

COMMENTARY: The rise of Rudock (premium)

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – Two games into the 2013 season and the jury remains out on how good the Iowa Hawkeyes will end up after they bounced back from a season-opening loss to Northern Illinois last week and defeated Missouri State 28-14 on Saturday at Kinnick Stadium.

Two games into the 2013 season, there's one thing about Iowa that is certain. It has a reliable signal-caller leading the offense in sophomore Jake Rudock.

Sure, it's only two games – the first two starts of Rudock's career – and they've both come at home against teams that aren't in the Big Ten. But what became clear Saturday afternoon is that Rudock has a swagger to him. He might be quiet off the field, but he's demonstrating on the gridiron why Kirk Ferentz opted to go with him as the Hawkeyes' quarterback in 2013.

Watching Iowa's offense during the first half Saturday may have been like watching teeth get pulled or like watching paint dry. The Hawkeyes were moving the football up and down the field on Missouri State, yet only had seven points to show for it. That changed drastically in the second half and one of the biggest reasons why was because of Rudock's demeanor.

After the game, Ferentz called him "resilient." Multiple teammates who were asked about him used phrases like "tough-minded." These are traits needed in a successful quarterback and while this isn't to say he's going to become an all-Big Ten player and someone who goes on to have a lengthy NFL

career, it is safe to say he's the quarterback of now for Iowa. That's a very important thing for the Hawkeyes to have as this season gets more and more difficult in terms of competition.

Rudock has shown he is capable of not only making plays with his arm, but also with his feet. He didn't throw any touchdown passes on the afternoon and is actually on pace to throw fewer than Iowa had all of last season (7). However, he scrambled for two touchdowns and rushed for 33 yards on seven carries. The intelligence that has been talked about with Rudock goes beyond what he sees. It's also knowing what he doesn't see.

Say what you want about the Missouri State squad Iowa played Saturday. Most of it is probably on point. That shouldn't deter from what those on hand at Kinnick Stadium saw from a guy who made only his second career start. He completed 19 passes to 10 different Hawkeye skill players. He even made a block in the third quarter immediately after handing the ball off to Mark Weisman on a zone-read play that resulted in an Iowa touchdown.

Last week, he played well against Northern Illinois. But he made a costly mistake throwing a late fourth-quarter interception that led to a field goal in the final seconds to put Iowa at 0-1. He made a similar mistake Saturday throwing a pick-six in the fourth quarter that trimmed Iowa's lead over Missouri State to 21-14.

And then he responded in a big way. He proceeded to lead the Hawkeyes 65 yards down field and just minutes after making a bone-headed play, he ran in for his second touchdown of the game to extend the Iowa lead back to two scores. His ability to put his mistake aside and reignite the offense at a time when it was badly needed speaks volumes about his work ethic and his determination.

Again, there's no point in making any major proclamations

about what becomes of Rudock's career over the next three years. For the time being though, his evolution as Iowa's quarterback deserves respect.