

# COMMENTARY: Plenty to build off (premium)

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*HawkeyeDrive.com*

COLUMBUS, Ohio – What the Iowa Hawkeyes took away from Ohio Stadium on Saturday wasn't a "moral victory." A loss is still a loss and Iowa came up short against No. 4 Ohio State, falling 34-24 to the Buckeyes and leaving "The Horseshoe" with a 4-3 overall record and 1-2 Big Ten mark.

But in saying that, there were also some encouraging aspects to Saturday's game the Hawkeyes should be able to build off of going forward.

Let's start with the obvious, which is that Iowa went into halftime with a 17-10 lead. Yes, a 7-point lead on the road against the No. 4 team in the country in a game no one outside the program realistically thought the Hawkeyes had a chance of actually winning. That alone should make Iowa players and coaches confident enough that they can hang with any of the remaining five teams on the Hawkeyes' schedule, three of whom have to visit Kinnick Stadium.

Yes, Iowa got beat. A huge reason why was the Hawkeye defense simply couldn't get off the field against an Ohio State offense that was as good as advertised. The Buckeyes compiled 30 first downs Saturday and two huge reasons why were their quarterback Braxton Miller and their running back Carlos Hyde. Both rushed for over 100 yards and Miller also completed 22-of-27 pass attempts. This unit was the real deal.

But there were times when the defense showed encouraging signs. One that immediately comes to mind is the one Buckeye possession (aside from the end of the game when Ohio State ran

the clock out) that didn't result in points during the second quarter. A 4th-and-10 play that initially looked like it might an Ohio State score was instead an incomplete pass because junior strong safety John Lowdermilk had the where-withall to break up the play at the very last second.

Now looking at the offense, it scored the first three times it touched the ball Saturday. The opening drive was a 15-play series where Iowa went right down the field and the Hawkeyes had a 7-0 lead before even allowing the Buckeyes to touch the football. In the first half, at least, Iowa had a balance and was pushing the pace.

The play from the Hawkeye tight ends was as good as it could possibly be. All five of them were involved in the game plan and there were numerous instances where Iowa lined up with three tight end sets. And those sets were working.

Sophomore quarterback Jake Rudock completed his first five passes on that opening scoring drive, all five of which were to his group of tight ends. C.J. Fiedorowicz caught four passes and scored that first touchdown. Jake Duzey had team-highs of six catches and 138 yards receiving. He also caught a pinpoint throw from Rudock and went 85 yards down the sideline for a touchdown that tied the game just as Ohio State took its first lead of the day.

Iowa lost to a far superior team, but put together as respectable a performance as the majority of its fans could have hoped for.

Looking ahead now, the Hawkeyes have a critical 2-game home-stand coming up against Northwestern next week and No. 25 Wisconsin the following week. Assuming the Hawkeyes beat lowly Purdue three weeks from now, their best shot at another win is one of these two home games.

After the way Iowa looked for most of Saturday's game, there's plenty of positives for the Hawkeyes to build off. The

question now is will they? If they can, this team will reach the six wins needed for bowl eligibility, which was always the big thing for this program big picture. Losing Saturday was never going to deter from that.

There's still plenty of reason to believe the reasonable goals for Iowa can be obtained. Even after a loss like this. That's not to say the Hawkeyes will win the rest of their games, but the odds of that (as extreme as they are) appear better than a repeat of last year, which at the end of the day, is a success as far as this season's concerned.