

COMMENTARY: Coming to grips with reality (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Sometimes, the truth can be painful. Right now, this is definitely the case when it comes to this Iowa football team.

After losing another heartbreaker to No. 8 Ohio State on Saturday at Kinnick Stadium, the Hawkeyes have four losses. This particular defeat killed any slim hopes there were of a share of the Big Ten title, and likely knocks Iowa out of the top 25 when all the polls are released Sunday.

Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz has repeatedly made the comment “You are what your record says you are.” Right now, the Hawkeyes are 7-4 overall, 4-3 in the Big Ten.

Is this team underachieving? Maybe. The answer to this question would definitely be yes if your expectations for this team were based completely off whatever happened last year when Iowa won the Orange Bowl.

I’ll tell you what is discouraging when it comes to this team – is how the way this team is losing these games. Every single loss this season (and I’m only talking this season here) has stemmed from opposing teams scoring go-ahead touchdowns in the fourth quarter. Arizona, Wisconsin, Northwestern, and now Ohio State. Throw in that Indiana almost beat Iowa in the final seconds of their meeting on Nov. 6, and you’d be looking at a 6-5 team.

In fact, other than the game against Arizona, the Hawkeyes were winning when each of those games were lost.

Now I do believe something should be said for the fact that all 10 of Iowa's losses over the past three years have been by a touchdown or less. That is astonishing.

But what once looked unusual just two months ago in Tucson now seems like a recurring problem. Watching the Hawkeyes lose the way they have this season is kind of like watching someone using numerous methods to help themselves quit smoking, only to eventually light up another cigarette. Or better yet, like watching a dam slowly burst and when hole is clogged up, another appears.

I'll stop with the analogies because they should both present a clear picture. As far as a solution is considered however, that's something I can't answer.

I can't tell if the problems Iowa has are more physical or more mental, but either way, they exist and have continued to exist this entire autumn.

To the players' credit, none of them have made excuses for the poor play down the stretch in games. After every single loss, I've heard Ricky Stanzi tell members of the media including myself to place the blame for each defeat clearly on his shoulders. I'll also just add here that it's one thing to criticize Stanzi's play, but to question his leadership is asinine, and any Hawkeye fan who thinks his void won't be challenging for James Vandenberg to fill is incredibly naive.

But with all the being said, 11 games have been played now. The final ingredients haven't been added, but it seems clear now what the identity of this team is.

The 2010 Iowa Hawkeyes are a good team. They are not a great team.

That is the reality.