

Hawkeyes survive Windy City scare

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

CHICAGO, Ill. – For three quarters, the Iowa Hawkeyes looked lethargic against Northern Illinois. Offensively, they were flat. Defensively, they were getting gashed up the middle, with the worst of it being a 73-yard touchdown run surrendered on a designed quarterback draw.

Fifteen minutes stood between Iowa and its first 0-1 start since 2000, which is also the last time the Hawkeyes had a losing regular season under head coach Kirk Ferentz.

But that fourth quarter proved to be one where all three phases factored heavily in the Hawkeyes scoring nine unanswered points to cap an 18-17 come-from-behind win over the Huskies on Saturday at Soldier Field.

Momentum began to swing completely in Iowa's favor when junior kicker Mike Meyer – who had already made three field goals earlier in the game – boomed one from 50 yards out to cut the Hawkeye deficit down to 17-12.

"I saw everybody yell and jump up and down. I didn't see it go through," Meyer said. "I was just waiting for the call and whatever the coaches say, you just go out there and do it."

From there, the defense played relentless. It forced Northern Illinois into a 3-and-out after it found a way to bottle up quarterback Jordan Lynch following that earlier 73-yard score. In fact, the Huskies only mustered 11 yards of total offense on their final five possessions of the game.

"I'm not super happy with how we played at times, but I'm

really proud of how we hung in there,” Morris said following his eight-tackle performance. “We stuck together and when we needed the juice, we found the juice. We were able to play well.”

Then came the key play of the entire game, which oddly enough, occurred at a moment where it appeared momentum had slipped away from the Hawkeyes. John Wienke, a fifth-year senior who switched over to punter and was beat out for the first-string job by true freshman Connor Kornbrath, was brought in for a pooch punt. Senior cornerback Greg Castillo, who had already entered the game for an injured B.J. Lowery, managed to down the ball at the Northern Illinois 1-yard line.

“I just saw the ball and I just touched it,” Castillo said, who added he wasn’t worried about the call being overturned after instant replay was used.

After another Huskie 3-and-out, Northern Illinois found itself punting deep out of its own end zone. With this in mind, senior cornerback Micah Hyde was determined to get good field position for the offense, which was continuing to struggle getting into the end zone. Hyde returned the punt 11 yards to the Huskie 24, with the offense being provided 3:41 to get the winning score.

“It was a great job by the return team of getting blocks,” Hyde said. “I’m thankful they blocked really well for it.”

Two plays got the Hawkeyes nowhere. Then came a gutsy 3rd-and-9 call, one that was discussed at halftime by offensive coordinator Greg Davis.

Senior quarterback James Vandenberg called two plays – one pass and one run – in the huddle. Iowa checked down to a run play it was attempting to get big plays on all afternoon. That big play it was waiting for finally arrived, when sophomore running back Damon Bullock found a hole on the outside and struck pay-dirt, scoring from 23 yards out and giving the

Hawkeyes their first lead since going up 3-0 after their opening drive.

"It was a matter of getting a hat on everybody," Vandenberg said. "We knew we had been close earlier in the game on that play. We thought it was a good play, stuck with it and we were able to pop one through."

The defense would get one more stop. The offense would pick up one more first down. The Hawkeyes would find a way to leave Soldier Field unblemished before their home opener Sept. 8 against Iowa State, a game scheduled to start from Kinnick Stadium at 2:30 p.m. Central.

"We expected this to be a very tough game," Ferentz said. "I'm just really proud of our effort and the way the guys really hung in there."