

# COMMENTARY: A season looking lost (premium)

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EVANSTON, Ill. – Following Iowa's 38-14 loss to Penn State last weekend in Iowa City, I said how the Hawkeyes would respond on the road against Northwestern would be telling as to the direction this team would be heading the rest of the season.

If what transpired at Ryan Field on Saturday is any indication, this season has begun to spiral out of control for Iowa and there's no telling when it this nosedive will come to a screeching halt.

The Hawkeyes lost 28-17 to Northwestern, but the final score isn't real indicative of how much Iowa was manhandled for the second straight week. While the offense played better at times than it did against Penn State, the Hawkeyes could still only come away with three points in the first half against a Wildcat squad that was missing three quarters of its secondary.

Defensively was where Iowa lost this particular game though. Northwestern had two players – running back Venric Mark and quarterback Kain Colter – rush for over 100 yards and Colter scored the Wildcats' first three touchdowns on the ground.

Whether it was matter of being out of position, not winning one-on-one battles or simply missing tackles, it wasn't as though the Hawkeyes had one particular chink in the armor that Northwestern was exposing over and over again. And that's what ought to be alarming since this was the second week in a row Iowa has looked abysmal defensively.

Add in too that the Hawkeye defense gave up the biggest play of the game. Right after pinning Northwestern at its own 1-yard line, Mark broke off a 72-yard run that set up Colter's second touchdown and made the score 14-3. That's what Iowa couldn't afford to have happen, especially at a moment like that.

It's definitely cliché to say the little things are where the Hawkeyes need to improve at, but the little details are what led to things like that big run, or the three delay of game penalties or the blocked punt at the start of the second half.

And because Iowa is struggling at getting those little things down, this is why when this season's over, the Hawkeyes are going to sitting at home with their first losing record in 12 years. Iowa sits at .500 in both conference play and overall entering the month of November and the Hawkeyes still haven't played either Michigan or Nebraska yet.

Heck, Iowa has another road game next week against an Indiana squad that just earned its head coach, Kevin Wilson, his first victory with the Hoosiers in Big Ten play on Saturday. That team's going to have confidence it hasn't felt in a long time playing in front of its home crowd against a very vulnerable Hawkeye squad. Not only that, but from an offensive standpoint, Indiana is very similar in scheme to Northwestern and maybe even just as talented as the Wildcats are.

Right now, the Hawkeyes have at least three games remaining that they don't deserve to be favored in and there's no reason to think they're going to win any of those three games. A 1-3 November means a 5-7 season, which means no bowl game. It's very realistic and likely.

There's plenty of blame to go around and I'm sure this will be dissected more and more over the next few weeks, but for now, this is something Iowa fans ought to prepare themselves for.

Even if the Hawkeyes do win two games and get to 6-6, what

good does going to either bowl in Texas or the Little Caesars Bowl in Detroit really do? There's no reason to think anything's going to dramatically change between now and season's end, so why should anyone expect a bowl appearance to lead to a performance that hasn't already been displayed.

It's not lack of effort from the players. Iowa simply is what it is and this season is only going to get dimmer before any sort of light shines bright again.