

# COMMENTARY: Harsh reality hits home for Hawkeyes (premium)

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*HawkeyeDrive.com*

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Last year, the Iowa Hawkeyes left Jack Trice Stadium with the sinking feeling of defeat after losing a 44-41 barnburner to Iowa State in triple overtime.

On Saturday, Iowa lost its second straight game to the Cyclones by three points. The same sinking feeling was felt following the 9-6 defeat at Kinnick Stadium. It wasn't quite the high-scoring output in Ames one year ago, but once again, there were numerous variables that contributed to this.

The biggest culprit was the play of the offense, which I'll get to in a bit. But first, let me make a few other observations. For one, Iowa State was simply better. A lot of people knew going in that these two teams were even at the very least. Very few chose to look beyond the fact that this year's game was at Kinnick Stadium, using that as a crutch for why Iowa had the ultimate edge.

Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said in his press conference back on Sept. 4 whichever team played better on the field would prevail. This team was Iowa State and it was evident from the opening drive.

The Cyclones had three possessions in this game where they reached the red zone, only to turn the ball over. Iowa State could've gone roughshod on the Hawkeyes, but weren't able to because of strong defensive performances like the ones Iowa received from junior linebackers Anthony Hitchens and James

Morris. Hitchens had 19 tackles. Morris had 12 tackles, as well as a fumble recovery and an interception, both of which occurred in the red zone.

But while there were a pair of great individual showings, the defense as a whole got carved apart early on. Steele Jantz completed each of his first 10 pass attempts, one of which was a 5-yard touchdown pass to Aaron Horne on that opening drive to put Iowa State up 6-0. Defensively, the play was improved in the second half, but their backs were against the walls most of the game.

Now, to the offense. In two games, the offense has a total of 24 points. That's only three more points than the number scored in the last two games of 2011, where a completely different scheme was being used.

This isn't an indictment on first-year offensive coordinator Greg Davis because it has only been two games and I do believe improvements will become evident over the course of the season. The red zone execution failures can't happen unless you're either moving the ball down the field or if your defense is making the plays to set you up with such great field position in the first place.

Once again, senior quarterback James Vandenberg looked inconsistent and there were drops aplenty among Iowa's skill players. Some of Vandenberg's decision-making was poor, including the two plays where he threw interceptions. But some of those passes that were being dropped were on the money. Plenty of blame can go around.

While I maintain the belief that Iowa will slowly get better offensively as the season goes on, there are also going to be games later in the season where the Hawkeyes face stingier defenses than what they've seen so far from Northern Illinois and Iowa State.

Improvements can and probably will be made, but the margin for

error has shrunk. Before the season started, some felt Iowa could jump out to a 5-0 start with the schedule it had for the month of September. Not only is that now impossible, but at least two of these next three games the Hawkeyes have at Kinnick Stadium are far from gimmes.

The reality is Iowa will lose more games this season, some of which might be a lot like Saturday's loss to Iowa State. It might be a bitter pill to swallow for Hawkeye fans, but there's only so many changes that can occur.