

COMMENTARY: Leading by example (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Not often does a walk-on transfer from one FBS program to another while also showing the leadership and character that earns the respect on entire football team from the minute he arrived on campus. Then again, not often do teams land walk-ons like Mark Weisman.

After spending his freshman year playing football at the U.S. Air Force Academy, Weisman decided to transfer and found a home with Iowa just before the 2011 season. Like any transfer in his position, Weisman had to redshirt. But the idea of playing fullback, the one position he wants to play, was enough for him to become a Hawkeye, even if it meant having to earn an opportunity at a scholarship.

On Saturday, Iowa won its second game of the 2012 season, defeating Northern Iowa 27-16. Weisman wound up being a significant reason why.

As the Hawkeyes watched both running backs Damon Bullock and Greg Garmon leave the game with injuries, Weisman no longer was the fullback being used in goal-line and short-yardage situations. The sophomore had to become the primary running back.

Weisman's first two carries of the afternoon were a pair of 1-yard touchdown runs, Iowa's first two red zone touchdowns this season. When the final gun sounded, Weisman finished with 24 carries, 113 yards rushing and added a third score from two yards out in the third quarter.

That it was Weisman, a sophomore walk-on fullback that just two years ago was an Air Force Falcon, who had this kind of afternoon might be surprising to Iowa fans. It wasn't surprising to any of his teammates though.

To a man, all of the offensive players who spoke to the media following the Hawkeyes' win Saturday used words such as "tough" and "hard-working" to describe their teammate. Perhaps the most powerful words came from senior wideout Keenan Davis, who spoke of Weisman as if he was a team captain, the guy everyone looked up to.

"He's a guy that he just shows you. He doesn't tell you," Davis said. "He goes in and he works really hard every day. Workouts, everything. When we're running, he's first. When we're working out – me and him do some of the lifts together, I see it firsthand.

"This guy really is important to this team."

When a senior that is considered the leader of the receiving corps is saying that a walk-on sophomore fullback is "important" to their team success, it speaks volumes.

Now maybe Weisman ends up reverting back to fullback and never rushes for 100 yards ever again. Or maybe he winds up starting at running back next week and puts on an encore for the faithful at Kinnick Stadium. Only time will tell.

But make no mistake about it. Weisman has earned the opportunity given to him and on Saturday, he made the most of it. He showed he belongs. Iowa lost two players at a position where injuries and attrition have been killers and when Weisman was inserted, he did exactly what Davis said – he showed and didn't tell.

This performance might not mean much in the grand scheme of things. But on this day, Weisman put together a story that will definitely be worth telling again someday and one that

Hawkeye fans won't soon forget.