

Hawkeyes stuff Huskers

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

LINCOLN, Neb. – Perhaps the best way to describe what took place inside Memorial Stadium on Friday is that it was an exorcism. A number of demons that sat with the Iowa Hawkeyes for over a year are no more.

Iowa's 38-17 win over Nebraska signified some firsts. It was the Hawkeyes' first victory over the Cornhuskers since they joined the Big Ten in 2011 and the first time Iowa has laid claim to the Heroes Trophy. It was the first win over Nebraska since 1981 and the first time the Hawkeyes left Lincoln victorious since 1943.

But this win did much more than that. By finishing its regular season with an 8-4 overall record, Iowa doubled its win total from 2012. It gave the Hawkeyes four road victories – three of which came against rivals – and for the first time since 2008, they posted a winning record during the month of November.

"The whole idea is moving forward. That's what you do in life," Ferentz said. "The credit just goes to our players. They didn't sit around and pout or act like little babies. They just went back to work and did a heck of a job."

Then there was the game itself. The third quarter, specifically, is when momentum began to swing entirely in Iowa's favor.

Momentum started shifting toward the Hawkeyes shortly after Nebraska went down the field and scored a touchdown to shorten Iowa's lead to 14-10. A pass interference penalty called on the Cornhuskers prompted their head coach Bo Pelini to tee off on a nearby official and Pelini would be called for an

unsportsmanlike conduct, which gave Iowa the ball at Nebraska's 15-yard line. The Hawkeyes would extend their lead back to 17-10 when senior kicker Mike Meyer connected on a field goal from 31 yards out.

The shift turned into a swing on the Cornhuskers' ensuing possession. Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz called timeout following a third-down incompleteness with the hope that the officials would review the play since senior linebacker Anthony Hitchens hit Nebraska quarterback Ron Kellogg III just as he released the ball.

Facing 4th-and-3 from their own 32-yard line, the Cornhuskers attempted a fake punt on Iowa's punt safe unit. Except unlike fake punts past executed against the Hawkeyes, senior linebacker Christian Kirksey was there to stuff punter Sam Foltz short of the first-down marker.

Kirksey said he was tipped off earlier in the week by special teams coach Chris White about how Foltz had played receiver prior to handling punting duties.

"As soon as I had seen him roll out, I took off running and was able to contain him," Kirksey said.

Then on the very next play, sophomore quarterback Jake Rudock completed a 24-yard touchdown strike to junior wideout Kevonte Martin-Manley that gave Iowa a 24-10 advantage. Rudock went back to his No. 1 receiver despite a third-down drop on the previous possession.

"The sun was in my eyes and I had to reach out for it, but I had to get it," Martin-Manley said. "I wouldn't be able to live with myself if I didn't."

Just as it appeared Nebraska might get back into the game after scoring a fourth-quarter touchdown to cut Iowa's lead in half, Cornhusker running back Ameer Abdullah fumbled on the next series, and the ball was recovered by junior defensive

tackle Louis Trinca-Pasat.

"I got off my block and saw [Anthony Hitchens and Kirksey] get in on the running back," Trinca-Pasat said. "The ball came out and my initial thought was to pick it up and run, but I got too excited and just fell on the ball."

Iowa got the ball on Nebraska's 39-yard line and sophomore running back Jordan Canzeri made a cut-back run that gave him open field all the way to the 2-yard line. Junior running back Mark Weisman would score from two yards out on the very next play to extend the Hawkeye lead back to 14 points.

"We knew they were going to be over-pursuing like they were to our strong side," Canzeri said about his 37-yard run, which was an audible. "It just turned out to be a play that we bounced outside and it just all worked out."

One more touchdown would be scored from four yards out on a bootleg from redshirt freshman quarterback C.J. Beathard, who entered the game in the third quarter for Rudock after he left with a sprained knee. The clock wound down, and the Hawkeyes began celebrating.

At 8-4, there's plenty for Iowa to feel good about, including the strong possibility of now playing in the Outback Bowl on New Year's Day if the Big Ten ends up with two BCS teams. The announcement of where the Hawkeyes will be bowling comes Dec. 8.

But for the moment, Ferentz and his players have an opportunity to reflect on a season that ended far better than anyone outside the program foresaw.

"The good news is we're a better football team today than we were back at the end of August," Ferentz said. "That's what the whole thing's about."