

Hawkeyes mount Nittany Lions in Big Ten opener



Shaun Prater (left) celebrates on the sidelines with Derrell Johnson-Koulianos after returning a fourth-quarter interception 33 yards for an Iowa touchdown during the Hawkeyes' 24-3 on Saturday over the Penn State Nittany Lions inside Kinnick Stadium.

By Brendan Stiles

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – After two seasons of monumental victories over Penn State, Iowa's 24-3 win over the Nittany Lions Saturday evening inside Kinnick Stadium didn't have the drama many have been accustomed to in this series.

Instead, it was a dominating performance from the 17th-ranked Hawkeyes from start to finish over the country's No. 22 squad.

Those previous meetings showed Penn State establishing itself and Iowa having to adjust. On this night, the Hawkeyes got it going on the opening drive with a 20-yard field goal from true

freshman Michael Meyer to make it 3-0. The series was highlighted by a 24-yard reception courtesy of junior wide receiver Marvin McNutt.

Although senior quarterback Ricky Stanzi would throw an interception to Penn State's Nick Sukay in the first quarter, he responded back on the following possession. After the Hawkeye defense forced a 3-and-out, Stanzi found senior wide receiver Derrell Johnson-Koulianos in the back of the end zone for a 9-yard touchdown to make it 10-0 in favor of Iowa.

For the Hawkeyes, it was all about putting pressure on the Nittany Lions from the get go.

"It doesn't matter who we are playing. That's always the goal – to start fast, put points on the board early, get them down early," Iowa sophomore running back Adam Robinson said after rushing for 95 yards on 28 carries against the Nittany Lions. "I think we did that well as a team, and as an offense."

Clearly, Penn State was not going to be able to play from behind. Robert Bolden, a true freshman starting at quarterback for the Nittany Lions, was 20-of-37 passing for 212 yards with an interception. Running back Evan Royster, Penn State's most valuable weapon offensively, was only able to muster 56 yards on the ground against the Iowa defense.

The Hawkeyes would continue to rely on the defense forcing 3-and-out after 3-and-out until late in the first half. Iowa finished a 68-yard scoring drive with a 1-yard touchdown run from Stanzi on a designed quarterback sneak. Again, the drive was highlighted by a couple of 18-yard receptions from McNutt.

Penn State's only points of the game would come in the final 1:41 of the first half. A roughing the passer penalty called on Iowa defensive tackle Mike Daniels keyed the Nittany Lions' lone scoring drive, which concluded with a 20-yard field goal from Collin Wagner on the half's final play.

The Nittany Lions looked to have gained major momentum of their opening drive of the second half. But this is when the Hawkeyes ultimately seized the contest.

Penn State had driven down to the Iowa 1-yard line, and found itself in a 4th-and-Goal situation. A touchdown would've trimmed the lead to 17-10. A designed play with Bolden ended up with senior defensive lineman Christian Ballard stopping him short of the goal line, and more importantly, keeping the Nittany Lions off the scoreboard.

"I saw a little bit of green left, so I knew I had a chance to make the play," Ballard said. "That's all I was thinking about."

Iowa would pile it on in the fourth quarter, when junior cornerback Shaun Prater picked off a Bolden pass and returned it 33 yards for a touchdown, cementing the victory.

"Once I cut it back, it was all open field," Prater said. "I just had to get in the end zone."

The Hawkeyes now have the luxury of a bye week coming up before traveling to Ann Arbor, Mich., to face the No. 19 Michigan Wolverines on Oct. 16. The game is scheduled to be a 2:30 p.m. CST kickoff.

"It's right in the middle of our season," Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said about the upcoming bye week. "We've been at this thing eight weeks, now we've got eight more from today, so I couldn't find a better time for it."