

Hawkeyes' fate sealed in The Big House

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

ANN ARBOR, Mich. – Watching Iowa's 2012 season has been like watching a terminally ill pet slowly succumb to its death. For the first half of this season, it showed symptoms of sickness but appeared in good shape. Then came the diagnosis and the season has since gotten worse.

On Saturday, the Hawkeyes' fate was sealed and like that sick pet lying on its deathbed, it will be euthanized by this time next week.

It wasn't merely the fact that No. 23 Michigan had its way with Iowa en route to a 42-17 win or that the Hawkeyes won't be bowl eligible for the first time since 2000. Saturday's game was a classic case of everything Iowa trying to counter what plagued it no longer being effective.

Defensively, it didn't matter who the Hawkeyes had on the field at any given point. Michigan's quarterback duo of Devin Gardner and Denard Robinson made everything they did look effortless.

The Wolverines scored touchdowns on each of their first six possessions. Gardner, who started at quarterback for the third straight week, completed 18-of-23 passes for 314 yards and three touchdowns. He also rushed for three touchdowns. While Michigan moved the ball at will, the Iowa defense found itself using a variety of different personnel packages at all three levels that were to no avail.

"This is a horrible thing because the coaches, this is their

job. They prepare us well throughout the week,” senior cornerback Micah Hyde said. “They watch so much film and all this and that to get us ready to play and we just come out here and show a piss-poor effort like we did.

“We just gave up too many big plays.”

Robinson, who played in his first game since suffering a nerve injury in his right arm against Nebraska three weeks ago, started at running back Saturday in what was his final game at “The Big House.” He ended up leading the Wolverines in rushing with 98 yards on the ground, including a 40-yard run at the end of the first quarter where he juked Iowa junior free safety Tanner Miller out of his shoes.

Michigan became the fifth consecutive Iowa opponent to rack up at least 400 yards of total offense against the Hawkeyes, compiling 513 total yards on the afternoon.

“There were a bunch of plays where guys were right there to contest the ball and it just didn’t happen,” Miller said. “Then there were other times where there were blown assignments and miscommunications where they were running wide open on us.

“There was a whole handful of things that went wrong.”

Offensively, it didn’t matter that sophomore running back Mark Weisman returned or that junior tight end C.J. Fiedorowicz played the best game of his career to date. Iowa only managed 17 points, which included a touchdown late when the outcome was well out of reach.

Weisman started at running back for the first time since Oct. 27 when he injured his groin in a 28-17 loss to Northwestern. Without the services of sophomore running back Damon Bullock – who was held out due to a back injury – Weisman rushed for 63 yards on 16 carries and also hauled in that late touchdown catch.

Fiedorowicz entered Saturday's contest with 31 receptions through 10 games. Against Michigan, he had eight catches for 99 yards, both of which were team-highs. With wide receivers only accounting for two of the 19 completions that senior quarterback James Vandenberg had, the use of Fiedorowicz and redshirt freshman tight end Henry Krieger-Coble came into play early and often in the first half before everything got out of hand.

But as the deficit grew bigger, Iowa began to press offensively and eventually found itself struggling to move the football like it has the bulk of 2012.

"We got too far behind," Weisman said. "We've got to be able to put points up quick and we just didn't get it done."

Now with one game left, there's no bowl at stake. Even if the Hawkeyes were to win on their Senior Day against No. 16 Nebraska, it's still a losing season, something that Iowa – prior to Saturday – hadn't endured since 2006.

Before the 2012 season gets placed to rest, Iowa fans will get to say their final goodbyes to the team at Kinnick Stadium next Friday, much like one would just before its sick pet is put down.

"I've got six days left as a Hawkeye," said Vandenberg, one of 19 seniors who will see their college career end next week. "I'll live it as hard as I can, go as hard as I can and go out swinging."