

Hawkeyes down Bears, even record at 1-1

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – For the first time in 343 days, the Iowa Hawkeyes got to end a game at Kinnick Stadium with the victory formation. After a 329-day span where Iowa lost seven straight games, it finally managed to eek out a 28-14 win over Missouri State inside Kinnick Stadium Saturday afternoon.

No, the Hawkeyes didn't win with any style points like many of their fans were probably hoping they would against an FCS opponent. Yes, the first half was an offensive display of offense by both teams with Iowa only mustering a 7-0 lead at halftime. Big picture context though, this was a game the Hawkeyes had to show they could win and they ended up doing just that.

"We definitely needed this," senior defensive end Dominic Alvis said. "A win like this is good to have and we're going to build a lot of momentum from this win."

What was strong for Iowa from start to finish Saturday was the play of its defense. While the offense had its early struggles, the defense held Missouri State to 67 yards of total offense in the first half and 197 yards for the entire game. It also got off the field on third down, as the Bears were just 1-of-10 on third downs all afternoon.

Part of that was the result of some blitzing done by Iowa on third down plays, even though the Hawkeyes stayed in their base 4-3 the entire game and didn't feature any substitutions sans the 7-man rotation used along the defensive line.

"It worked out well," junior strong safety John Lowdermilk said. "We came after them on third down. [Defensive coordinator Phil Parker] likes to make sure we can cover the guys and that puts a lot of stress on the corners and safeties being able to cover man-to-man. But we know they don't have very much time to throw the ball because they can't block everybody."

The second half was when the Iowa offense started to put everything together. Igniting the offensive spark was junior running back Mark Weisman, who rushed for 180 yards on 30 carries. The Hawkeyes' first series of the second half resulted in Iowa turning the football over on downs when Weisman was stuffed for no gain on 4th-and-1 from the Missouri State 2-yard line. He then proceeded to rush for touchdowns on each of the next two drives.

The second touchdown drive of the quarter was capped off by a 3-yard run where Iowa ran zone read and Weisman got a block from his quarterback, Jake Rudock, as soon as he was handed the ball.

"I was like, 'if I could just nudge him a little bit.' I mean, on film it's not going to look like I touched him," Rudock said. "But hopefully, it did something to spring him through."

Iowa showed a pulse on offense because it managed to start converting on third downs, going 5-of-7 in the second half after only picking up two first downs on third-down plays in the first 30 minutes of action.

Missouri State crept back into the game early in the fourth quarter, scoring a pair of touchdowns 10 seconds apart from one another to trim the Hawkeye advantage to 21-14. The first score came on a 27-yard touchdown pass, while Iowa's first play from scrimmage on the ensuing drive was an interception thrown by Rudock that was returned for a touchdown.

But Rudock would recover quickly and emphatically. Four

minutes and 18 seconds after throwing that pick-six, the Florida native capped the ensuing 10-play series by leading the Hawkeyes 65 yards down field and scoring on the ground for the second time from two yards out, extending Iowa's lead back to the 14 points it won by.

"That was a really tough play," head coach Kirk Ferentz said about the interception. "But one thing about him, he's a resilient guy. He went right back to work and did a good job finishing the game for us."

Rudock finished with 33 yards rushing on seven carries and also completed 19-of-28 passes for 193 yards with 10 different players catching balls from him.

The Bears threatened late in the fourth quarter, but the Hawkeye defense sealed the victory when senior free safety Tanner Miller intercepted a pass in the end zone with 6:50 remaining.

"One of us needed to step up and make the big play and we challenged ourselves over there on the sideline. You know, 'Who was going to step up and make the big play?'" Miller said. "I had the opportunity and I stepped up and made it."

Now at 1-1, the Hawkeyes head on the road for the first time Sept. 14 when they travel to Ames for their annual showdown with Iowa State. Kickoff from Jack Trice Stadium is scheduled for 5 p.m. Central and the game will be televised nationally on Fox Sports 1.