

Hawkeyes cough up opener

By Brendan Stiles

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – When the 2013 season began, the Iowa Hawkeyes already had a small margin of error. Just one season ago, Iowa finished 4-8 and found itself playing an extremely significant season-opener for the first time in over a decade.

In a matter of moments, that miniscule margin of error shrunk. An interception thrown by first-year starting quarterback Jake Rudock in the game's final minutes led to Northern Illinois connecting on a 36-yard field goal with four seconds left and leaving Kinnick Stadium with a 30-27 win over Iowa. The Hawkeyes now find themselves starting a season 0-1 for the first time since 2000.

The interception came on an out route with 1:24 left. Iowa had 1st-and-10 at its own 45-yard line and was looking at needing about 20-25 yards to get in field goal range for senior kicker Mike Meyer. Rudock threw the ball intended for junior wideout Kevonte Martin-Manley and he said the throw was about halfway to Martin-Manley before he realized it was about to be picked off by Northern Illinois corner Jimmie Ward.

"I threw it, thought we had good leverage on it," Rudock said. "Midway through, I saw how well he broke on it and he made a good play."

It was one of two picks thrown by Rudock (the other being on a pass tipped at the line of scrimmage by a Huskie defensive lineman). Outside of that, his first outing wasn't terrible as he completed 21-of-37 pass attempts for 256 yards through the air. He also threw a touchdown pass earlier in the game to senior tight end C.J. Fiedorowicz and even ran for a score that put Iowa up 24-17 at halftime.

After falling behind 10-0 in the first quarter, momentum began to shift in the Hawkeyes' favor when senior linebacker Christian Kirksey forced a Northern Illinois fumble that he then proceeded to pick and return 52 yards for Iowa's first touchdown.

Following a 28-yard field goal from Meyer to tie the game at 10-10, the offense started to heat up when Iowa pulled off a flea-flicker where Rudock hit senior receiver Jordan Cotton downfield for 53 yards. That completion set up the touchdown pass to Fiedorowicz, which was an 11-yard dart over the middle of the field.

"I think it was a momentum switch," said Kirksey, who turned 21 Saturday. "You know, any time the defense makes a play, it sparks up the offense and it sparks up the defense to go out there and do it again."

But Northern Illinois managed to adjust defensively. After the Hawkeyes compiled 302 yards of total offense in the first half, they only managed 156 yards total in the second half and all they got out of those 156 yards was a 44-yard field goal from Meyer that put Iowa ahead 27-20 with 6:42 left. In addition, Iowa ended up converting just 1-of-7 third down attempts in the second half after going 6-of-10 on third downs in the first half.

"We weren't consistent enough," junior running back Mark Weisman said after rushing for 100 yards on 20 carries. "We weren't staying on the field, we weren't converting on third downs and you have to do that in order to win games. Playmakers have to be able to make plays out there. That's what it comes down to."

Defensively, Iowa kept Huskie quarterback Jordan Lynch from burning it on the ground like he did a year ago when these teams met in Chicago. This time around though, Lynch completed 25-of-41 passes (he was 6-of-16 in last year's meeting) for

275 yards and hit Da’Ron Brown for a 33-yard score to tie the game at 27-27 with 5:05 showing. Lynch tossed three touchdown passes on the afternoon.

“I thought he was a lot better than last year,” senior linebacker James Morris said of Lynch, adding that Northern Illinois looked to spread Iowa out more and play more up-tempo offensively in contrast to when these teams played last season.

The two teams then exchanged punts before Iowa found itself at its own 45 with a chance to win. Then came the interception and ensuing game-winning Huskie field goal.

“Probably one we’d like to have back, but that’s football,” Ferentz said. “It was just a good play on their part and a bad play on ours.”

Iowa will look to end a seven-game losing streak dating back to last season now on Sept. 7, when the Hawkeyes play host to FCS opponent Missouri State. The Bears are coming off a 23-17 loss to Northwestern State on Aug. 29. Kickoff is scheduled for 11 a.m. Central from Kinnick Stadium, with the game airing nationally on the Big Ten Network.