

Hawkeyes hammered by Penn State at home

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – There's no sugarcoating that can be done. For four quarters inside Kinnick Stadium on Saturday night, Penn State imposed its will on Iowa. The Hawkeyes lost their third home game of the season to the Nittany Lions, 38-14, and it looked every bit like a game with that outcome.

Defensively, Iowa was carved apart by Penn State quarterback Matt McGloin, who threw for 289 yards on 26-of-38 passing and two touchdowns. The Nittany Lions ran 90 plays from scrimmage and accumulated 509 yards of total offense.

"We played against no-huddle teams in the past. Our expectation going into this game was that they were not going to use it as much as they did," junior linebacker James Morris said. "It caught us off guard, but at the end of the day, we've got to line up and play football, play it better when the ball is snapped."

Offensively, the Hawkeyes could get absolutely nothing going on the ground or through the air. While freshman running back Greg Garmon got the start, sophomore running back Mark Weisman managed to play despite a sprained ankle. However, neither proved effective. Iowa ran the ball 23 times and could only record 20 yards rushing the entire night.

The passing game wasn't any better. Senior quarterback James Vandenberg completed just 17 of his 36 passes for 189 yards. He threw one touchdown pass late in the fourth quarter to senior wide receiver Keenan Davis, but that wasn't enough to make up for the lackluster showing from the entire offense.

“We scored seven offensive points,” Vandenberg said. “We’ve got to do a lot better than that.”

Vandenberg’s struggles reached a point to where fans booed rather loudly and head coach Kirk Ferentz had to answer questions regarding whether he thought of benching Vandenberg for redshirt freshman back-up Jake Rudock.

“I thought about it,” Ferentz said. “But at that point, we just felt like, ‘Let the starters finish the game.’”

If there was a highlight in this game for the Hawkeyes, it came on special teams from junior wide receiver Jordan Cotton. After Penn State took a 38-0 lead in the fourth quarter, Cotton finally got Iowa on the scoreboard with a 92-yard kickoff return for a touchdown.

On the injury front, Iowa took a hit along the offensive line. In a three-play span during the first quarter, the Hawkeyes lost both sophomore left tackle Brandon Scherff and sophomore right guard Andrew Donnal to injuries. Scherff was carted off the field with what Ferentz said called “a lower leg injury” that will sideline him the rest of the season, while Donnal limped into the locker room on crutches at the start of the second quarter and didn’t return.

Redshirt freshman Austin Blythe took Donnal’s spot at right guard, a position Blythe had started the first four games of the season at for Iowa prior to being injured himself. As for Scherff’s spot at left tackle, he was replaced by junior Nolan MacMillan, who played in his first game since 2010 after missing all of last season with a sports hernia injury.

Iowa now plays its next two games on the road, beginning with a Legends Division contest against Northwestern Oct. 27 at Ryan Field in Evanston, Ill. The Wildcats are 6-2 overall and 2-2 in the Big Ten after blowing a 12-point fourth-quarter lead in a 29-28 home loss to Nebraska on Saturday. The game is scheduled to kick off at 11 a.m. Central and will be televised

nationally on ESPN2.

COMMENTARY: All about the response now (premium)

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – As the Iowa Hawkeyes walked off the Kinnick Stadium turf Saturday night, they did so having played as awful a game as it has had since Kirk Ferentz became head coach. Heck, a valid argument could be made that Iowa's 38-14 loss to Penn State is the worst loss the Hawkeyes have endured at Kinnick Stadium in 14 seasons.

Both teams came in 4-2 overall and 2-0 in the Big Ten, but it was the Nittany Lions that looked more like a team vying for a division title – despite the fact they can't play in any sort of postseason until 2016.

As disastrous as Iowa looked on Saturday, this season still has promise. But while hopes of possibly winning the Legends Division and playing in Indianapolis on Dec. 1 haven't completely faded, the Hawkeyes are now at a crossroads and the timing couldn't be worse.

The offense needs to be tinkered with, point blank. As much credit as Penn State deserves for its defensive prowess, Iowa was absolutely abysmal on offense and this is far from the first time this season that has been the case. Even with sophomore running back Mark Weisman being able to suit up despite having a sprained ankle, he only had nine yards

rushing on five carries. None of the other running backs fared any better and Iowa managed to rush for 20 yards on 23 carries.

