

COMMENTARY: Canzeri standing out (premium)

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HawkeyeDrive.com

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. – Iowa did what many expected it to do Saturday afternoon, pounding Purdue into oblivion as the Hawkeyes left Ross-Ade Stadium with a 38-14 victory over the Boilermakers.

Going against a porous run defense that surrendered over 200 yards per game on the ground coming into Saturday's contest, Iowa compiled 318 yards rushing on 52 carries. In the midst of that, one name stood out from the rest – sophomore running back Jordan Canzeri.

All season long, Canzeri has been the No. 3 running back behind juniors Mark Weisman and Damon Bullock. The depth Iowa has been able to sustain 10 games into this season is pretty remarkable given the number of injuries throughout the past decade that have plagued former Hawkeyes at this position.

Now here's what has become obvious because of that depth – Canzeri needs to be the No. 1 running back for Iowa these final three games (including its pending bowl game now) and going into 2014.

This is no knock on either Weisman or Bullock. Both have been good players and both have traits the Hawkeye backfield needs to possess in terms of depth. But with Canzeri now having rushed for team-highs in each of the past two games along with the fact he has remained durable, he has to be the feature back going forward.

Iowa went 3-and-out on its opening series. Against Purdue.

Yes, that same Purdue that was ranked dead last in the Big Ten against the run. Canzeri came in to start the Hawkeyes' next series and much like his first carry against the Badgers where he cut back and ran up the middle for 43 yards, his first carry Saturday went for 14 yards and got Iowa out of the shadow of its own end zone from the 5 to the 19-yard line.

Canzeri has the following in his repertoire – the ability to cut back when nothing's there initially, the ability to keep his feet moving, the ability to keep moving forward unless he's getting absolutely no support from his blockers (which shouldn't be the case with this offensive line) and the ability to turn on the jets once he finds an opening. He might not be the biggest back, but he has something defenses clearly aren't prepared for. Purdue sure as heck wasn't on Saturday and it showed all game long.

When Iowa's offense looked stagnant, Canzeri was the guy who gave it a boost. That's not to say the Hawkeyes didn't get contributions all around, because they did. But Canzeri's the guy that jump-started everything with his ability to make those explosive plays that offensive coordinator Greg Davis has continuously preached Iowa's needs to have in order for his system to be effective.

At this point, there's no reason to look back and wonder what if because theoretically, Iowa is probably where it should be right now at 6-4 (if anything, that win over Minnesota is looking more and more impressive by the day). The four teams that have beaten the Hawkeyes are all better than them right now, as evident by all four being ranked. Against the teams Iowa came in superior against, the Hawkeyes have beaten all of them (Saturday included).

If the notion of not starting Canzeri is to surprise teams, it's at the point where neither Michigan nor Nebraska nor whichever Iowa plays in its to-be-determined bowl game is going to be surprised. If that element of surprise wasn't gone

after last week, it certainly is now. Let's also keep in mind too that before last season (2012) even began, Canzeri was set to be the No. 1 running back before injuring his knee because he was the guy who had to fill in for a suspended Marcus Coker in the 2011 Insight Bowl.

This isn't to say Iowa shouldn't use more than one running back. If Bullock, Weisman and freshman LeShun Daniels get a few carries here and there, that's fine. But the Hawkeyes' recipe for success against Purdue really ought to be what they do going forward if they want to meet their aspirations of doing more than simply reaching six wins and ending up somewhere in Texas around the holidays.