

COMMENTARY: Appropriate ending for this senior class

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HawkeyeDrive.com

TEMPE, Ariz. – It's the fourth quarter. The scoreboard read "Tigers 24, Hawkeyes 20."

Before Iowa and No. 14 Missouri met at Sun Devil Stadium on Tuesday in the 2010 Insight Bowl, I predicted on my "Talkin' Hawks" podcast that the Tigers would win by this very score.

My reason for bringing this up isn't to brag. I reference this because part of the rationale I gave was that unless either the Iowa defense got a stop when it needed to, or the offense executed a two-minute drill successfully, I couldn't convince myself (or any of you, for that matter) that the Hawkeyes would come out on top.

But the defense did step up when sophomore cornerback Micah Hyde intercepted Blaine Gabbert and proceeded to run back 72 yards for a go-ahead touchdown. The offense did manage to protect the lead and put a game away.

Final score: Iowa 27, Missouri 24.

For seniors like Ricky Stanzi, Adrian Clayborn, Karl Klug, Julian Vandervelde, etc., playing in the Insight Bowl just 11 months after winning a BCS game might not have been how they saw their Iowa careers ending when the season began.

But to leave the program accomplishing something never done in the history of Iowa football – winning three straight bowl games – all while having one of the better three-year runs in team history makes this victory a fitting end for them.

Stanzi didn't have to lead any game-winning drives on this night, but he reminded everyone why he has won a total of now 26 games as a starting quarterback at Iowa. Clayborn didn't have the best night statistically, but his presence up front helped make a difference one last time. The same thing could be said about senior linebacker Jeff Tarpinian, who was battling injury and found a way to play the entire game at outside linebacker.

Allen Reisner, who only had three catches the entire night, made the play at the end of the game that sealed this final victory for this senior class.

As disappointing as this season may have been in terms of expectations, replacing this particular senior class will be no easy task. It's the largest senior class that Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz has ever had graduate in his 12 years at Iowa. It's also one of the most successful classes under Ferentz, maybe second only to his 2004 and 2005 classes that both left with a total of 38 victories in four years of actual playing.

Sure, this was just the Insight Bowl. Sure, finishing 8-5 as opposed to 7-6 isn't a whole lot better for this team. But after a month of turbulence, this is a group that deserved one last time to shine.

And wouldn't you know? They shined at night in what's called "The Valley of the Sun."

Each group of seniors has a different identity. This particular group's identity is one that found a way to prevail on the field one final time for those who did make the trip to Arizona.

In hindsight, maybe I shouldn't have doubted this happening. Then again, it only seems appropriate that things unfolded the way they did.