

# COMMENTARY: When parallels become noticeable (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

LINCOLN, Neb. – Think back to 2008. Iowa lost an early November game to Illinois to fall to 5-4. The Hawkeyes pulled off an improbable victory the following week at home against Penn State, then ended that season strong with wins over Purdue, Minnesota and South Carolina.

The regular season finale at Minnesota was probably the most memorable. It was a 55-0 curb-stomping that propelled Iowa to that bid in the Outback Bowl and from there, the Hawkeyes quickly disposed of the Gamecocks to end that season 9-4.

Now fast forward to the present. Here sit the 2013 Hawkeyes in a position quite similar. Earlier this month, Iowa lost 28-9 to Wisconsin and fell to 5-4 in the process. Two weeks after securing bowl-eligibility by beating Purdue, there was that improbable comeback win last week against Michigan at Kinnick Stadium.

Then came Friday. Much like that Minnesota game in 2008, what the Hawkeyes did to Nebraska inside Memorial Stadium can be classified as a curb-stomping. The momentum swung in Iowa's favor during the third quarter and from there, it wasn't whether or not the Hawkeyes would beat the Cornhuskers, but by how much. The final turned out to be 38-17.

Much like that Minnesota game, this battle for the Heroes Trophy – a prize claimed for the first time ever by the Hawkeyes – will be remembered in Iowa City for a long time. Not just because it was Iowa's first victory over Nebraska in 32 years or because it was the Hawkeyes' first win inside

Memorial Stadium in 70 years, but because of what it says about the program's current state.

Just like 2008, here's Iowa possessing a 5-3 mark in Big Ten play and an 8-4 overall record. With victories this season over Minnesota, Michigan and now Nebraska, the Hawkeyes have proven on the field they're worthy of a return trip to Tampa for the Outback Bowl.

Obviously, logic isn't the sole factor in bowls deciding who they take, but assuming the Big Ten has two BCS teams (which it should), the Hawkeyes have the best argument for playing inside Raymond James Stadium on New Year's Day. They have the wins. They also have the quality losses (if there even is such a thing).

Iowa's four defeats have come to Northern Illinois, Michigan State, Ohio State and Wisconsin. All four of those teams are currently ranked in the top 15 of both the AP poll and BCS Standings and three of those teams are likely to be playing in BCS bowl games this January. The Hawkeyes didn't lose to any slouches and whatever slouches they encountered this season, they managed to handle.

Two things still need to happen in order for this season to become a complete mirror image of 2008. The first can potentially happen in the next month, and that's winning a bowl game. If Iowa heads back to Tampa, there are four potential possibilities awaiting it there from the SEC (this will be played out over the weekend).

But then there's the second step – carrying that momentum over into the following year. The Hawkeyes were able to do this in 2009 and it resulted in them winning the Orange Bowl. There are some key players leaving after this season, but plenty of pieces will be returning for an Iowa squad that ought to be viewed as a contender in the new Big Ten West Division forming in 2014.

If the Hawkeyes are able to achieve both these steps, it further cements Kirk Ferentz's legacy as Iowa's head coach. It would also speak volumes to what was established by this current core of players.

This core of players left plenty of memories for their fans, perhaps none greater than Friday's win over Nebraska. That's how significant this is and could still even become over time.