lions, who pay a visit to Kinnick Stadium on Oct. 2 for No. 17 Iowa's Homecoming game.*

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Last weekend, after covering Iowa's 45-0 victory over Ball State, I went back and watched Penn State's 22-13 win over Temple on Sept. 25 for the first time and watched in its entirety.

Below is a list of observations I made of the Nittany Lions from examining the game real closely:

## **Offense**

*What I really like about Penn State's offense is that there is balance. Although the Nittany Lions are a little more run-oriented this season as opposed to recent years past, they do mix in a good amount of pass. They also are capable of running plays with quarterback Rob Bolden lining up in both shotgun and under center.*

*For a true freshman that has only played in four collegiate games, Bolden is a pretty solid quarterback. There are certainly some areas where you can tell he is raw, but there are things about his game that are quite impressive, and it's easy to tell that Penn State's coaching staff is going to keep*

*the playbook to a minimum until he continues to progress.*

*One area of Bolden's game I really like is his poise. His pocket awareness makes him seem mature beyond his years. He knows who his best weapons are and finds ways to utilize them. Bolden showed on more than a few occasions in this game against Temple that he is willing to stay in the pocket and take what is given to him.*

*Obviously being a younger signal-caller, he looks a lot for big plays. Not necessarily home run plays with a receiver streaking down the sideline, but plays that can go for 15-20 yards. He has an ability to throw on the run, but he seems to be at his best when he stays in the pocket. He is also a quarterback willing to take any hits opposing defenses lay on him.*

*The areas of Bolden's game that would concern me if I was a Penn State fan usually showed up when he had a short field to work with, and that could be a big problem for the Nittany Lion offense down the road. He seemed to miss any time he threw fades down field, and when Penn State would throw the ball in the red zone, it seemed like Bolden would put a little too much on the football, and it would wind up sailing out of the end zone, being completely uncatchable.*

*Against the Owls, there were two receivers he seemed to rely on in certain spots. One of them is Brett Brackett, who led the Nittany Lions last weekend with five receptions for 62 yards. The other was Justin Brown, who had 84 yards receiving on four catches. These are two receivers that need to be accounted for.*

*The times Bolden did run with the football, there were a couple of instances where he did so running the option and keeping it, as defenses were keying in on running back Evan Royster.*

*As far as Penn State's running game is concerned, Royster's*

latest performance was the best of his career, at least statistically speaking. Royster rushed for a career-high 187 yards against Temple, doing it on 26 carries. He now sits 184 yards away from becoming the Nittany Lions' all-time leading rusher. While I don't see him reaching this mark against Iowa, he will do it fairly soon.

Royster seems to be at his best running the football when he can run between the tackles. He shows occasional burst to the outside, but he's at his best as a runner when there's a hole inside the hashes because he has the vision that he can make plays on his own once he runs through the holes.

My one knock on Royster would be with ball security, and this proved to be an issue against Iowa last year. On Penn State's second series of the game, he had a fumble recovered by Temple. The Owl defender was able to just punch the ball right out, which is exactly what occurred last season in Penn State's loss to the Hawkeyes.

Penn State's other running back, Stephfon Green, didn't fare as well against the Owls, and there is a major difference in the way he runs compared to Royster.

The offensive line did fairly well, but lost right tackle Lou Eliades in this game to a torn ACL that will sideline him for the rest of 2010.

Like years past, Penn State is a team that likes to chew up time of possession when it has a long field to work with. Against Temple, the Nittany Lions had two scoring drives that started inside their own 5-yard line.

Penn State was able to get a touchdown late to seal the win, but the Nittany Lions this season have been awful in the red zone. This should be another concern because in each of Iowa's last two wins over Penn State, the Nittany Lions had methodical drives, only to settle for field goals, and thus keep the Hawkeyes in those contests.

## **Defense**

*Defensively, Penn State runs a 4-3. The thing to note here though is the Nittany Lions constantly had eight, sometimes nine, guys in the box to contain Temple's ground game.*

*Early on in this game, Penn State's defense was allowing the Owls to continue moving the chains, and the Owls got two touchdowns on the ground, both on plays where the running back was able to get out to the edge.*

*Struggling to get out to the edge could be a major problem this week, as Iowa is a team that uses a zone-blocking scheme offensively when it does run the ball.*

*From the second quarter on, however, the Nittany Lion defense really clamped down, and forced four Temple turnovers on the day, including three interceptions – two by defensive back Nick Sukay, and one by linebacker Nate Stupar. On both of Sukay's picks, he made great reads on the football. The first interception was thrown right to him in the first half, the second was one late in the game where he made a heck of a play.*

*As for Stupar's interception, that came in the third quarter on a play where he made a great read, and managed to bring it back into the red zone for the offense. Penn State took the lead for good on the drive that followed.*

*Linebacker Michael Mauti is a force to be reckoned with. In the second half, especially, he was flying all over the field and seemed to be in on every big play the Penn State defense made. Iowa will need to know where he is at all times.*

*Another dominant player is defensive tackle Ollie Ogbu. Like Mauti, he came on real strong in the second half, and Temple couldn't run the ball up the middle to save its life.*

*Penn State, as mentioned before, will be looking to stop the*

run first. That defense is willing to commit 8-9 guys, which could potentially open up some big passing plays. One thing to keep in mind is that the secondary might be the best part of the Nittany Lions' defense this season, as it returned three of the four starting DBs from last season. Safety Drew Astorino played against Temple with a lingering shoulder issue, so keep an eye on that.

