

COMMENTARY: Opportunity lost (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Saturday's game against No. 13 Michigan State provided a litany of opportunities for the Iowa Hawkeyes.

The story was set. It was Senior Day at Kinnick Stadium, and one senior in particular – wide receiver Marvin McNutt – was on pace to become perhaps the most decorated wideout in Iowa history. The Hawkeyes came off a major victory last week against Michigan and entered this contest having won three of four against the Spartans, including a 37-6 thrashing of them last season. Michigan State entered the contest not having won a game at Kinnick Stadium in 22 years.

A victory over the Spartans would have capped an undefeated season at home, which hasn't happened since 2004 when Iowa last won the Big Ten. The Hawkeyes would have been in a four-way tie for first place in the Legends Division with two weeks remaining and having the inside track towards winning it.

Saturday provided Iowa with a golden opportunity. It ended up being an opportunity that slipped away, however, as Michigan State prevailed 37-21.

Winning streak against the Spartans? Gone. Chance at its first perfect season at home in seven years? Gone. Chances of winning the Legends Division? Probably gone (Iowa isn't mathematically eliminated yet, but Michigan State's not losing to Indiana next week).

Now McNutt did become Iowa's all-time leader in receiving

yards for both a season and career, but that was about the only good that came the Hawkeyes' way Saturday. Instead of having everything fall into place, Iowa now finds itself at 6-4 overall and 3-3 in the Big Ten.

The good news for Iowa is it secured bowl eligibility last week. That's one of the few things this team can hold onto at this point.

It isn't Michigan State winning that might come by surprise, but how the Spartans won. From their opening drive to the final whistle, Michigan State played like a team that was ranked 13th in the country and in first place of the Legends Division. Iowa, on the other hand, found itself in a hole it had to continue digging out of until it was too late.

Michigan State was simply the better team on this day. This wasn't a loss that seems inexplicable like it was when Iowa lost to Minnesota two weeks ago. The Spartans won this game because it was better in all three phases of the game.

That might seem cliché to say, but that really was the case. The Spartans came in with the worst red zone offense of any team in the Big Ten and ended up scoring on all four trips it made inside the Iowa 20-yard line. Defensively, Michigan State made the Hawkeyes one-dimensional. Sophomore running back Marcus Coker only had 57 yards rushing. He was the Big Ten's leading rusher coming into Saturday's game and he had rushed for over 100 yards each of the last four weeks.

Even on special teams, Iowa fell for yet another fake field goal attempt (the second it had given up this season). There was also a fumble on a kickoff return by senior safety Jordan Bernstine.

The bottom line is this – Iowa didn't lose this game as much as Michigan State won it. What the Hawkeyes did lose, however, was a chance to really turn this into a better season than it has been for them in 2011. That's where the disappointment

ought to lie.

Spartans spoil Hawkeyes' Senior Day

By Brendan Stiles

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – On what was supposed to be a day to remember for 18 Iowa seniors, it wound up being a day to forget.

The Iowa Hawkeyes were beaten, battered and bruised by a 13th-ranked Michigan State squad out to prove it was legit, and the Spartans ended up defeating the Hawkeyes in a game that wasn't as close as the final score indicated. It was Michigan State's first victory at Kinnick Stadium since 1989, but more importantly for the Spartans, they managed to remain alone atop the Legends Division holding a 5-1 conference record with two games left.

Meanwhile, Iowa fell to 6-4 overall and 3-3 in the Big Ten, and while the Hawkeyes aren't mathematically eliminated from contention in the Legends Division, their chances of playing in Indianapolis next month are now on life support.

"I guess you'd have to say we weren't ready," Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said. "We didn't look ready. We left the door open way too many times in all three phases.

"If you play a good team like Michigan State, it's going to be tough to win if you're not playing well."

It began with Michigan State jumping ahead 14-0 out of the

gate. The Spartans struck on their opening drive when quarterback Kirk Cousins connected with wideout B.J. Cunningham for the first of two scores, then capitalized off an interception thrown by junior quarterback James Vandenberg when Cousins hit running back Edwin Baker for a touchdown.

