

COMMENTARY: Putting things in perspective (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – Although the final outcome of Saturday's game between No. 13 Iowa and No. 10 Wisconsin wasn't what the majority of the 70,585 inside Kinnick Stadium anticipated, this isn't a time to be jumping ship, either.

What I took away from the Hawkeyes' 31-30 loss was this – it's one game.

I'm not going to defend any of the numerous debacles Iowa had throughout the game – and there were a plethora of them. But let's get one thing straight right now. Wisconsin is a good football team.

Before any of us go off on what Iowa did wrong, let's look at what Wisconsin did right. Every time the Hawkeyes threw a punch, the Badgers found a way to throw one right back.

And while Wisconsin still needs Michigan State to lose a couple of games here down the stretch in order to be in the Big Ten driver's seat, a quick glance at the Badgers' schedule suggests a possible 11-1 record this season. After scoring 31 points on both Ohio State and now Iowa in consecutive weeks, the bowl forecast looks great for Wisconsin at this moment.

Now back to Iowa. For all the criticism everyone has, some of which is warranted, it's not like the Hawkeyes got it handed to them and played lackluster for four quarters.

Things like an extra point being blocked, a field goal being mishandled, not being prepared for a fake punt, and poor clock management are inexcusable in football. I could maybe see how

the fake punt caught Iowa off guard (although in hindsight, it was a good call Wisconsin made), but the other three things demonstrate lack of focus, and that can't happen.

An extra point should never be blocked, period. The blunder with the field goal try should not be placed on Michael Meyer's shoulders in any way, shape or form. Not to mention the fact there were two penalties on Iowa prior to that attempt.

And while I'm not always critical of Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz, I really don't get his rationale for calling Iowa's final timeout with 12 seconds left when there was time to spike the ball and get at least one more play off before attempting a possible game-winning field goal.

But that being said, the Hawkeyes did some good things. Scoring 30 points and being able to move the ball as effectively as they did on this Badger defense ought to be an encouraging sign. Ricky Stanzi completed more than two-thirds of his passes, and didn't have a single turnover. Adam Robinson played another exceptional game, as did both Derrell Johnson-Koulianos and Marvin McNutt. Heck, even Allen Reisner looked tremendous at times out there.

As for the defense, I get the frustration. Wisconsin moved the ball at will on Iowa. But to simply place all the blame on these guys for what the Badgers did, in my opinion, is selling this defense short. Scott Tolzien played phenomenal, as did both John Clay and Montee Ball, who came in for an injured James White.

Not to make excuses for the defense, but when you consider the depth right now at linebacker, it's thin. The Hawkeyes are already without Bruce Davis, came into this game without Jeff Tarcup, and lost Jeremiha Hunter in the second half to what appeared to be a serious injury. That's probably one of the few areas any football team could least afford to not have

depth.

Again, is this a disappointing loss if you're someone associated with the Hawkeyes in any manner there is? Absolutely.

But remember to keep things in perspective. There are five games left in the regular season, and while the chances of winning the Big Ten look less realistic, finishing the season strong and appearing in a New Year's Day bowl game is nothing to sneeze at.

A win over Michigan State next week would certainly change the outlook on the rest of the Hawkeyes' season. Right now, that's all this team (and the fans for that matter) needs to worry about.