

Hawkeyes stunned by late Wildcat rally

By Brendan Stiles

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EVANSTON, Ill. – The theme is one Iowa fans have become all too familiar with.

For the third time this season, a game-winning touchdown drive by an opposing team was the difference. For the fifth time in six years, the No. 13 Iowa Hawkeyes found themselves on the losing end against Northwestern.

This time around, the Wildcats marched 91 yards down the field and scored on a game-winning 20-yard touchdown pass from Dan Persa to Demetrius Fields with 1:22 left, and the Hawkeyes failed to respond, falling 21-17.

The loss drops Iowa to 7-3 overall, 4-2 in the Big Ten, and likely eliminated the Hawkeyes from the Big Ten title race.

“We lost,” senior quarterback Ricky Stanzi said. “It’s the same feeling if we lose any other game. It sucks. You don’t want to lose. You want to win.”

Iowa, once again, got off to a rough start. After Northwestern forced the Hawkeyes to punt on their opening series, the Wildcats proceeded to march 62 yards for a touchdown to take a 7-0 lead. The score was a run by Northwestern quarterback Dan Persa from two yards out.

The Hawkeyes had very little success moving the ball at all in the first half until the final minutes of the second quarter. A critical 20-yard fourth-down completion from quarterback Ricky Stanzi to tight end Allen Reisner would lead to a 32-yard field goal by Michael Meyer, and Iowa was only down 7-3

at halftime.

The success from that final first half possession would carry over to the second half. Stanzi completed a 5-yard touchdown pass to wide receiver Marvin McNutt to put Iowa ahead 10-7. The Hawkeyes would extend the lead to 17-7 when Stanzi threw his second touchdown pass of the afternoon, a 70-yard bomb to wide receiver Derrell Johnson-Koulianos.

Stanzi would finish the game with 270 yards passing to go with those two touchdowns, and he only tossed one interception. But that pick proved to be one that changed the outlook of the game.

Iowa was still ahead 17-7 in the fourth quarter, looking to go for the jugular. But an ill-advised throw down field went right into the hands of Northwestern's Brian Peters. Then the momentum began to shift in the Wildcats' favor for good.

"It's ironic, because that's the first time we'd ever had decent field position today," Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said. "Not only did we not come away with points, but we ended up turning it over."

Northwestern had the football and Persa was able to find wide receiver Jeremy Ebert for a 6-yard touchdown pass that trimmed the Hawkeye lead to 17-14 with 6:21 remaining.

After the Wildcats forced a 3-and-out, they got the ball on their own 9-yard line with 4:08 showing on the scoreboard. Northwestern continued to move the chains, and the big play from Persa to Fields happened.

"We made some mistakes in the fourth quarter by letting [Persa] get out of the pocket and scramble and not keep him contained," junior safety Tyler Sash said. "They caught a big pass on us at the end there."

Iowa had one last shot to escape a victory like it did a week

ago at Indiana, but this time, it wasn't meant to be.

"It just seems like every single year, we come in against Northwestern and we kill ourselves," senior offensive lineman Julian Vandervelde said. "They're a team that you can't make the basic mistakes against. We had far too many penalties, and in past years, far too many turnovers.

"They're a team that we should beat, but in order to beat them, we have to play clean. We didn't play clean."

The Hawkeyes now have two regular season games remaining, and will have to try bouncing back from this defeat at Kinnick Stadium on Nov. 20 against Ohio State. It will be Iowa's "Senior Day" and the game is scheduled to kick off at 2:30 p.m. Central.