

COMMENTARY: Problems not going away (premium)

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – Yes, the Iowa Hawkeyes lost their second game inside Kinnick Stadium on a last-second field goal. Yes, they were in position to beat Purdue on Saturday instead of losing 27-24.

But the reality is this: The Boilermakers were more deserving of winning than the Hawkeyes and the reason is because the same problems that continue to plague Iowa resurfaced again Saturday. Not only that, but with this team now 10 games into the 2012 season, it's beyond the point where these can be fixed.

The Hawkeyes are 4-6 now. They're not going to a bowl. Any miraculous hope of this that existed during the past week was deflated as the seconds ticked off the Kinnick Stadium scoreboard.

This was a complete team loss. Well, O.K. Maybe special teams was decent. But the offense and defense were equally horrid on Saturday. Offensively, the biggest problem stemmed from failing to pick up conversions in short-yardage situations. Whether it was 2nd-and-1, 3rd-and-3 or 4th-and-5, it just seemed like Iowa couldn't get anything going in these instances. Against a team like Purdue that was reeling coming in, having lost five straight games itself, this is bad. Perhaps even borderline unacceptable.

While we're on the offense here, let's get one other thing out of the way: There were two instances Saturday where Iowa faced fourth down, opted to go for it, and wound up turning the ball

over on downs. As far as the decisions to go for it are concerned, both were correct calls by head coach Kirk Ferentz. I was as critical as anyone of him during Iowa's fourth-down situations against Northwestern and Indiana the last two weeks, but here, I have to defend him to a degree.

On both occasions, Iowa was going against a wind that was blowing as much as 20 MPH. Both plays, coincidentally, were 4th-and-3s from Purdue's 35-yard line, so if junior kicker Mike Meyer is sent out to try field goals, he's kicking 52-53 yard attempts against a strong wind.

If you want to be critical of the actual play calls that were made on fourth down, that's fair game, in my opinion. But at least they tried. The second one in particular, on the Hawkeyes' final possession of the game, had to be done. The play call was bad, but I can't fault Ferentz for taking the gamble there on fourth down given those circumstances.

But let's get to what was actually a bigger sieve Saturday – the defense. Purdue compiled 490 yards of total offense against Iowa's defense. The same Purdue that scored nine points last week against Penn State. It didn't matter if the Boilermakers were running or passing the football, either, because the Hawkeyes' tackling was horrendous the entire game.

It's already problematic enough when Iowa's barely using any nickel or dime against a team that's spreading it out like Purdue was. But when you also can't tackle on top of that, that's a problem. And this is something that has become more and more apparent over the past month.

Also take into account that the Hawkeyes forced three turnovers (one of which was a fumble recovery returned by Micah Hyde for a touchdown) and the Boilermakers missed a chip-shot field goal at the end of the first half. My point here is this game could've been a lot worse. It probably never should've come down to Purdue needing a last-second field goal

to win in regulation.

So yes, the Hawkeyes could've won and yes, losing in the final seconds like that is going to be gut wrenching for any player at any time. But again, it's not like Iowa had this game stolen from it either.

The problems, the failure to execute, whatever you want to call it, hasn't changed. As Ferentz said in his postgame, they have to play with who they have and there's no quick fix in sight. At least not for these last two weeks.