

Hawkeyes continuing to build confidence (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

BLOOMINGTON, Ind. – If there's one thing the No. 15 Iowa Hawkeyes have, it's confidence.

Well, at least they should possess confidence after eeking out an 18-13 win on Saturday over the Indiana Hoosiers at Memorial Stadium.

This was not the best game Iowa has played this season. In fact, it was far from it.

But the mindset of the Hawkeyes when the clock expired was no longer devastation, but relief.

"It didn't come easy," Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said after garnering his 100th career win. "Indiana played a tremendous football game, and we expected they would.

One major contributor to Iowa's success, at least early on, was running back Marcus Coker, who made his first start in place of an injured Adam Robinson. All Coker did was rush for 129 yards on 22 carries, becoming the third straight true freshman to rush for 100-plus yards on the Hoosiers.

While the plan is for Robinson to return to practice this coming week, at least the Hawkeyes now know there's a reliable No. 2 back they can depend on.

"We all expected that," senior fullback Brett Morse said. "He has been a good player for us since he walked in. He just did a heck of a job today, and he did a good job preparing during the week.

“He’s a smart kid and really has a good grasp on the offense.”

With Iowa finding itself in a vintage “trap game,” any positive contributions were going to be important.

Coker wouldn’t be the only true freshman that factored into the outcome. Michael Meyer, a walk-on kicker, made 4-of-5 field goals attempts, including a career-long 42-yard kick that came in the fourth quarter with the Hawkeyes trailing.

“He showed some resiliency there coming back and getting a critical field goal for us,” Ferentz said.

By staying within reach, Iowa found a way to capture momentum from Indiana and not look back.

The defense was able to force a Hoosier punt, setting the Hawkeyes up offensively with 3:42 on the clock and a chance to win the game. But in order to do this, Iowa needed to go score starting from its own 12-yard line.

In less than a minute, what looked like an Iowa loss turned into a late lead after senior quarterback Ricky Stanzi completed a 52-yard strike to junior wide receiver Marvin McNutt resulting in a go-ahead touchdown.

“We’ve been in that position, and we’re just looking for guys to make plays,” junior safety Tyler Sash said. “We got a stop on defense, and the offense came out. Rick made a heck of a throw, and Marv did the rest of the work.”

Indiana would get the ball back starting on its own 41-yard line, needing to go 59 yards down the field to win. The Hoosiers moved the football down to the 18-yard line.

Meanwhile, guys on the offensive side of the ball watched in angst, remaining optimistic that the defense would hold like it did the last time it was on the field.

“Honestly, you’re more nervous then than you are before the

game or on the field, because there's nothing you can do about it," Stanzi said. "You just got to trust your defense, and they did a good job."

As it turned out, the defense did just enough for the Hawkeyes to escape Memorial Stadium with a win and a 4-1 Big Ten record entering the final three games of the regular season.

Now Iowa knows it has the confidence to end the season strong.

"I just feel good about our players showing the grit necessary in the fourth quarter and making some plays to get us in the end zone and also keeping them out of it," Ferentz said. "It didn't come easy at any phase."