

COMMENTARY: Simple explanations to Hawkeye loss in Happy Valley (premium)

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STATE COLLEGE, Pa. — Coming off a bye week and entering Big Ten play with a 3-1 record, the recipe for a successful 2011 season was nearly set for the Iowa Hawkeyes this weekend.

But this Iowa team that came to Beaver Stadium on Saturday left befuddled and probably left many of its fans befuddled with its performance in a 13-3 loss to Penn State. This loss was big on at least three fronts. For one, it ended a three-game winning streak Iowa had against Penn State entering this year's meeting. This also marked the first time since 2007 that Iowa had either lost a game by more than one touchdown or by double-digits.

Following the loss, senior linebacker Tyler Nielsen provided a simple explanation to why the defense wasn't able to get the job done.

"It was pretty easy to see — we didn't stop the run," Nielsen said.

Penn State running back Silas Redd became the third opposing running back this season to rush for over 100 yards on the Hawkeyes this season. In total, the Nittany Lions compiled 395 of total offense.

But these are the numbers that would concern me with this defense: 88, 81, and 90. Those three numbers are the number of yards Penn State had on three different drives in this game. The scary thing here is that those three drives resulted in

two field goals and an interception. So while the defense may have kept the Nittany Lions out of the end zone, my honest opinion is that these three drives set the tone for what ultimately took place in the fourth quarter.

Then there's the offense, which probably deserves more of the blame here if there needs to be a scapegoat for what transpired Saturday. Iowa had 253 yards of total offense against Penn State. I know the Nittany Lion defense is stout, but that's kind of the point. In Big Ten games, 253 yards of offense just isn't going to cut it.

Junior quarterback James Vandenberg had the worst game of his young career. He only threw for 169 yards, which is significantly less than what he averaged per game in non-conference play. He also doubled his interception total coming into the game during the fourth quarter, with both picks coming after the key fumble he lost on a Penn State sack, which was followed by the Nittany Lions' lone touchdown drive.

Simply put, the fact that Iowa came off a bye week and only produced three points is a discouraging sign.

This loss shouldn't come as a surprise to fans. While all the talk was about Penn State's quarterback situation, which I'm pretty sure is solved now, its defense stepped up when it needed to. The Nittany Lions were better in the trenches, they played better special teams, and they committed fewer turnovers. The things I thought Iowa needed to do in order to leave Beaver Stadium a winner Saturday is exactly what Penn State did.

While the final outcome may seem a bit shocking, neither head coach Kirk Ferentz nor any of his players who were made available to the media afterwards were confused about why the game went the way it did. That's really the big takeaway from this game in my eyes.