

# COMMENTARY:                      Sputtering offense                      proves                      to                      be difference

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TEMPE, Ariz. – The play of Iowa's offense is what doomed its chances in the 2011 Insight Bowl, as the Hawkeyes were defeated by No. 19 Oklahoma, 31-14.

Maybe this sounds like stating the obvious, but this was a night, and a game, where it was pretty clear where it was lost.

Say what you will about the suspension handed down to sophomore running back Marcus Coker last week, preventing him from traveling with the team for this game. He wouldn't have made the difference Friday night. Not against that Oklahoma defense.

Look at the other games Iowa lost this season where it was thoroughly dominated like it was by the Sooners in this contest. Coker struggled to get much going, and the offense struggled. I'm talking about the three double-digit losses to Penn State, Michigan State and Nebraska that preceded Friday night's events. Coker wasn't the difference in those games, and he wouldn't have been the difference in this one.

To take that point one step further, freshman running back Jordan Canzeri didn't look too bad. He only rushed for 58 yards on 22 carries, but he also had a team-high six receptions. It speaks volumes about his ability to be a threat in both the running and passing game. It also speaks volumes to just how much the offense struggled.

Junior quarterback James Vandenberg finished 23-of-44 passing. Six of his 23 completions on the night were to Canzeri – for 28 yards. That isn't going to get it done against a team like Oklahoma. Sure he had more passing yards than Oklahoma quarterback Landry Jones, but the issues Vandenberg had early on proved to play a huge role in the outcome of this game.

Iowa's first two possessions featured six passes by Vandenberg. He completed one – a 10-yard catch by senior wide receiver Marvin McNutt. He also threw an interception to Oklahoma cornerback Jamell Fleming that set up the first of three touchdowns scored on the ground by Sooner back-up quarterback Blake Bell.

The only way the Hawkeyes had any chance of realistically winning this game is if they had delivered the first punch the Sooners' direction. They didn't. Instead, Oklahoma was able to build up a 21-0 lead that Iowa wasn't able to overcome.

In what was the final game for Norm Parker as Iowa's defensive coordinator, the Hawkeye defense played pretty well. It held the Sooner offense to 275 total yards. Oklahoma's starting running back, Roy Finch, had four yards rushing on six carries. In fact, Bell was the Sooners' leading rusher with 51 yards and 21 of those yards came on his final touchdown run in the fourth quarter that iced it.

Basically what I'm getting at here is the defense did enough to put Iowa in position to win. That first touchdown run Bell had from four yards out came after Vandenberg's aforementioned interception. Senior defensive end Broderick Binns had an interception of his own on Oklahoma's opening drive of the second half when it appeared the Sooners were going to deliver the knockout blow. Senior defensive tackle Mike Daniels had two sacks and was just the second player all season to have multiple sacks in a game against Oklahoma.

A lot of question marks surround the defense entering 2012,

but it's going to be interesting what steps are taken offensively going forward. This team loses McNutt and probably loses offensive tackle Riley Reiff to the NFL early. Vandenberg will be a senior, but he can't continue to have games like the one he had Friday.

Again, it's pretty obvious what happened in this Insight Bowl. The question now becomes whether the Hawkeyes can learn from their offensive mistakes. If this entire season was any indication, it's fair to wonder if they will.