Stunner in the desert: Iowa rallies, topples Tigers

Missouri quarterback Blaine Gabbert walks across the field following Missouri's 27-24 Insight Bowl defeat against the Iowa Hawkeyes. Gabbert set Insight Bowl records for most completions (41) and pass attempts (57), and threw for 434 yards and had two interceptions.

By Dave Matter

TEMPE, Ariz. — If Tuesday night's Insight Bowl was indeed Blaine Gabbert's final college game, the Missouri quarterback certainly went out in style at Sun Devil Stadium. The junior quarterback threw for 434 yards in the Tigers' 27-24 loss to Iowa. But it was two incomplete passes that will come to define this defeat.

Protecting a four-point lead with 6 minutes left, Gabbert threw an unfathomable pass in the flat that Iowa cornerback Micah Hyde intercepted and returned for a go-ahead touchdown.
Then, four minutes later, Gabbert extended Missouri’s season one last play, completing a fourth-down pass to T.J. Moe.

But a replay review reversed the call, ending the drive, essentially ending Missouri’s season.

“I got greedy,” Gabbert said after what might or might not have been his last game in a Missouri uniform. Gabbert has until Jan. 15 to enter the 2011 NFL draft pool, a decision that will be based on his draft projection from the NFL draft advisory committee.

“Everything is going to be evaluated after the season. … We will address that situation when it arises,” he said.

In front of an Insight Bowl record crowd of 53,453, Gabbert threw for season-high yardage totals on 41-of-57 passing. Moe finished with 15 receptions — one off the school record — for 152 yards.

“I thought I had it, but I guess they had some evidence that said I didn’t,” he said of Missouri’s final play from scrimmage. “And that’s just the way it goes sometimes.”

And with that, the Tigers (10-3) head into the offseason with several questions left unanswered.

“We are going to have one hell of a football team, I can tell you that right now,” Gabbert said.

Iowa opened the scoring, feeding freshman tailback Marcus Coker with seven carries on an eight-play drive. The only time Coker didn’t touch the ball, Ricky Stanzi connected with Marvin McNutt for a 49-yard strike, torching cornerback Carl Gettis with a strike down the MU sideline. Five plays later, Coker punched in the game’s opening touchdown from the goal line.

Missouri responded with a methodical 17-play drive as Gabbert opened fire on the Hawkeyes, completing 8 of 9 passes for 82 yards, including a 24-yard strike to Jerrell Jackson on third-and-19 — while getting clobbered in the pocket by defensive end Adrian Clayborn. Gabbert couldn’t pick up a first down on a third-and-2 draw, and needing just a yard for the first down, Gary Pinkel went for easy points, a 23-yard Grant Ressel field goal.

After trading punts with the Tigers, Iowa continued its ground assault, hammering away on the right side of its offensive line with Coker, who rewarded the strategy with a 68-yard blast to the end zone. Looking much like Tiger-killer Roy Helu Jr. of Nebraska, Coker cruised untouched through the Missouri defense for his second touchdown, doubling his season total.

But with Gabbert throwing strikes through Iowa’s zone coverages, the Tigers clawed back, breaking out an 86-yard touchdown drive, finished off by Henry Josey’s 10-yard touchdown run on his first touch of the night.

A quick stop by Missouri’s defense handed the ball back to Gabbert and he continued his carving of the Iowa secondary. With seven straight completions Gabbert guided the offense into the red zone in the half’s final minute, but on third-and-10 from the 14, a sure touchdown pass glanced
off the fingers of Jackson and into the hands of Iowa safety Brett Greenwood, sealing a 17-10 lead for the Hawkeyes at the intermission.

The Tigers couldn’t sustain a drive on their first possession of the second half then wasted a Matt Grabner punt down to the 3 as Iowa pounded out a 93-yard scoring drive, ending with Mike Meyer’s 21-yard field goal for a 20-10 lead.

Gabbert quickly answered, completing 5 of 6 passes on the ensuing drive, a 77-yard possession that ended with his 8-yard rumble into the end zone on a called draw, cutting Iowa’s down to 20-17.

Just when the Tigers needed another stop, senior captain Kevin Rutland delivered. After throwing just four interceptions during the regular season, Stanzi threw No. 5 as Rutland snagged a long sideline heave for McNutt, then returned it to midfield where Gabbert resumed his comeback. The Tigers’ nine-play drive ended with Gabbert’s 2-yard tunnel screen to Egnew for a touchdown, giving MU its first lead of the night, 24-20.

Iowa’s comeback bid began to fizzle when Missouri safety Jarrell Harrison intercepted Stanzi on the next drive. But Gabbert gave the ball right back. After five consecutive completions, Gabbert tried threading a pass to Wes Kemp on the run, but with Kemp trying to block Iowa’s Hyde, Gabbert unloaded a pass Kemp didn’t seem to anticipate coming his way. Instead, Hyde snatched it and scampered 72 yards, looping around the middle of the field and down the opposite sideline on his way to the end zone for a 27-24 Iowa lead.

With one last chance to retake the lead, Gabbert drove the Tigers into Iowa territory, but on fourth-and-7, Moe’s apparent diving catch was short-lived — until it was reversed, giving the ball back to Iowa and snatching away the Tigers’ chance to rally.

