

Hawkeyes silenced by late Gopher rally

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

MINNEAPOLIS, Minn. – The Iowa Hawkeyes missed a golden opportunity Saturday afternoon.

They entered their game against Minnesota with a chance to create a four-way tie for first place in the Big Ten's Legends Division, and held a 21-10 lead in the fourth quarter.

Then disaster struck. The Golden Gophers scored 12 unanswered points and recovered an onside kick in between scores. When it was all said and done, Floyd of Rosedale wound up staying in Minnesota, as the Hawkeyes fell to the Golden Gophers, 22-21. The loss drops Iowa to 5-3 overall, and more importantly, the Hawkeyes are now 2-2 in Big Ten play.

The onside kick is what will be remembered from this performance. The Golden Gophers had just scored a touchdown and not only attempted, but recovered, their second onside kick in as many seasons against the Hawkeyes.

When pressed on the matter afterwards, Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said it was a call that made sense from Minnesota's standpoint.

"I don't want to say it was an obvious situation, but it was certainly something that they could do," Ferentz said. "At that point, it made perfect sense. They needed another score, and they stole a possession there.

"Their execution was excellent, to their credit. Ours was not. More important, they took that momentum and drove the field."

Iowa was unable to win despite a performance for the ages from sophomore running back Marcus Coker, who rushed for career-high 252 yards on 32 carries and scored two touchdowns, both of which came from one yard out. It was also the third straight time Coker had rushed for over 100 yards in a game this season.

"Marcus ran really hard today, and he deserves a lot of credit because he did. He probably played the best game of his year," junior center James Ferentz said. "As an offensive line, we didn't do a great job. Losing's tough, and the fact that we're pretty much at fault makes it tougher."

What also hurt the Hawkeyes in this game were missed opportunities early. On the opening drive, Iowa went for it on fourth down, and junior quarterback James Vandenberg completed a pass to sophomore wide receiver Jordan Cotton that ended up one yard short.

Later in the first quarter, Iowa got down to the Minnesota 6-yard line, but sophomore kicker Mike Meyer hooked a 24-yard field goal wide to the left, keeping the game scoreless. Meyer would miss another field goal try from 43 yards out in the first half.

"We were able to put together some drives there early, and you've got to finish drives," Vandenberg said. "We weren't able to do that there in the first quarter, and that came back to bite us."

The Hawkeyes struck first when Vandenberg found senior wide receiver Marvin McNutt for a 12-yard touchdown pass on a fade route. The score came after senior strong safety Jordan Bernstine recovered a Minnesota fumble. However, the Golden Gophers responded with a touchdown of their own on the ensuing possession to tie the game at 7-7 just before halftime.

After a Minnesota three-and-out, Iowa would march down the field and Coker would score the first of his two touchdowns.

Minnesota made a field goal to make it 14-10 before Coker scored his second touchdown, giving the Hawkeyes a 21-10 lead.

Then came a Golden Gopher touchdown, the onside kick, and the last score of the game with 2:48 showing on the clock. Just before the play, which was 4th-and-Goal from the Iowa 3, the Hawkeyes called a timeout.

"I think the timeout before the fourth down was just to make sure we had the right call and had exactly what we wanted," said sophomore linebacker James Morris, who recorded a team-high 13 tackles.

However, Minnesota quarterback MarQueis Gray would run in from three yards out and reached the ball over the plane to put the Golden Gophers ahead.

"They had a good game plan," junior cornerback Micah Hyde said. "I think a couple of times, they just wanted to get Gray out of the pocket, and let him run to the sticks. I think they did a good job of that, and he didn't force a pass tonight."

Iowa had one last chance, but couldn't get any sort of offense going. Four of Vandenberg's eight incompletions on the day came on that drive, including drops by senior tight end Brad Herman and junior running back Jason White.

"I don't think we were down or low at all. We just didn't execute," Vandenberg said. "I don't think it was a confidence issue. We just didn't execute. We were never really able to get anything going, and that makes it hard, when you're sitting there in 4th-and-long."

Iowa now returns home to plays its final two games of the season at Kinnick Stadium. The home stand begins Nov. 5 with a contest against No. 17 Michigan (7-1, 3-1) set to begin at 11 a.m. Central. The game will be televised nationally on ESPN.