

Delay dampens Hawkeye win in season opener

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – A torrential downpour combined with lightning in the vicinity led to an 84-minute delay during Iowa's game Saturday against Tennessee Tech. But by that point, the Hawkeyes had already made it rain on the Golden Eagles.

Thanks in large part to a 24-point second quarter, Iowa was able to handle its season-opener with ease to the tune of a 34-7 victory, and this came despite the unusual circumstances that occurred.

With 3:37 remaining in the third quarter, Iowa was ahead 34-0 and faced a 3rd-and-8 from its own 42-yard line. At 1:22 p.m. Central, head referee Bill LeMonnier stopped play after lightning was spotted in the area. Both teams went to their respective locker rooms, while spectators were instructed to file out of their seats.

The challenge for Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz was keeping his team informed.

"The most difficult part about it is there's just no certainty. Anytime lightning strikes, they have to push the clock back another 30," Ferentz said. "First we told them it was going to be a while. Got another report, came back and said it was going to be quite a while, which it ended up being."

As for the players, it became a mental challenge, but one they seemed to handle better than some might have expected.

"A lot of the guys were doing it by saying they weren't going to focus, but just joking around and kind of trying to keep the situation light," senior defensive back Jordan Bernstine said.

Before the delay though, Iowa got off to a sluggish start before really separating itself in the second quarter. The Hawkeyes took a 3-0 lead on their second offensive series with a 39-yard field goal by sophomore kicker Mike Meyer. However, the scoring was prefaced by sophomore running back Marcus Coker fumbling on two of his first four carries, with the first one being recovered by Tennessee Tech.

True freshman running back Mika'il McCall was inserted into the game for Coker after his second fumble was recovered by junior left tackle Riley Reiff. McCall rushed for 61 yards on nine carries in the first quarter, but his season was ended when he broke his right ankle on a play in the quarter's final minute. He was taken to the locker room on crutches and Ferentz said afterwards he would be out for good.

"Nobody's more disappointed than him," Ferentz said. "He's just really a tremendous young guy with a great attitude, great spirit."

Iowa would get its first touchdown of the game in the second quarter when junior quarterback James Vandenberg ran in from one yard out. The scoring drive was highlighted by a magnificent catch from junior wide receiver Keenan Davis, who was called down at the 1-yard line.

"He did a great job of winning and got us down to the half-yard line," Vandenberg said.

In what was only his third career start, Vandenberg completed 13-of-21 passes for 219 yards and two touchdowns, both of which went the way of senior wide receiver Marvin McNutt. The first of those two strikes went for 88 yards on a play where McNutt made the defender miss and had nothing but open field

the rest of his way to the end zone, putting Iowa ahead 17-0.

"Right after the tackle, I saw the green and just decided to take off," McNutt said.

After sophomore linebacker James Morris returned an interception down to the Tennessee Tech 9-yard line on the ensuing possession, the Hawkeyes settled for a 20-yard field goal by Meyer. The Golden Eagles began to drive down field, but in the first half's final minutes, senior cornerback Shaun Prater intercepted a Tre' Lamb pass and proceeded to return the pick 89 yards for a touchdown to give Iowa a 27-0 halftime lead.

"I saw the tight end spill out late, so I made sure that I just boxed him out and play the ball at the highest point," Prater said. "I focused on catching it at the highest point, but once I started to bring it down, I just ripped it out, and after I yanked it out, I just tried to bring it down field."

Now at 1-0, the Hawkeyes shift their attention to in-state rival Iowa State, who it meets at Jack Trice Stadium in Ames on Sept. 10. Kickoff is scheduled for 11 a.m. Central and will be televised nationally on FSN. Last season, the Hawkeyes crushed the Cyclones at Kinnick Stadium, 35-7, and Iowa has won the last three meetings in the Cy-Hawk Series.