

11/25/2013: State of the Big Ten, Volume 108 (premium)

Every Monday, we will be running a weekly series titled "State of the Big Ten," which will be made available to all members of HawkeyeDrive.com. This series of columns will focus on one major headline regarding the conference and go in-depth on the subject at hand.

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Five days from now, one of college football's biggest rivalries reconvenes when No. 3 Ohio State and Michigan tangle in "The Big House." For the Buckeyes, there's plenty at stake and this is something that will be examined further next week.

As for the Wolverines, this is the team that this space will focus on here. Because right now, things appear to be a mess up there in Ann Arbor, Mich.

The 2013 season started out promising for Michigan after it opened up 5-0. It didn't necessarily look impressive reaching that 5-0 mark, but a win's a win. Even after losing in four overtimes to Penn State, the Wolverines beat Indiana at home the following week and entered their Nov. 2 showdown against Michigan State at 6-1 and ranked higher than the Spartans.

But then came November. Then came the humiliation Michigan received from its in-state rival. Then came the Wolverines' first loss in "The Big House" during the Brady Hoke era on Nov. 9 to Nebraska. Michigan did pull off a miraculous win at Northwestern that took a last-second field goal for the ages and three overtimes and holding a 21-7 lead at Iowa last weekend, things appeared to get back on track.

Yet the Wolverines' second half against the Hawkeyes could only be described as disastrous. A lot of that has to be credited to Iowa's defense, which held Michigan to just 45 yards of total offense in that second half. But 45 total yards? Michigan? That's a major issue.

Here are the Wolverines sitting at 7-4 entering their annual showdown with Ohio State and they're probably looking at 7-5 after Saturday, which would include a 3-5 mark in Big Ten play. For some teams like an Iowa or Minnesota, winning 7-8 games this season has to be viewed a success. By Michigan's standards, it can't be viewed that way.

Last season was one that turned out to be very predictable. Michigan went 8-5, but the eight wins came in games it was expected to win and the five losses were games the Wolverines were expected to lose. This season has been a step back, which is kind of remarkable considering how much was said about Michigan being able to implement more of what offensive coordinator Al Borges wanted to do upon arriving in Ann Arbor with Hoke.

Michigan might still end up in a game like the Buffalo Wild Wings Bowl, presumably against Texas and former defensive coordinator Greg Robinson. This isn't to say Hoke or anyone on his staff shouldn't be retained, but if given the parameters that surround a program like Michigan, it's fair to say Hoke might be on the hot seat in 2014.

The Wolverines might not be favored to win the Big Ten's East Division next season, but in terms of talent, Michigan's the one team that will be capable of hanging with Ohio State. One thing Hoke has done tremendously well is recruit. Those high-caliber high-school players he's bringing in are about to become upper-classmen. By this point in time, Michigan should be considered a heavy favorite to win the Big Ten, yet might not be in Year Four.

A busy offseason awaits Hoke and his staff in Ann Arbor. If the offense continues to regress like it has – and it's worth mentioning that Devin Gardner was granted an extra season of eligibility, so he'll be back in 2014 – then the Wolverines are going to continue struggling and changes might need to be made. Some of this is on coaching, some of it on the players.

Maybe it changes for the better on Saturday, or in Michigan's bowl game, or next year. Or maybe it never changes and the offense remains complacent. Either way, the pressure's growing on Hoke because fans up there are going to become more impatient with more performances like the ones the Wolverines have had in November.

Fiedorowicz receives Senior Bowl invite

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Iowa senior tight end C.J. Fiedorowicz received and accepted an invitation to participate in the 2014 Senior Bowl. The announcement came from the UI via release on Monday.

Fiedorowicz, who is listed at 6-7 and 265 pounds, currently has 23 catches for 260 yards receiving and leads the Hawkeyes in touchdown grabs with five of them, including his most recent score last weekend during Iowa's 24-21 win over Michigan. For his career, Fiedorowicz has 84 catches for 830 yards receiving and nine touchdowns.

This marks the first time since 2012 Iowa has had any players

invited to the Senior Bowl, which takes place Jan. 25 in Mobile, Ala. That year, former wideout Marvin McNutt took part and former defensive tackle Mike Daniels was invited. The game will be televised nationally on NFL Network.

Iowa at Nebraska Game Notes, 2-deep

OFFENSE:

SE 4 Smith, 8 Shumpert

LT 68 Scherff, 76 MacMillan

LG 59 Boffeli, 57 Gaul

C 63 Blythe, 58 Simmons

RG 65 Walsh, 78 Donnal

RT 70 Van Sloten, 73 Ward

TE 86 Fiedorowicz, 82 Hamilton/87 Duzey

WR 11 Martin-Manley, 17 Hillyer

QB 15 Rudock, 16 Beathard

RB 45 Weisman/5 Bullock, 33 Canzeri

FB 38 Cox, 42 Plewa

DEFENSE:

