

# COMMENTARY: Reality check comes early (premium)

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AMES, Iowa – In this day and age where “keeping it real” seems trendy, this is a good time to discuss some harsh bits of reality regarding this Iowa football team.

First off, Iowa State defeated Iowa 44-41 in triple overtime on Saturday at Jack Trice Stadium. Truth be told, it could have been much worse for the Hawkeyes than it was.

Yes, losing to an in-state rival in any fashion, even in three overtimes, is going to sting. But senior defensive tackle Mike Daniels said it best afterwards Saturday when he said Iowa State “brought it” and played like the better team. The Cyclones left anywhere between 12-20 points on the board, missing two field goals and turning the ball over twice in the red zone, and they still ultimately found a way to defeat the Hawkeyes on Saturday.

Basically what I’m getting at is, even when things seemed to be going right for Iowa, it wasn’t as if Iowa State was just going to roll over and feel down about itself like it has in recent years.

Next bit of reality – the criticism of the coaching staff is absolutely fair. The extremists going as far as saying Kirk Ferentz should be fired need to step off the ledge, but constructive criticism for how the end of the game was handled is absolutely fair.

Iowa had the ball with 1:17 remaining in regulation and had two timeouts. Yet they ran down the clock and settled for

overtime. Ferentz's defense after the game was that they were going to run with the hope they'd cross the 30-yard line, then put it in quarterback James Vandenberg's hands. My question would be this: Why not just do that from the get-go, especially when the Hawkeyes seemed to be spreading out Iowa State's defense quite a bit while throwing the ball in overtime?

The game was tied. A field goal would have won the contest, and sophomore kicker Mike Meyer had already made a career-long 50-yard kick earlier in the game. All I know is last Friday night, I was watching Missouri come back from two touchdowns down and make an attempt to beat Arizona State in regulation before pulling a coaching gaffe of its own en route to an overtime loss. The contrast in coaching styles intrigues me.

Now, I will give Ferentz some benefit of the doubt on the call in the third overtime. Key word being "some." When it's 4th-and-6, yes, you take the points. But after an Iowa State penalty makes it 4th-and-1, going for it needs to at least be discussed. Because let's face it – the Cyclones were not going to settle for a field goal regardless. This is where "knowing your opponent" ought to come into play.

One last harsh reality – this Iowa defense is going to continue to struggle over the course of the season. It may have a few good games from time to time, but the recipe for scoring on this defense has been revealed, and there are enough teams on Iowa's schedule that have the personnel to do it.

It's not pessimism. It's just the truth. The old adage is that teams improve the most between Weeks 1 and 2. Except in this case, there wasn't any improvement between Tennessee Tech and Iowa State for the Hawkeyes.

The bottom line is this: Can the Hawkeyes bounce back? Sure. Pittsburgh's coming to Kinnick Stadium next week off a 6-point

victory over an FCS team at home, so it isn't as if the Panthers are flawless. But it's safe to say there's as much, if not more, talent on Pittsburgh than there is Iowa State. Again, the same can be said of most of Iowa's remaining opponents.

Which is why right now is a good time for Hawkeye fans out there to prepare themselves for the worst. Because if Saturday was any indication, it could be the reality.