

COMMENTARY: When it is what it is (premium)

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – Wisconsin might not be the best team Iowa has played or will play in 2013, but one could argue it's the most complete team the Hawkeyes have faced or will face.

Sure, the 22nd-ranked Badgers might not have the best offense in the Big Ten (that would be probably be Ohio State) or the best defense in the Big Ten (that would definitely be Michigan State). But they're just good enough in both areas that when they needed plays on Saturday, they got them and as a result, were able to leave Kinnick Stadium with a 28-9 win over Iowa.

Yes, the Hawkeyes had their chances in this game. In the first quarter, Iowa's defense forced 3-and-outs and the offense had prime field position for its first four possessions. Except the Hawkeyes only came away with three points. As the game progressed, Wisconsin forced turnovers and found ways to capitalize off those Iowa miscues and come away with touchdowns.

Simply put, this was one of those games where that saying "It is what it is" comes into play. The Badgers were 9.5-point favorites entering this border war and played like a ranked team priming itself for a possible BCS at-large spot should it not find itself playing for a fourth straight Big Ten crown.

The only aspect of this game that might have been a surprise was Iowa's defense being able to bottle up Wisconsin's ground game as much as it did in the first half. Melvin Gordon came in as the nation's leading rusher, yet only had 62 yards rushing on 17 carries and zero touchdowns. In the first half

specifically, Gordon only had 18 yards rushing on six carries.

Iowa's offense struggling as it did wasn't shocking. Maybe the passing game being as ugly as it looked was shocking, but there was enough evidence coming in to suggest the Badgers' 3-4 scheme would present issues to the Hawkeyes. The only other time Iowa saw a 3-4 look was when it played Missouri State, which might not seem like a big deal until you factor in how the Hawkeyes only led 7-0 at halftime of that particular game.

There were opportunities there for Iowa on this day. Mark Weisman didn't have the durability to finish the game out after suffering an elbow injury, but at least initially, he looked like he might have a solid game with Wisconsin missing its best defensive player in linebacker Chris Borland due to a hamstring injury. The Hawkeyes also got contributions across the board from their receiving corps, which is something that could be beneficial entering the remainder of their season.

Defensively, Iowa was as well-prepared as one could've asked it to be. The entire first quarter, Wisconsin did nothing offensively. But also during that first quarter, right tackle Blake Haverstein was tipping off whether the Badgers were running or throwing the football by the way he was lined up on the offensive line. When he was in a 3-point stance (which most O-linemen are the majority of the time), it was a run. When he was in a 2-point stance (neither hand on the ground), it was a pass.

On the Badgers' first series of the second quarter, this giveaway was adjusted and Wisconsin began to move the ball at a much better rate. And while the Hawkeyes couldn't capitalize on the one mistake Badger quarterback Joel Stave made on the first series of the game, Wisconsin converted two second-half interceptions (one from Jake Rudock, the other from C.J. Beathard) into touchdowns to further separate itself from Iowa.

This game ultimately came down to the Hawkeyes' inability to move the football when they really needed to because one had to figure the Badgers would get 2-3 big plays on offense. Just about every team Iowa has played this season has scored on big plays and that's still an ongoing issue that probably won't be rectified at all in 2013.

Wisconsin was going to win this game. It was the better team coming in and proved it's still the better team. The Badgers had just enough of everything necessary to not only beat Iowa, but beat it by more than any of those three teams it lost to that were a combined 23-1 entering Saturday.

The writing was on the wall and in this particular case, "it is what it is."