Vandenberg would respond back with a touchdown pass of his own to sophomore tight end C.J. Fiedorowicz, but Michigan State then scored 17 unanswered points to take a 31-7 lead into halftime. The 24-point deficit was the largest Iowa had faced in four seasons and stirred up some emotions in the locker room.

“The seniors did not want to go out like this,” senior defensive end Broderick Binns said. “We were trying to get everybody going, telling them to keep your head up.”

Michigan State tacked on a field goal in the third quarter to go ahead 34-7, but not before running both a reverse pass and a fake field goal attempt.

“It just comes down to we got to stop them when we’re on the field as a defense,” senior safety Jordan Bernstine said. “That’s what’s going through my mind when we’re out there, even when they have a big lead.”

Then Iowa scored two consecutive touchdowns to trim the Spartan lead to 13 points entering the fourth quarter. The first of those two third-quarter scores came courtesy of senior wide receiver Marvin McNutt, who set two school records Saturday.

The St. Louis native reached the 1,000-yard receiving plateau for the season after hauling in a one-handed catch, and eventually recorded the milestone for most receiving yards in a season. He also surpassed the mark set by former wideout Derrell Johnson-Koulianos last season for career yards and is the new record holder with 2,635 yards receiving.

Another field goal would be made by Michigan State in the fourth quarter to finish off the scoring. Afterwards, Hawkeye players showed their disappointment, but also felt encouraged by the rally that was made in the second half holding the Spartans to just six points during the final 30 minutes of play.

Iowa now heads to the road for two straight games to conclude the regular season, with the first contest taking place Nov. 19 against cross-protected rival Purdue. The Boilermakers will become bowl-eligilble with a victory after defeating Ohio State in overtime Saturday, 26-23. Kickoff is scheduled for 11 a.m. Central and will be aired nationally on the Big Ten Network.

Iowa-MSU video: Marcus Coker

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Iowa sophomore running back Marcus Coker rushed for 57 yards and one touchdown on 21 carries and hauled in three catches for 24 yards receiving in the Hawkeyes' 37-21 loss to No. 13 Michigan State on Saturday at Kinnick Stadium.

Iowa-MSU video: Shaun Prater

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Iowa senior cornerback Shaun Prater recorded eight tackles for the Hawkeyes in their 37-21 loss to No. 13 Michigan State on Saturday at Kinnick Stadium.

Iowa-MSU video: Micah Hyde

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Iowa junior cornerback Micah Hyde finished with seven tackles for the Hawkeyes in their 37-21 loss on Saturday to No. 13 Michigan State at Kinnick Stadium.

Iowa-MSU video: Tyler Nielsen

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Iowa senior linebacker Tyler Nielsen had five tackles for the Hawkeyes on Saturday in their 37-21 loss to No. 13 Michigan State at Kinnick Stadium.

Iowa-MSU video: Christian Kirksey

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Iowa sophomore linebacker Christian Kirksey recorded a team-high nine tackles for the Hawkeyes in their 37-21 loss to No. 13 Michigan State on Saturday at Kinnick Stadium.

Iowa-MSU video: Marvin McNutt

By Brendan Stiles

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – Iowa senior wide receiver Marvin McNutt caught eight passes for 130 yards and a touchdown and also had two carries for 27 yards on the ground in the Hawkeyes' 37-21 loss to No. 13 Michigan State on Saturday at Kinnick Stadium. McNutt recorded two milestones in the loss: He set Iowa's new all-time record with 1,089 yards receiving this season, and also became Iowa's all-time leader with 2,635 career receiving yards.

Iowa-MSU video: James Vandenberg

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Iowa junior quarterback James Vandenberg completed 22-of-47 pass attempts for 262 yards through the air, two touchdowns and an interception in the Hawkeyes' 37-21 loss to No. 13 Michigan State on Saturday at Kinnick Stadium.

Iowa-MSU video: Tanner Miller

By Brendan Stiles

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – Iowa sophomore free safety Tanner Miller finished with seven tackles in the Hawkeyes' 37-21 loss to No. 13 Michigan State on Saturday at Kinnick Stadium.