

## Stumbling Hawks need repairs in hurry

Written by Jim Ecker

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IOWA CITY - The Iowa Hawkeyes are a college football team with serious defects.

Even the most ardent Iowa fan has to admit that now.

The Hawkeyes stumbled against Northwestern, 38-31, before 67,047 fans at Kinnick Stadium on Saturday when they had trouble protecting C.J. Beathard, had trouble running the football and had trouble stopping the Wildcats when it counted.

Northwestern scored 21 straight points in the second half, turning a 24-17 deficit into a 38-24 lead when Austin Carr caught his third touchdown pass for the Wildcats with 12:06 left in the game.

Northwestern averaged 16.3 points in its first four games for the worst scoring offense in the Big Ten, but the Wildcats got healthy against the leaky Hawks on a damp day in Iowa City.

Northwestern sacked Beathard six times for 42 yards in losses and hurried him into an errant pass that was intercepted with 58 seconds remaining to seal the victory. By contrast, Iowa sacked Northwestern quarterback Clayton Thorson just once.

Iowa tailbacks LeShun Daniels and Akrum Wadley combined for only 107 yards on the ground, and Iowa's net rushing total fell to just 79 yards on 41 attempts when the sacks were subtracted.

Meanwhile, Northwestern tailback Justin Jackson carried the ball 26 times for 171 yards all by himself.

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The Hawkeyes fell to 3-2 overall for the season and 1-1 in the Big Ten, and this was supposed to have been the "easy" part of the schedule with games against Miami (Ohio), Iowa State, North Dakota State, Rutgers and Northwestern. So much for that.

Quite frankly, the Hawkeyes probably would have lost to Rutgers last week if Rutgers star Jamarion Grant had not suffered a season-ending ankle injury late in the first half of that game.

Getting sacked six times in one game is a lot. It's probably due to a combination of Iowa's receivers not getting open, the offensive line not blocking well enough and Beathard not releasing the ball a little faster (or throwing it away). In any case, he took a pounding.

The Hawkeyes undoubtedly missed Matt VandeBerg, their top receiver who is sidelined with a broken foot. He needed crutches to get around Saturday and watched at least part of the game from the pressbox, his ankle and foot in a protective boot.

Riley McCarron did a good job in VandeBerg's absence with eight catches for 78 yards, including a 15-yard touchdown pass on a perfect throw by Beathard, but the Hawks could have used VandeBerg as well. Tight end George Kittle, Iowa's second-leading receiver, caught only one pass against Northwestern and was not a factor.

The Hawkeyes excelled on kickoff returns and punt returns, with Desmond King and McCarron combining for 254 yards on nine healthy returns that helped keep Iowa alive. By contrast, the Hawks had only 283 yards of total offense - just 29 more than their return yardage.

A few weeks ago, a veteran reporter who has covered the Hawkeyes for many years asked Coach Kirk Ferentz if Beathard should be getting some attention for the Heisman Trophy. That was after the Hawks had won their first two games and Beathard was looking good, but nobody is suggesting that Beathard should be mentioned for the Heisman these days.

Beathard is still playing well, but he needs more help from his offensive line and receivers. It's as simple as that.

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King continues to excel on defense, especially on pass defense when an opponent dares to throw the ball his way. He intercepted eight passes last year and won the Jim Thorpe Award, symbolic of the top defensive back in the country, but he does not have any interceptions this year and the regular season is nearly half over.

It's not a big surprise that King does not have any interceptions, considering that he's had only a few opportunities. He's still regarded as a premier defensive back and probably will be a high pick in the NFL draft next year.

It is surprising, however, that King has not served as one of Iowa's captains the last few games after beginning the year as a captain. The captains are selected by the team's leadership group - not the coaches - and the members of that group went with Beathard, Daniels, Josey Jewell and VandeBerg on Saturday, even though VandeBerg is hurt.

It seems odd that Iowa's only All-American is not a full-time captain, but Ferentz has brushed the topic aside and said it's not a big issue. Still, you have to wonder.

A lot of reporters picked the Hawkeyes to finish 9-3 this season and compete for the Big Ten West title again, but there was talk Saturday about the record slipping to 7-5 or even 6-6.

The rest of the season begins Saturday at Minnesota. There's no sense worrying about the remaining home games with Wisconsin, Michigan and Nebraska at this point. If you can't beat Northwestern, which arrived in town with a 1-3 record, how are you going to beat the others?

The Hawkeyes have picked themselves off the turf in previous years after disappointing losses. They need to do it again or this season could unravel in a hurry.