

# COMMENTARY: More than just a loss? (premium)

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – 0-1. Before Saturday's season-opener against Northern Illinois, Iowa hadn't started a season with this record since 2000. At that point in time, Kirk Ferentz was in his second season as head coach and still in the middle of rebuilding the Hawkeye program.

Northern Illinois left Kinnick Stadium with 30-27 win over Iowa on Saturday and now, the Hawkeyes are 0-1. After a tumultuous 2012 campaign where Iowa went 4-8, the Hawkeyes are already 0-1 after one game in 2013.

Right now, I find myself pondering this thought: Is the beginning of the end for Ferentz at Iowa?

Do I think he gets fired after this season? No. Do I think he walks away from coaching this season? No. This isn't something that will just abruptly end. It won't end now, it won't end this year and it probably won't even end next year or the year after.

But since winning the 2010 Orange Bowl, Iowa has played 39 games. Its record? 19-20. A lot has changed over this timeframe. The only players from that team still around now are fifth-year seniors who redshirted that 2009 season. Every single position group has undergone a coaching change over this time. One of the few constants from both then and today is Ferentz.

Sure, this is just one game. But this was an important game for Iowa, a program that had taken such a monumental step

backward in 2012 and needed to get back on the right track to open 2013. As good as Northern Illinois is, its head coach was coaching just his second game ever at the helm. This was a team Iowa beat last year. The win was in the Hawkeyes' sight and it slipped away. Instead of the discussion being how Iowa beat a quality opponent to start 1-0 for the 13th straight year, it's now about how the Hawkeyes have now lost seven straight games dating back to last season and how Ferentz has now lost four games to MAC opponents – all inside Kinnick Stadium, no less.

So now what? Coaching changes have come and gone. New personnel has come and gone. A lot of the problems that were thought to exist were rectified, or so it appeared. Is this current Iowa squad capable of winning four straight in September? I ask because this is probably the only plausible scenario now if the Hawkeyes are going to reach six wins and bowl eligibility.

What more has to change for Iowa to at the very least become respectable again nationally? Because right now, it isn't. If the scrutiny wasn't already enormous after 4-8, it is now after starting 0-1 after just going 4-8.

Winning on Saturday wasn't going to make Iowa's season and perhaps losing won't either. Perhaps. Except now, any margin of error that might have existed prior to kickoff is gone. This has the look of a losing season and will be one – unless Iowa wins in both Ames and Minneapolis next month. Not one or the other. Both. And by the way, Iowa State and Minnesota have both won two of their last three meetings respectively against Iowa.

At this moment in time, yes, it seems crazy to think that the clock is ticking on the Kirk Ferentz era at Iowa. And I'll say it again – it still appears on the surface to be far from over. But whenever it does end, this loss on Saturday just might be the one that everyone looks back upon as the

beginning of the end. It was a missed opportunity to plug a hole that has resonated around this program for 10 months and counting now.

It was a missed opportunity added to a list of them just from the last 4-5 years alone and that's not a good trend in an industry where results matter.

This is a program that hadn't started 0-1 since it was last in complete rebuild mode. How the Hawkeyes respond here is going to be important – not just for this season, but honestly, for the rest of Ferentz's tenure. If there's no uptick on the horizon, then it's worth asking again – is this the beginning of the end? Only time will tell.