

Hawkeyes finally tame Wildcats

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz doesn't get many chances to breath a sigh of relief. On Saturday, he was able to do just that.

Thanks in large part to a 24-point fourth-quarter showing, the Iowa Hawkeyes managed to snap a three-game losing streak to Northwestern, defeating the Wildcats 41-31 Saturday evening in front of a sellout crowd at Kinnick Stadium. The win is just the second in the last seven years against Northwestern for Iowa, who now sits at 1-1 in Big Ten play and 4-2 overall while the Wildcats fell to 0-3 in the conference and 2-4 overall.

"We had to work for everything we got," Ferentz said afterwards.

The game began with Iowa scoring first when sophomore kicker Mike Meyer connected on a 27-yard field goal to put the Hawkeyes ahead, 3-0. The Hawkeye defense then made a critical play.

With Northwestern having moved all the way down to Iowa's 7-yard line, pressure from the Hawkeye D-line on Northwestern quarterback Dan Persa forced an ill-advised throw that was picked by sophomore free safety Tanner Miller and returned 98 yards for an Iowa touchdown that put the Hawkeyes up 10-0.

Miller's play tied a school record set by former Iowa defensive back Adam Shada, who returned an interception 98 yards for a touchdown in 2006 during a game against Purdue.

"I knew that the quarterback was scrambling back there, and I was just trying to stay with my guy just in case he got outside our defensive line," Miller said. "But then I saw that one of our defensive linemen had wrapped his leg up and just was hoping he'd throw it.

"Luckily enough, he did. If it wasn't going to be a pick, it was going to be a sack."

Iowa would then go ahead 17-0 when junior quarterback James Vandenberg connected with junior wide receiver Keenan Davis on a play-action pass down the middle of the field for a 47-yard touchdown.

Northwestern would score on a Persa touchdown pass to wide receiver Jeremy Ebert to trim the Hawkeyes' lead to 17-7 at halftime. Then the Wildcats would dominate the third quarter and eventually tie the game at 17-17, silencing a rowdy faithful inside Kinnick Stadium.

From this moment though, the offense would start to pour it on Texas.

With Northwestern having dominated time of possession entering the fourth quarter, Iowa's game plan simply became holding onto the ball as long as possible. As it turned out, the Hawkeyes were able to post more than 10 points in the fourth quarter, allowing itself to stay in the game with 24 fourth-quarter points.

"This was a big step for our offense," Vandenberg said. "It started with that O-line. They gave us great protection and great running holes all day, and it spread from there."

Sophomore running back Marcus Coker rushed for 124 yards on 22 carries, which was statistically speaking the best outing of his season thus far. Coker would score a pair of goal line touchdowns in the fourth quarter to help guide the Hawkeyes to a win.

"When we're up, they know that we have to run the ball, and we know we have to run the ball," Coker said.

There was also history made in the fourth quarter of Iowa's game against Northwestern. Senior wide receiver Marvin McNutt scored on a touchdown pass from 35 yards out that put Iowa ahead 31-17. The play also marked McNutt's 21st career touchdown receptions, a record he now shares with former Iowa wide receivers Danan Hughes and Tim Dwight.

"It's a great honor to be with those guys. They're great Iowa players," McNutt said. "They left here with that record, and that's something to be proud of, just to be there with those guys."

At 4-2, Iowa now shifts its attention towards a beaten-up Indiana squad coming into Kinnick Stadium next Saturday after a 59-7 loss to No. 4 Wisconsin. The Hoosiers are now at 1-6 overall and are 0-3 in the Big Ten. Iowa won its second straight over Indiana last season with an 18-13 win in Bloomington, Ind., having won three straight overall against the Hoosiers. The game is Iowa's Homecoming, and it is slated to kick off on Oct. 22 at 11 a.m. Central from Kinnick Stadium. It will air nationally on the Big Ten Network.