

# COMMENTARY: Small, but important step forward (premium)

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AMES, Iowa – The Iowa Hawkeyes left Jack Trice Stadium Saturday evening with the Cy-Hawk Trophy and a 27-21 victory over intrastate rival Iowa State to cap the first quarter of its season with a 2-1 mark.

In terms of the big picture, this was merely a small step forward for Iowa. But nevertheless, it was an important step forward that this football team needed to demonstrate it could take.

When it comes to the grand scheme of things, this was just one win. The Hawkeyes still need to win four more games to become bowl-eligible and looking at the remaining three quarters of their schedule, doing that might be a tall order. Iowa has to continue building up its record now before the calendar turns to October and November and the competition becomes fierce.

Sure, Iowa got its first victory over Iowa State for the first time since 2010. But let's be blunt about something – this Cyclone team isn't that good and that 27-21 final was deceiving thanks to Iowa State scoring 14 unanswered points late in the fourth quarter.

This was a game the Hawkeyes dominated on both sides of the ball. They knew going in that controlling the line of scrimmage would be important and they did just that on both sides of the football. Defensively, Iowa State had 59 yards rushing on 24 carries. Offensively, Iowa ran 80-plus plays for

the third straight week and had possession of the football for over 38 minutes on Saturday.

Sophomore quarterback Jake Rudock scored from one yard out to cap a 15-play drive in the fourth quarter that extended Iowa's lead to 27-7 and it really could've been much worse. The Hawkeyes had a couple of second quarter possessions where they had to settle for field goals. Had those two drives resulted in touchdowns, Saturday's game would've been a bloodbath.

Putting past history aside, Iowa came into this game the superior team and played like it and that's where the "important" part of this small step comes into play. The Hawkeyes weathered the early storm that was expected to exerted their strength in the second quarter.

This was a game where Iowa converted 11-of-20 third downs, which is the best that has been in a long time. Junior running back Mark Weisman went over 100 yards rushing for the third straight week, Rudock avoided the costly interception and for most of the night, the Hawkeyes were crisp on offense.

Then there was the defense, which featured guys on all three levels making plays when they were needed. This wasn't one of those games where one guy was the sole difference-maker.

Iowa earned this victory in all three phases Saturday. It entered a favorite and played like one. If you're Kirk Ferentz, you really had to like what you saw from your team.

Again, no one should lose focus of the big picture here. Iowa could still fail to reach a bowl game and the fact that Iowa State nearly pulled off an epic fourth-quarter comeback has to be somewhat concerning. But the Hawkeyes cleared a hurdle they badly needed to clear and that could potentially become more beneficial down the road than anyone realizes now.

This was a small step for Iowa to take, but an important one.