

Hawkeyes survive in overtime to beat Wildcats

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Saturday's game inside Kinnick Stadium wasn't so much an elimination game. Whichever team – Iowa or Northwestern – lost would still have four more games to keep itself in the Big Ten's bowl picture. For whoever won, it was simply going to be a matter of survival.

For all the concerns surrounding the Hawkeyes' ability to finish games, on this day at least, they found a way to survive. It took an overtime period, but Iowa emerged 17-10 victors over Northwestern to snap a two-game losing streak and put itself at 5-3 overall – already one win better than it was last season and now one win away from becoming bowl-eligible.

"It was good for us," Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said. "This one came hard, which is part of winning in conference play. There's nothing easy about it."

Much like last week's contest at Ohio State, the Hawkeyes imposed their will on the opening drive after Northwestern opted to have the 20 MPH winds at its back to open the game. Iowa marched 74 yards on 14 plays – 12 of which were run plays – and went ahead 7-0 when junior running back Damon Bullock scored from three yards out.

"We had to pretty much set the tone that at the beginning of the game, we were going to run the ball," Bullock said. "For the most part, we did that."

The Hawkeyes were also able to set a tone defensively. After only forcing one turnover on downs against Ohio State, Iowa

forced a 3-and-out on Northwestern's opening possession. Highlighting this was a third-down sack of Wildcat quarterback Kain Colter by senior linebacker James Morris that came with the Hawkeyes lined up in their "Radar" package – a look similar to a 3-4, but with the three linemen up front all lined up like blitzing linebackers.

In the "Radar," junior defensive tackle Louis Trinca-Pasat was the nose tackle, while the rush ends were sophomore Nate Meier and true freshman linebacker Reggie Spearman. Junior Quinton Alston was lined up at linebacker along with Morris and seniors Christian Kirksey and Anthony Hitchens.

"We knew [Colter] was going to be a fast quarterback, just like the previous game we had played," Meier said. "We just wanted more speed on the field."

Iowa would extend its lead to 10-0 in the second quarter when senior kicker Mike Meyer connected on a 38-yard field goal and that would remain the score entering the third quarter. Then it became a matter of survival.

Once again, the offense started to struggle with sustaining drives and the defense started to struggle getting off the field. Northwestern would trim the Iowa lead to 10-7 when Colter hit superback Dan Vitale for a 10-yard touchdown strike in the third quarter. Then in the fourth quarter, the Wildcats tied the game with a 16-play series ending with a 29-yard field goal from Jeff Budzien.

On the ensuing possession, the Hawkeye offense would regain a rhythm when junior wideout Kevonte Martin-Manley caught a third-down pass from quarterback Jake Rudock to move the chains.

"They played man-to-man and I had an in-route," Martin-Manley said. "I was able to get open. Jake scrambled just a little bit and I popped open at the last second, caught it and we were able to move the chains."

Iowa would get all the way to the Northwestern 24-yard line when Meyer attempted a 42-yard field goal. The snap bounced to holder Connor Kornbrath and Meyer's kick – which was already going against the wind – hooked to the left, giving Northwestern 76 yards and 4:58 to work with.

"I kind of just got ahead of myself and just lost concentration at the end," Meyer said.

The Wildcats got to the Iowa 21-yard line before a 15-yard illegal block penalty was called. The very next play, Northwestern running back Mike Trumpy coughed up a fumble that was recovered at midfield by freshman cornerback Desmond King.

Iowa got to Northwestern's 31-yard line, but ended up moving backwards and out of field goal range. The Wildcats had two timeouts remaining, but never used them. Iowa then used a timeout with 15 seconds in regulation and opted to go for it on 4th-and-11. Rudock threw an interception and the Wildcats took a knee to send it to overtime.

"We wanted to get at least inside the 25," Ferentz said when asked what the ideal field goal range for Meyer would've been at the end of regulation. "The situation we ended up in, we just figured let the clock go down and try to convert. If we did, we had two timeouts."

Northwestern won the overtime coin toss, but both teams went toward the South end zone with the wind at their backs. Facing 3rd-and-7 from the Wildcat 8-yard line, Rudock sensed a blitz coming and with two defenders right in his face, he lofted the ball toward the corner of the end zone to a wide open C.J. Fiedorowicz for a touchdown that gave Iowa a 17-10 advantage.

"It all felt like it was in slow motion. That ball was in the air forever," Fiedorowicz said. "I just ran underneath it and happened to be right there.

"For how young he is, he has got a lot of poise and

confidence. He has been in these situations and has played big-time ball.”

From there, the Hawkeye defense stepped up. Following a sack and a 3-yard run, King again made a key play by breaking up a Colter pass at the last possible second that would’ve resulted in a first down had it been completed. Then on 4th-and-8, Colter found himself scrambling to the outside, but was denied by Trinca-Pasat.

Iowa survived.

Now with a shot at becoming bowl-eligible, the Hawkeyes return to action at Kinnick Stadium Nov. 2 when they play No. 22 Wisconsin for the first time since 2010, when the Badgers escaped Iowa City with a 31-30 win that propelled them into the first of three straight Rose Bowl appearances. Kickoff is set for 11 a.m. Central and the game will be nationally televised on either ABC, ESPN or ESPN2.