

Defense highlights first conference win of 2010 (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – They say that defense wins championships.

While a title wasn't won on this crisp evening inside Kinnick Stadium, there was a championship-caliber defense from Iowa on full display in a 24-3 victory over Penn State on Saturday.

It didn't matter that defensive coordinator Norm Parker had missed his fourth consecutive game due to complications from diabetes. The Hawkeyes came into this game with the No. 1 ranked defense nationally, and played like it.

Iowa came into this contest wanting to shut down the running game of Penn State, which was showcased by its senior running back, Evan Royster. The final statistics for Royster were 10 carries for 56 yards. This came just a week after he had rushed for a career-high 187 yards against Temple.

Defensively, how the Hawkeyes attacked Penn State's ground game proved to be pretty simple.

"Just getting after the offensive line," senior defensive tackle Karl Klug said. "Just penetrating the backfield, making Royster dance a little bit so the defense can catch up. I feel like that's big."

As a result of Royster being bottled up, the Nittany Lions found themselves relying on the arm of true freshman quarterback Robert Bolden. Numbers-wise, he completed 20 of his 37 attempts for 212 yards passing.

But all Penn State had to show for it was three points, making this the second consecutive week the Hawkeyes have held an opponent without a touchdown.

"This defense is a really hard-nosed defense," senior defensive lineman Christian Ballard said. "We're really veteran, and that's something we expect."

Even when it seemed the Nittany Lions may have finally gotten momentum, Iowa found itself taking it right back emphatically.

Penn State opened the second half with a drive that resulted in its second straight trip into the red zone. This came just after the Nittany Lions ended the first half with the 20-yard field goal from Collin Wagner that turned out to be their only points.

Iowa had found a way to bounce back on this drive. Instead of Penn State trimming the Hawkeyes' lead in half, they came away with no points after Bolden was stopped on a 4th-and-Goal from the 1-yard line by Ballard.

"We knew what they were going to do," senior linebacker Jeremiha Hunter said. "I personally thought they were going to run a quarterback power up inside. When I saw them pull the guard and tackle, I got to thinking, 'Better get outside.'"

The evening was capped by another defensive highlight from the Hawkeyes late in the fourth quarter. Junior cornerback Shaun Prater recorded the only interception thrown by Bolden, but made him and the rest of the Nittany Lions pay dearly, as he brought the pick back 33 yards for a touchdown that cemented the fourth win of the season.

Last season against Penn State, Prater had gotten an interception of former Nittany Lion quarterback Daryll Clark, only to find himself returning it for negative yards trying to make a bigger play out of it. It was something his teammates, and him, remembered.

"It was nice to see him get in the end zone," junior safety Tyler Sash said after mentioning the negative return yardage Prater had on his interception a year ago. "I've seen him do it in practice. He does it all the time. He's a good player, and he made a good play."

Prater made it clear once he saw the open field, he knew what he was going to do.

"Last year, I cut it back the same way I did today," Prater said. "Thankfully, I cut it back, and it worked out pretty good."

Through five games, the Hawkeyes have surrendered a total of 51 points, and after this upcoming bye week, face an enormous test in a a Michigan team led by quarterback Denard Robinson.

"It's going to take everything we have to try and get a win up at that place," Ballard said. "Hopefully, we'll be ready and I hope we can pull it out."