

# COMMENTARY: All about the response now (premium)

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*HawkeyeDrive.com*

IOWA CITY, Iowa – As the Iowa Hawkeyes walked off the Kinnick Stadium turf Saturday night, they did so having played as awful a game as it has had since Kirk Ferentz became head coach. Heck, a valid argument could be made that Iowa's 38-14 loss to Penn State is the worst loss the Hawkeyes have endured at Kinnick Stadium in 14 seasons.

Both teams came in 4-2 overall and 2-0 in the Big Ten, but it was the Nittany Lions that looked more like a team vying for a division title – despite the fact they can't play in any sort of postseason until 2016.

As disastrous as Iowa looked on Saturday, this season still has promise. But while hopes of possibly winning the Legends Division and playing in Indianapolis on Dec. 1 haven't completely faded, the Hawkeyes are now at a crossroads and the timing couldn't be worse.

The offense needs to be tinkered with, point blank. As much credit as Penn State deserves for its defensive prowess, Iowa was absolutely abysmal on offense and this is far from the first time this season that has been the case. Even with sophomore running back Mark Weisman being able to suit up despite having a sprained ankle, he only had nine yards rushing on five carries. None of the other running backs fared any better and Iowa managed to rush for 20 yards on 23 carries.

Let me repeat that – 20 yards on 23 carries. Not even one yard per carry. It doesn't matter who Iowa is playing with that

average. It's not going to beat anybody in the Big Ten if it can't run the ball, especially when the passing game continues to have issues like it has all season long.

Now whether the tinkering gets done with scheme or personnel doesn't really matter. Iowa can't stay as predictable as it has been though, otherwise the results are going to continue being lackluster.

The defense wasn't any better. Matt McGloin was probably the best quarterback Iowa has faced to date and he carved the Hawkeyes up like a Thanksgiving turkey. McGloin came in averaging 250 passing yards a game, which was tops in the Big Ten. He completed 26 of 38 passes for 289 yards. The Hawkeyes allowed Penn State to play to its strength offensively and got shredded as a result.

Yet in the grand scheme of things, this loss might not be nearly as damaging. Yes, Iowa got dump-trucked by Penn State and it was never close. But it's no longer about how bad the Hawkeyes looked, but rather how they respond.

Iowa plays at Northwestern next weekend. The Wildcats are 6-2 and could very easily be 8-0 if not for a pair of fourth quarter collapses, which includes a 28-16 lead on Nebraska evolving into a 29-28 loss to the Cornhuskers on Saturday. Next weekend is much bigger. If the Hawkeyes can leave Ryan Field with a win, they'll remain in a position to control their destiny towards winning the Legends Division. Lose to the Wildcats though and you can forget it.

Here's what I do know – if Iowa plays like it did Saturday again next week, the Hawkeyes aren't getting out of Evanston with a victory. It's clear that plenty of things need fixing. Now the question becomes whether Iowa make the right fixes and continue showcasing its remarkable ability of bouncing back the following week from bad losses.

That's going to be the difference between this team continuing

to be talked about as a division contender as opposed to a team that barely qualifies for a bowl game.