

Missed opportunities doom Hawkeyes in loss to Huskers

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – As the Iowa Hawkeyes walked off their Kinnick Stadium turf Friday for the final time in 2012, their 13-7 loss to No. 17 Nebraska proved to be a microcosm of their entire season.

Missed opportunities. Iowa has had plenty of them throughout a 4-8 campaign and that proved to be no different against the Cornhuskers, who secured their spot in next week's Big Ten Championship Game with the win.

"We could have took advantage of some of them, but it didn't happen," senior wide receiver Keenan Davis said. "They came out and played better than us. We played hard, but they ended up playing better."

The game began with Nebraska putting together a 16-play drive that resulted in a 26-yard field goal to go ahead 3-0. Iowa came right back on the ensuing possession and went 62 yards for a touchdown that put the Hawkeyes up 7-3. A 25-yard completion against the wind by senior quarterback James Vandenberg to junior tight end C.J. Fiedorowicz set up a 1-yard Vandenberg touchdown run that ended up being Iowa's lone score of the afternoon.

Meanwhile, the Hawkeye defense began to settle down in terms of what personnel it had on the field. Nebraska would compile just 17 yards of total offense from when its second possession began and halftime, when it went into the locker room trailing by that 7-3 margin.

“We definitely kept it simple this week,” senior cornerback Micah Hyde said. “We knew coming in they were going to run the ball downhill and we just got to stop it. It doesn’t matter what defense we’re in.”

Iowa was ahead by four points, but it could’ve easily been more. The Hawkeyes forced a pair of Cornhusker turnovers, including a muffed punt recovered by Hyde. Just before halftime, Iowa was driving in Nebraska territory and burned its final timeout of the half with 15 seconds showing.

After the timeout, the Hawkeyes were called for an illegal substitution penalty and after an incomplete pass on third down, junior kicker Mike Meyer missed a 42-yard field goal against a strong NW wind that could’ve put Iowa ahead by seven.

“It was a miscommunication,” junior tight end C.J. Fiedorowicz said. “We had 12 guys on the field. The wrong personnel was in. That penalty could’ve cost us, but we missed that field goal.”

In the second half, Nebraska was ignited by running back Rex Burkhead, who played his first game in over a month and finished with 69 yards rushing on 16 carries to lead the Cornhuskers. Late in the third quarter, Nebraska took over at Iowa’s 43-yard line and four plays later, Burkhead put the Cornhuskers ahead with a 3-yard touchdown run.

“He just changes the tempo of things out there a little bit,” Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said of Burkhead. “That’s what good players do.

“To me, when he’s in there, they run at a little different level.”

As Nebraska started moving the ball effectively on offense, its defense was shutting down Iowa. From the moment they fell behind in the third quarter to the final whistle, the Hawkeyes

had just 35 yards of total offense. In the fourth quarter alone, Iowa had just 13 yards of total offense.

Because the Cornhuskers were forced to punt on both of their fourth-quarter possessions after incomplete passes on third down, the Hawkeyes had two occasions in that final stanza to put together scoring drives – with the wind at their back – and possibly pull off the upset. But Iowa opted to punt on the first series and when it got the ball back, Vandenberg threw his second interception of the day, which sealed the Cornhusker win.

“They tried to hand us the game,” senior center James Ferentz said. “For whatever reason, we couldn’t take it.”