LE 95 Ott, 34 Meier

LT 71 Davis, 67 Johnson

RT 90 Trinca-Pasat, 97 Cooper

RE 98 Hardy, 79 Alvis

OLB 20 Kirksey, 39 Perry

MLB 44 Morris, 52 Alston

WLB 31 Hitchens, 6 Spearman

LCB 19 Lowery, 27 Lomax

SS 37 Lowdermilk, 21 Law

FS 5 Miller, 12 Gair

RCB 14 King, 7 Draper

SPECIAL TEAMS:

P 98 Kornbrath

PK 96 Meyer, 1 Koehn

LS 61 Kreiter

HOLDER 98 Kornbrath

PR 11 Martin-Manley

KR 23 Cotton, 33 Canzeri

[Iowa vs. Nebraska Game Notes](#)

2013 Big Ten football TV schedule: Week Fourteen

Every week, we will post the TV schedule for all games featuring Big Ten teams. Here is where and when you can watch them this week:

Nov. 29:

Iowa at Nebraska, 11 a.m., ABC

Nov. 30:

No. 3 Ohio State at Michigan, 11 a.m., ABC

Minnesota at No. 11 Michigan State, 11 a.m., BTN

Northwestern at Illinois, 2:30 p.m., BTN

Purdue at Indiana, 2:30 p.m., BTN

Penn State at No. 14 Wisconsin, 2:30 p.m., ESPN

***All times listed are Central Standard Time.**

11/23/2013: Iowa 24, Michigan 21 (Links)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Check out all of these links to content posted on Saturday after Iowa's 24-21 win over Michigan at Kinnick Stadium.

Please note, anything with “premium” in parentheses are links that can only be accessed by those logged in as either a paid subscriber or three-day free trial member to *HawkeyeDrive.com*:

RECAP: [Hawkeyes storm back to beat Wolverines](#)

COMMENTARY: [Defense shines on Senior Day \(premium\)](#)

VIDEO:

[Kirk Ferentz](#)

[Tevaun Smith](#)

[Jordan Canzeri](#)

[Mark Weisman](#)

[Drew Ott](#)

[Carl Davis](#)

[Jake Rudock](#)

[James Morris](#)

[Christian Kirksey](#)

[B.J. Lowery](#)

[Anthony Hitchens](#)

Hawkeyes storm back to beat Wolverines

By Brendan Stiles

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Thirty minutes into their final home game of the 2013 season, the Iowa Hawkeyes looked like a team heading toward a quagmire against Michigan similar to what they endured playing against the Wolverines last season in Ann Arbor.

They trailed Michigan 21-7 in a game where (for at least one half) nothing seemed to go right for the Hawkeyes. Whether it was turnovers or inability to take advantage of short fields, Iowa looked like it was heading toward a curb-stomping.

But unlike a year ago when the Hawkeyes left “The Big House” getting shellacked 42-17, they were the ones making plays on both sides of the ball. Not only was Iowa able to claw its way back into the game, but it delivered a 24-21 over the Wolverines for their fans who braved the elements for what was the coldest game in Kinnick Stadium history on Saturday.

“I think it was a real testament to the guys staying together. They kept fighting,” Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said, referencing his team’s second-half comeback. “We grew up a little bit today.”

Iowa fell behind early when sophomore quarterback Jake Rudock threw the first of three interceptions on the very first play from scrimmage. He was hit as he released the ball and it ended up in the hands of Michigan’s Brennen Beyer, who returned it seven yards for a touchdown to put the Wolverines up 7-0.

The Hawkeyes would go down the field later in the first quarter and tie the game up at 7-7 when Rudock connected with senior tight end C.J. Fiedorowicz for a 5-yard strike. But when Iowa went against the wind in the second quarter, things slowly unraveled.

Michigan got the ball on the Hawkeyes’ 28-yard line following

Rudock's second pick of the day and capitalize off the turnover when quarterback Devin Gardner laid a stiff arm into Iowa senior free safety Tanner Miller and threw it across his body to A.J. Williams for a two-yard score. Following a pair of 3-and-outs from the Hawkeye offense, the Wolverines struck again when Gardner finished a 47-yard drive with a 9-yard strike to Jeremy Gallon, giving Michigan that 21-7 lead it took into halftime.

The momentum tilted back in Iowa's favor early in the third quarter when Rudock connected with sophomore wide receiver Tevaun Smith for his first career touchdown reception on a play covering 55 yards.

"The ball was right there and I tried to catch it with my right hand because I couldn't get my left hand up," Smith said, describing how he had to turn back for the ball in order to catch it. "I tried to catch it with the right, bring it in with the left, then try to separate myself from the defenders trying to grab me."

From there, it would be back-and-forth between the two defenses until the early minutes of the fourth quarter when Iowa was facing the winds gusting from 25-30 MPH again. Facing 4th-and-1 from Michigan's 24-yard line, it ran a play up the gut with junior running back Mark Weisman, who moved the chains by picking up four yards on the play.

Moments later, Weisman would finish the series off with a 9-yard touchdown score that tied the game with 12:11 left.

