

COMMENTARY: DJK well-deserving of records (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

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ANN ARBOR, Mich. — As Iowa wide receiver Derrell Johnson-Koulianos caught his third touchdown pass on a slant in the fourth quarter of the Hawkeyes' 38-28 victory over Michigan on Saturday, he wasn't just putting Iowa on the Michigan Stadium scoreboard.

The 19-yard touchdown reception made Johnson-Koulianos Iowa's career leader in receiving yards, a record that was held by Tim Dwight (1994-97).

It's only fitting that the man everyone calls "DJK" reached this enormous milestone on what many would consider a clutch play. I say this because for his entire Hawkeye career, clutch is what Johnson-Koulianos has been.

And in my humble opinion, just saying that Johnson-Koulianos is "deserving" of this honor might be selling him short.

This is my fourth season of covering Iowa football. In my four years on this beat, I've occasionally had encounters with Hawkeye players. When these moments do occur, I don't ever attempt to seek their attention.

During the course of these last four years, I can name the one and only player who has ever attempted to initiate any sort of conversation with me off the record or in moments where I'm not holding a recorder or video camera in my hand — Derrell Johnson-Koulianos.

It doesn't matter where I happen to be. Any time I've ever seen Johnson-Koulianos anywhere, he has always acknowledged my presence. Again, it's not something I intentionally look for, but like any normal human being, it's something I can and do appreciate when it does happen.

Based off everything I've ever heard or read about Johnson-Koulianos, I'm pretty confident in saying that many of you who have ever met him have had similar moments.

Now, I get the polarization. I get that some of the "negative" attention with Johnson-Koulianos upsets some out there. Between all the visits to "the doghouse" and being held back from speaking to the media – although it should be noted that he has voluntarily avoided talking to us this season – I can get why some fans out there get turned off by him.

But all of his Iowa teammates will tell you how much they appreciate the work ethic he does provide when he's on the field. Performances like the one Johnson-Koulianos had here in "The Big House" on Saturday support what they say.

This milestone is for everything he has done for the Hawkeyes on the field, and rightfully so. Johnson-Koulianos was thrown in right away as a redshirt freshman and in a game against Wisconsin, made a one-handed touchdown catch that at the time gave Iowa a lead.

As a sophomore, he had one of his best performances (aside from this most recent one) in a 24-23 win over Penn State that changed the culture of this Iowa football program. I still remember Shonn Greene telling me after that game how proud he was of Johnson-Koulianos and how he was a big reason why the Hawkeyes pulled off that upset.

Last season, "Mr. Third Down" (as I began nicknaming him) made 12 receptions on third-down plays for the Hawkeyes, every single one of which resulted in an Iowa first down. He also sparked a near-miraculous comeback at Ohio State when he

returned a Buckeye kickoff 99 yards for a touchdown at a time when the game looked in doubt.

Coming into Saturday's game against Michigan, Johnson-Koulianos already had four touchdown receptions, all of which had come in Iowa's previous three games. Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz always preaches about how seniors ought to be playing the best football of their careers. Johnson-Koulianos has clearly gotten that message and has delivered.

All of that led to what transpired on Saturday.

Johnson-Koulianos caught three touchdown passes. The third of those separated him from every other receiver in the record books. And wouldn't you know it? That record-breaking play just happened to come on a third down. It was 3rd-and-4 from Michigan's 19-yard line.

This is a script that couldn't have been written any better for a guy that is clutch on the gridiron, and even more genuine off of it.

I can only hope that when "DJK" is introduced during Iowa's Senior Day ceremony on Nov. 20 before playing Ohio State, the very team the Campbell, Ohio native grew up rooting for before choosing Iowa, the fans inside Kinnick Stadium that afternoon give him the acknowledgement that Johnson-Koulianos deserves.