

COMMENTARY: McNutt leaving his mark (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Upon becoming Iowa's all-time leader in touchdown catches Saturday, senior wide receiver Marvin McNutt said he hopes to leave with the type of legacy that was placed by the two men he surpassed with his milestone – Danan Hughes and Tim Dwight.

With all due respect to Danan, Tim, and other past Iowa receivers, McNutt might be leaving with a greater legacy than any of them ever had.

On a day that will be remembered for McNutt carving his name among his legends, the milestone he set and the ones he's on pace to set are being done in emphatic fashion. The reception that placed McNutt atop the record books came late in the first quarter and was an 80-yard scoring play on a pass thrown to him by junior quarterback James Vandenberg.

McNutt would score two more times in the second quarter and had already reached a career-high in receiving yards before halftime. He finished the game with 184 yards receiving on six catches.

The story about McNutt is well-documented, but can't be told enough. Four years ago, McNutt came to Iowa as a quarterback and was competing with the likes of Ricky Stanzi and Jake Christensen for that position. In 2008, he made the switch to wide receiver and as a sophomore had a chance to stand out.

One memory I have of McNutt from when he was in the midst of his transition came in the spring of 2009. Because FieldTurf

was being installed at Kinnick Stadium due to drainage issues, Iowa's last spring practice that year was at the Kenyon Practice Facility and wasn't open to the entire public. That afternoon, McNutt made a spectacular one-handed catch along the sidelines, the sort of move that looked vintage Randy Moss in his prime. I was sold on him being a receiver when I saw that play, but little did I realize the receiver McNutt would become.

On the afternoon McNutt scored his first touchdown, he scored twice. It was a coming out party, if you will, only he refused to look at it as such. Three weeks later, he made one of the signature plays of Iowa's 2009 season, scoring off a slant route on the final play of the game to beat Michigan State.

When Vandenberg made his first career start that same season inside Ohio Stadium, it was McNutt who bailed him out with two touchdown catches and absolutely abused Buckeye cornerback Chimdi Chekwa. He also caught the first touchdown of the 2010 Orange Bowl that Iowa won against Georgia Tech.

McNutt recorded eight touchdown catches during both his sophomore and junior seasons. He reached that eight-touchdown plateau Saturday and still has five, likely six, games left to build on that.

But it's not just what McNutt has accomplished, but how he has accomplished it. From his first career reception (coincidentally against Indiana) in 2008 to now, the St. Louis native has been a consummate professional with how he handles himself on and off the field. This year, he became a team captain and deservedly so.

He had the chance to jump to the NFL after last season, but opted to return for his senior year. Part of his drive in doing so was wanting to be the first in his family to graduate. Not only is McNutt on pace to do that, but his performance Saturday and the consistency he has displayed

through three seasons ought to be catching the eye of NFL teams. There were four teams with scouts on hand at Kinnick Stadium for Saturday's game, and I'm willing to bet all four examined McNutt closely.

Yet when this day was complete, he wasn't thinking about the accolades. McNutt said the two drops he had can't be dismissed, and it's motivation for him to perform better next week and the following week, even after a career day.

When Iowa's season comes to a close and McNutt walks off the field in a Hawkeye uniform for the final time, there's no question he'll be leaving his mark. Iowa fans ought to cherish what the Hawkeyes have in McNutt now, who just might be the best Iowa receiver under Ferentz and perhaps the best Iowa wideout ever when it's all said and done.