Let me repeat that – 20 yards on 23 carries. Not even one yard per carry. It doesn't matter who Iowa is playing with that average. It's not going to beat anybody in the Big Ten if it can't run the ball, especially when the passing game continues to have issues like it has all season long.

Now whether the tinkering gets done with scheme or personnel doesn't really matter. Iowa can't stay as predictable as it has been though, otherwise the results are going to continue being lackluster.

The defense wasn't any better. Matt McGloin was probably the best quarterback Iowa has faced to date and he carved the Hawkeyes up like a Thanksgiving turkey. McGloin came in averaging 250 passing yards a game, which was tops in the Big Ten. He completed 26 of 38 passes for 289 yards. The Hawkeyes allowed Penn State to play to its strength offensively and got shredded as a result.

Yet in the grand scheme of things, this loss might not be nearly as damaging. Yes, Iowa got dump-trucked by Penn State and it was never close. But it's no longer about how bad the Hawkeyes looked, but rather how they respond.

Iowa plays at Northwestern next weekend. The Wildcats are 6-2 and could very easily be 8-0 if not for a pair of fourth quarter collapses, which includes a 28-16 lead on Nebraska evolving into a 29-28 loss to the Cornhuskers on Saturday. Next weekend is much bigger. If the Hawkeyes can leave Ryan Field with a win, they'll remain in a position to control their destiny towards winning the Legends Division. Lose to the Wildcats though and you can forget it.

Here's what I do know – if Iowa plays like it did Saturday again next week, the Hawkeyes aren't getting out of Evanston

with a victory. It's clear that plenty of things need fixing. Now the question becomes whether Iowa make the right fixes and continue showcasing its remarkable ability of bouncing back the following week from bad losses.

That's going to be the difference between this team continuing to be talked about as a division contender as opposed to a team that barely qualifies for a bowl game.

Iowa-PSU video: James Morris

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – Iowa junior linebacker James Morris recorded 12 tackles in the Hawkeyes' 38-14 loss to Penn State on Saturday at Kinnick Stadium.

Iowa-PSU video: Christian Kirksey

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – Iowa junior linebacker Christian Kirksey recorded 12 tackles and recovered a fumble on Saturday in the Hawkeyes' 38-14 loss to Penn State at Kinnick Stadium.

Iowa-PSU video: Mark Weisman

By Brendan Stiles

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – Iowa sophomore running back Mark Weisman rushed for nine yards on five carries in the Hawkeyes' 38-14 loss to Penn State on Saturday at Kinnick Stadium. Weisman didn't make the start due to a sprained ankle suffered Oct. 13 against Michigan State, but came in on Iowa's second series of the game.

Iowa-PSU video: Jordan Cotton

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Iowa junior wide receiver Jordan Cotton hauled in one catch for 13 yards receiving and also returned a kickoff for a 92-yard touchdown in the fourth quarter of the Hawkeyes' 38-14 loss to Penn State on Saturday at Kinnick Stadium.

Iowa-PSU video: James Ferentz

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – Iowa senior offensive lineman James Ferentz started his 33rd consecutive game at center for the Hawkeyes in their 38-14 loss to Penn State on Saturday at Kinnick Stadium. Iowa compiled 209 yards of total offense in defeat.

Iowa-PSU video: Kirk Ferentz

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz addressed the media in a post game press conference following the Hawkeyes' 38-14 loss to Penn State on Saturday at Kinnick Stadium. Iowa fell to 4-3 overall and 2-1 in Big Ten play.

Iowa-PSU video: James Vandenberg

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – Iowa senior quarterback James Vandenberg completed 17-of-36 pass attempts for 189 yards and tossed one touchdown and two interceptions in the Hawkeyes' 38-14 loss to Penn State on Saturday at Kinnick Stadium.

Iowa - PSU video: Nolan MacMillan

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – Iowa junior offensive lineman Nolan MacMillan played at left tackle Saturday following an injury to sophomore Brandon Scherff in the Hawkeyes' 38-14 loss to Penn State at Kinnick Stadium. Iowa compiled 209 yards of total offense in defeat.