"Get downhill fast and get that first down," Weisman said about what entered his mind when the fourth-down play was called for him in the huddle. "You know, we had a couple that we didn't get and we needed those. We need to get those. It was a big time in the game and the line had a great surge and the fullback cleaned it up. It was a great play to have."

The offense would again take the favor once again. A 9-play, 50-

yard drive concluded with senior kicker Mike Meyer connecting on a field goal from 34 yards out to put Iowa up 24-21 with 6:02 remaining.

Michigan had one final chance to either tie or take the lead and got down to Iowa's 31-yard line before senior linebacker Anthony Hitchens forced Gardner to fumble just as he was going out of bounds and recovered it with his entire body in-bounds. It was the lone turnover forced by a defense that held the Wolverines to 45 yards of total offense in the second half, but the timing couldn't have been better for the Hawkeyes.

"I was just going for the ball. It was in the inside hand, and we're taught to do that," Hitchens said. "He had it in his in hand, and I went for it."

Iowa will play one more regular season game on Black Friday (Nov. 29) at Nebraska. Kickoff from Memorial Stadium in Lincoln, Neb., is set for 11 a.m. Central that morning and the game will be televised nationally on ABC.

COMMENTARY: Defense shines on Senior Day (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Three weeks ago, the Iowa Hawkeyes lost a game at home to Wisconsin where the defense did everything possible to keep the Badgers from distancing themselves. On that day, it just wasn't meant to be for Iowa.

For the first 30 minutes of Saturday's game against Michigan, it was looking eerily similar. The Hawkeyes found themselves trailing 21-7 despite only surrendering 113 total yards in the first half to the Wolverine offense. Michigan was aided by a defensive touchdown on Iowa's first offensive play from scrimmage, as well as short fields for its offense to work with on a pair of second quarter touchdown drives.

But in the second half, a senior-laden defense led the charge for Iowa and the Hawkeyes scored 17 unanswered to come back and defeat Michigan, 24-21. It did so because that senior-laden defense shined on Senior Day.

At the heart of it all (literally and figuratively) was Iowa's linebacking corps of James Morris, Christian Kirksey and Anthony Hitchens. These are the three guys that fellow teammates say are "the glue" of what they're able to do and it was on full display Saturday. All three of them were all over the field against the Wolverines and made big plays when they were needed.

Morris and Hitchens both recorded eight tackles. In Hitchens' case, three of those eight tackles resulted in lost yardage and he also made the biggest play of the game when he forced Michigan's lone turnover of the game on its final possession when he stripped the ball from Wolverine quarterback Devin Gardner.

This defense forced Michigan into 14 third downs and the Wolverines only converted on four of them for the entire game. Other than a few times using the Radar package on third down, Iowa stayed in its base 4-3 and managed to bode well. That's not to say there weren't times Gardner was able to escape the pocket because one area the Hawkeyes did struggle was getting a pass-rush on the Michigan signal-caller.

But this group only allowed the Wolverines to accumulate 158 yards of total offense for the entire game, including just 45

yards in the second half (most of which came on the final possession just before Hitchens' fumble recovery).

The similarity between this contest and that Wisconsin game three weeks ago was that the Hawkeye defense (for the most part, anyway) did what it needed to do. Both of the Wolverines' offensive touchdowns came on series where they started in Iowa territory, so it's hard to pin too much on the defense there.

Just before the offense began to click in the second half, it was looking almost exactly like that loss to the Badgers. Morris even commented afterwards how the odds usually don't favor a team that's minus-3 in turnover margin like the Hawkeyes were on Saturday.

Is this group up there with the Big Ten's top teams like Michigan State, Ohio State or Wisconsin? No. But it's not too far away from those four teams, either. Whether it's seniors like the three linebackers or cornerback B.J. Lowery or free safety Tanner Miller, or even defensive end Dominic Alvis (who returned for one play during the second half after missing the last three games with a back injury), these guys all have traits about their games that are admirable.

These are the guys most responsible for Iowa being able to bounce back like it has from last year's 4-8 record. These are the guys that aside from the Ohio State game – when it played the best offense it'd see all season – have kept Iowa in a position to win each and every week. On Saturday, these guys all did their part and it's something that ought to be somewhat appreciated between now and the conclusion of Iowa's bowl game.

This defense is shining and showing major progress in doing so.

Iowa-Michigan video: Anthony Hitchens

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Iowa senior linebacker Anthony Hitchens finished with eight tackles (including three tackles for lost yardage), two quarterback hurries, and also forced and recovered a fumble in the Hawkeyes' 24-21 victory over Michigan on Saturday at Kinnick Stadium.

Iowa-Michigan video: B.J. Lowery

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Iowa senior cornerback B.J. Lowery finished with three tackles and two pass break ups in the Hawkeyes' 24-21 win over Michigan on Saturday at Kinnick Stadium.

Iowa-Michigan Christian Kirksey

video:

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Iowa senior linebacker Christian Kirksey finished with six tackles and was credited with 0.5 sacks in the Hawkeyes' 24-21 victory over Michigan on Saturday at Kinnick Stadium.