

Hawkeyes storm back to beat Wolverines

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Thirty minutes into their final home game of the 2013 season, the Iowa Hawkeyes looked like a team heading toward a quagmire against Michigan similar to what they endured playing against the Wolverines last season in Ann Arbor.

They trailed Michigan 21-7 in a game where (for at least one half) nothing seemed to go right for the Hawkeyes. Whether it was turnovers or inability to take advantage of short fields, Iowa looked like it was heading toward a curb-stomping.

But unlike a year ago when the Hawkeyes left “The Big House” getting shellacked 42-17, they were the ones making plays on both sides of the ball. Not only was Iowa able to claw its way back into the game, but it delivered a 24-21 over the Wolverines for their fans who braved the elements for what was the coldest game in Kinnick Stadium history on Saturday.

“I think it was a real testament to the guys staying together. They kept fighting,” Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said, referencing his team’s second-half comeback. “We grew up a little bit today.”

Iowa fell behind early when sophomore quarterback Jake Rudock threw the first of three interceptions on the very first play from scrimmage. He was hit as he released the ball and it ended up in the hands of Michigan’s Brennen Beyer, who returned it seven yards for a touchdown to put the Wolverines up 7-0.

The Hawkeyes would go down the field later in the first quarter and tie the game up at 7-7 when Rudock connected with senior tight end C.J. Fiedorowicz for a 5-yard strike. But when Iowa went against the wind in the second quarter, things slowly unraveled.

Michigan got the ball on the Hawkeyes' 28-yard line following Rudock's second pick of the day and capitalize off the turnover when quarterback Devin Gardner laid a stiff arm into Iowa senior free safety Tanner Miller and threw it across his body to A.J. Williams for a two-yard score. Following a pair of 3-and-outs from the Hawkeye offense, the Wolverines struck again when Gardner finished a 47-yard drive with a 9-yard strike to Jeremy Gallon, giving Michigan that 21-7 lead it took into halftime.

The momentum tilted back in Iowa's favor early in the third quarter when Rudock connected with sophomore wide receiver Tevaun Smith for his first career touchdown reception on a play covering 55 yards.

"The ball was right there and I tried to catch it with my right hand because I couldn't get my left hand up," Smith said, describing how he had to turn back for the ball in order to catch it. "I tried to catch it with the right, bring it in with the left, then try to separate myself from the defenders trying to grab me."

From there, it would be back-and-forth between the two defenses until the early minutes of the fourth quarter when Iowa was facing the winds gusting from 25-30 MPH again. Facing 4th-and-1 from Michigan's 24-yard line, it ran a play up the gut with junior running back Mark Weisman, who moved the chains by picking up four yards on the play.

Moments later, Weisman would finish the series off with a 9-yard touchdown score that tied the game with 12:11 left.

"Get downhill fast and get that first down," Weisman said

about what entered his mind when the fourth-down play was called for him in the huddle. "You know, we had a couple that we didn't get and we needed those. We need to get those. It was a big time in the game and the line had a great surge and the fullback cleaned it up. It was a great play to have."

The offense would again take the favor once again. A 9-play, 50-yard drive concluded with senior kicker Mike Meyer connecting on a field goal from 34 yards out to put Iowa up 24-21 with 6:02 remaining.

Michigan had one final chance to either tie or take the lead and got down to Iowa's 31-yard line before senior linebacker Anthony Hitchens forced Gardner to fumble just as he was going out of bounds and recovered it with his entire body in-bounds. It was the lone turnover forced by a defense that held the Wolverines to 45 yards of total offense in the second half, but the timing couldn't have been better for the Hawkeyes.

"I was just going for the ball. It was in the inside hand, and we're taught to do that," Hitchens said. "He had it in his in hand, and I went for it."

Iowa will play one more regular season game on Black Friday (Nov. 29) at Nebraska. Kickoff from Memorial Stadium in Lincoln, Neb., is set for 11 a.m. Central that morning and the game will be televised nationally on ABC.