

Late drive kills defense again (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

EVANSTON, Ill. – In the aftermath of No. 13 Iowa's 21-17 loss to Northwestern on Saturday, a developing pattern has risen. And it's not a pretty one for Hawkeye fans.

An Iowa defense that has been highly-touted all season once again struggled to rise to the occasion when it truly mattered most.

Back in September, it was a 34-27 loss to Arizona defined by a late touchdown drive in the fourth quarter. Against Wisconsin back on Oct. 23 in Iowa City, a perfectly executed fake punt and a late touchdown run from Montee Ball in the final minute allowed the Badgers to leave Kinnick Stadium with a win.

Even just last week at Indiana, the Hoosiers let a last-minute win literally slip through its fingers.

And now Northwestern, a team that came in having won four of five against the Hawkeyes, rallied with two touchdowns in the fourth quarter to steal a victory away from Iowa. Not only that, but the scoring drives consisted of 85 and 91 yards, respectively.

All three losses and the near-debacle at Indiana have exposed a weakness that is as dreary as the Evanston skies looked on Saturday.

"That's not what we're looking for," senior defensive tackle Karl Klug said after recording seven tackles and two sacks for the Hawkeyes in defeat. "We can't allow that to happen."

In the fourth quarter of this contest, Iowa looked to be in solid position to come away with a victory. But that all changed when Northwestern's Brian Peters intercepted a Ricky Stanzi pass to set the Wildcats up at their own 15-yard line and just under 11 minutes remaining to work with.

Thirteen plays later, Northwestern quarterback Dan Persa threw the first of his two fourth-quarter touchdown passes to wideout Jeremy Ebert, and the Hawkeye lead was now just three points with 6:21 left.

Senior linebacker Jeremiha Hunter, who recorded an interception himself just before the momentum shifted in the Wildcats' favor, described Persa as a extremely difficult quarterback to get ready for.

"He can run around, and he's accurate when he's passing as he's running around," Hunter said. "That makes him a lot more effective."

Iowa would be forced to punt on its following series, and Northwestern had the football on its own 9-yard line with 4:08 remaining.

This time, it only took 11 plays for the Wildcats to break the hearts of many Iowa fans who made the trip to Ryan Field. Persa hit a wide-open Demetrius Fields in the end zone for a 20-yard score to give Northwestern a lead it relinquished at the start of the third quarter with just 1:22 showing on the clock.

"We tried to substitute different packages in, and I think they just stuck to what they wanted to do," senior safety Brett Greenwood said. "The bottom line is they executed and we didn't get the job done."

The Hawkeyes won't have any time to feel sorry for themselves as Ohio State comes calling at Kinnick Stadium next weekend. For now though, it's evident that this loss, just like those

others, stings.

"We know we have a good team," Hunter said. "I don't know. It was just one of those games where you hope it goes differently. You work hard, and it just doesn't end how you want it to."