Although the secondary might be the strength, it's hard to judge how good it really is after watching this game because Temple wound up being very run-oriented itself, and missed on both of the two deep passing plays it did attempt – one in each half. This may or may not be worth testing if you're Iowa.

### **Special Teams**

Actually, there's a lot to say here. For starters, Penn State kicker Collin Wagner was named the Big Ten's Special Teams Player of the Week after he connected on 5-of-6 field goal attempts in this game. That's right. Wagner accounted for 16 of the Nittany Lions' 22 points last weekend against Temple.

The one field goal try he did miss was his sixth and final attempt, one he hooked right. Otherwise, he proved to be pretty reliable considering how anemic Penn State's offense looked in the red zone.

One area of concern for the Nittany Lions here, however, might be on kickoff coverage. Temple didn't break any big plays on special teams here, but the Owls were getting returns of at least 20 yards more often than not.

### **Coaching**

I think Joe Paterno and his coaching staff called a pretty decent game. As I said before, they made it easy for Bolden to make plays more often than not, and the defense made some major adjustments to what Temple was doing in the second half.

*There was one situation that I feel deserves criticism, however. Just before halftime, Penn State faced a 4th-and-1 on the Temple 25-yard line. At this point in the game, the Nittany Lions trailed 13-9, meaning Wagner had already kicked three field goals. Paterno elected to go for it on fourth down, and Bolden was stopped short on a QB sneak. That's a situation where I feel you got to take the points, even if you're still trailing going into halftime.*

### ***Strengths***

- Bolden good pocket presence*
- Reliable kicker*
- Defense good at adjusting*

### ***Weaknesses***

- Red zone offense*
- Ball security*
- Stopping plays to the outside defensively*

### ***Final Thoughts***

Well, we know Penn State has had this game circled since Iowa went into Beaver Stadium last year in front of a "WhiteHouse" and left with a 21-10 victory over the Nittany Lions. It isn't often the Hawkeyes come into this match-up as a favorite, but this time around, they definitely will be.

Based off what I saw from Penn State against Temple, I think Iowa matches up very well against the Nittany Lions on both sides of the ball. Offensively, Iowa has a lot more playmakers at the receiver and tight end positions than Temple does, and they might be able to make big plays on this Nittany Lion defense. The key here, however, might be converting on these big plays early.

Temple got all 13 of its points in the first quarter, then was pretty much shut down. It's going to be important for Iowa to put Penn State in a hole early, especially with this game being at Kinnick Stadium. The longer the Nittany Lions are able to linger around, the more difficult things will become as the game progresses.

I think Penn State's struggles defensively of getting out to the edge plays right into the Hawkeyes' hands, as Adam Robinson is a running back who can definitely get to the outside to make plays in addition to inside the hashes. I expect the Nittany Lions to have the box loaded up to contain Robinson, which means there is potential for some of those big plays downfield. And as we saw in Iowa's loss to Arizona, Hawkeye quarterback Ricky Stanzi won't be afraid of throwing more play-action than usual.

I also would expect Iowa to run at least 2-3 end arounds in this game with Paul Chaney, Jr. The reason being is that the Owls ran two of them last week, and both plays resulted in first downs for the Temple offense.

Defensively for Iowa, the key match-up here is up front. With Eliades out for Penn State, the Nittany Lions are now going to have an inexperienced right tackle lining up against either Broderick Binns or Christian Ballard for the majority of the game. The front four will have to win its battles and force Bolden into making the kinds of mistakes young quarterbacks make.

As mentioned, he is willing to stay in the pocket and take a hit. Iowa should do what it can to make him scramble out, because then guys like Adrian Clayborn could be there waiting for him.

It is important for the Hawkeyes to stop the run, and not allow Royster to get going. If at any point he is able to get five-six yard runs for first downs, what you're going to see

is Penn State trying to take as much time off the clock as possible, and keep Stanzi and the rest of the Iowa offense on the sidelines.

As long as the Hawkeye defense keeps the Nittany Lions in check when they do get into the red zone and force them to settle for field goals instead of touchdowns, Iowa will be fine.

Special teams could be a factor as well. I mentioned how Temple seemed to get decent returns on Penn State's kickoff coverage. It wouldn't surprise me in the least if Derrell Johnson-Koulianos was able to take a kickoff back for a touchdown on this Nittany Lion team. And even if he doesn't, a big play from the kickoff return unit gives Iowa's offense a shorter field to work with.

The last thing I would stress is that the Hawkeyes need to capitalize any chance they get. Royster's fumble turned out to be the only Nittany Lion turnover not on downs against Temple, and the Owl offense responded with a touchdown. If Iowa can execute when the momentum is clearly on its side, then the Hawkeyes should be able to get out of this game with a third straight win over Penn State.