

Iowa at Northwestern (What to expect)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

To get you all ready for Saturday's game between Iowa and Northwestern, I put together a list of things you ought to know before these two face off at Ryan Field.

At the end, I'll provide what I think are three keys to an Iowa victory.

Iowa Hawkeyes (4-3, 2-1) at Northwestern Wildcats (6-2, 2-2)

Ryan Field; Evanston, Ill.

Oct. 27, 2012

11 a.m. Central

TV: ESPN2 (Beth Mowins, Joey Galloway, Lewis Johnson)

Radio: Hawkeye Radio Network (Gary Dolphin, Ed Podolak, Rob Brooks)

Weather: [47 degrees; sunny skies; winds around 15-20 MPH](#)

Brendan's Three Keys to the Game:

1. Keep Mark in check

I understand Northwestern running back Venric Mark is fully capable of big plays in both the ground game whenever the Wildcats have the ball and as a punt returner. After all, he does lead the Big Ten in all-purpose yards. On fourth down, it's pretty obvious that Iowa should kick the ball away from him. But defensively, the group that needs to set the tone

when it comes to keeping mark in check is the defensive line. If the tackles can clog up the middle of the field, it will allow the Hawkeyes' linebackers to key in on him and prevent Mark from busting big runs. If Northwestern can create holes for him in the middle of the field though, Iowa's defense is in trouble.

2. Passing game's best chance?

Northwestern possesses a pass defense that gives up an average of 280 yards per game through the air, which ranks dead last in the Big Ten. As anemic as Iowa has been lately throwing the football, the fact of the matter is this is as good of an opportunity as quarterback James Vandenberg and the rest of the Hawkeye playmakers are going to have at righting that ship. If Iowa can't develop a solid passing game that goes vertical and goes deep from time to time on this Wildcat defense, then it's fair to wonder if it'll ever get on track in 2012. From that standpoint, this game is critical.

3. Don't fall too far behind early on

In the last four meetings between Iowa and Northwestern, the Hawkeyes have built early double-digit leads only to squander them away (although Iowa did bounce back in last year's game after blowing an early lead and eventually won). Given the psyche of this Hawkeye team, the last thing it can afford is for the script to flip on Saturday. Even though Northwestern's coming off a disheartening loss at home to Nebraska last week, this is the Wildcats' homecoming and the intangibles are going to be in their favor. If Northwestern's the team building an early lead Saturday, I'm not convinced Iowa can play from behind, especially after what transpired at Kinnick Stadium last week when the Hawkeyes lost to Penn State. If Iowa can at least keep it close, if not hold a lead itself, then this game will go down to the wire and at that point, anything goes.