Reach Dave Matter at 573-815-1781 or e-mail dmatter@columbiatribune.com.
Insight setback for Mizzou

By Vahe Gregorian • vgregorian@post-dispatch.com | Posted: Wednesday, December 29, 2010 12:45 am

TEMPE, ARIZ. • A game 100 years in the making was worth the wait for Iowa, which punctured Mizzou’s season-ending run with a 27-24 victory in the Insight Bowl on Tuesday night at Sun Devil Stadium.

In the first meeting between the schools since 1910, 14th-ranked MU appeared on its way to victory with a 24-20 lead, the ball and quarterback Blaine Gabbert with a scalding hand.

But the Hawkeyes’ Micah Hyde took advantage of a miscommunication between Gabbert and target Wes Kemp to pick off a Gabbert pass and return it 72 yards for a touchdown with 5 minutes 32 seconds left.

"I just got greedy," said Gabbert, who was flushed out of the pocket to his left before lobbing the ball. "It was a scramble drill, and I thought Wes was going to release and go on the sideline because they were in man-to-man coverage. He stayed with them, and (Hyde) made a great play. And that’s really all I can say about that."

If the last words evoked Forrest Gump, so did Hyde’s mad dash, which ultimately had to be around 125 yards, starting at the MU sideline and going laterally across the field before turning up the Iowa sideline.

“Our defense turned (it) into an offensive play," Hyde said, adding, "All I did was run, honestly."

The Tigers drove to Iowa’s 43 on their next possession, but Gabbert’s fourth and 7 pass to T.J. Moe along the MU sideline was ruled incomplete upon official review, giving the Hawkeyes the ball with 2:15 to go.

Moe’s lunge initially was ruled a catch, and afterward apparent sideline eyewitness Aldon Smith said, "That’s a catch, that’s a catch, that’s a catch. I think the refs should let the kids decide the game and not the refs."

"I thought I had it, but I guess they had some evidence that said I didn’t," said Moe, who had an Insight Bowl record 15 catches for 152 yards. "And that’s just the way it goes sometimes."

Even Iowa defensive end Adrian Clayborn of Webster Groves said, "I thought he caught it, honestly. The guys in the sky know more than I do, and I’m just glad they overturned it."
Mizzou rallied to beat San Diego State 27-24 earlier this season after giving up the ball in the final 2 minutes, but the Tigers couldn't pry the ball back from Iowa, which downed the ball at the MU 1 on the game's final play.

Despite the crushing interception return, the game is sure to stir further speculation about the future of Gabbert, the Parkway West product who is projected as one of the top few NFL quarterback prospects and has been evaluated by the NFL draft advisory board.

"He looked good on film," Iowa coach Kirk Ferentz said. "He looks even better in person."

Gabbert, whose 284 yards in the first half was more than he had in nine full games this season, finished with MU bowl records of 41 completions in 57 attempts for 434 yards.

"sorry mizzou he may be leaving lol," former Tiger linebacker Sean Weatherspoon tweeted during the third quarter.

After the game, Gabbert said, "Everything is going to be evaluated after the season."

While MU (10-3) came in with three straight wins, Iowa (8-5) entered with three straight losses and might well have been reeling with two of its most productive offensive players booted off the team in the last few weeks.

Instead, with freshman running back Marcus Coker going for an Iowa bowl-record 219 yards on 33 carries, Iowa reeled in a season-ending dose of redemption in the type of game to which it has become accustomed.

In the last two years, Iowa had played in 12 games decided by seven or fewer coming into Tuesday. But after going 5-1 in those last year, Iowa was 1-5 in those circumstances this season.

Until Tuesday.

On Iowa's opening drive, Ricky Stanzi's 49-yard pass to Marvin McNutt of Hazelwood Central set up a 1-yard TD run by Coker to give the Hawkeyes a 7-0 lead just 4:28 into the game.

MU responded with its longest scoring drive of the season in terms of plays, 17, marching to the Iowa 5-yard line as Gabbert completed eight of nine passes for 82 yards in the sequence - including a 24-yarder to Jerrell Jackson on a third and 19. After Gabbert was stopped short on third and 1, MU opted for a 23-yard field-goal attempt by Grant Ressel that made it 7-3.

Iowa maneuvered into Mizzou territory on its next drive and appeared to mull going for it on fourth and 1 at the Mizzou 47 before punting. The Tigers went three and out, and on Iowa's next possession Coker burst up the middle 62 yards with blocking help downfield from McNutt to make it 14-3.

Coker's previous long run this season was 26 yards.
MU's next drive started with promise but sputtered in Iowa territory, squandering a sensational sprawling 32-yard catch by Wes Kemp, and Iowa made it 17-3 on a 34-yard field goal set up by a 38-yard Stanzi pass to Colin Sandeman - whose previous long reception was 19 yards.

But MU chomped into the lead with a nine-play, 82 yard drive, highlighted by Gabbert's 21-yard pass to Moe on third and 9 and his 26-yard zinger to Jackson and capped by freshman Henry Josey's 10-yard run to make it 17-10 with 7:28 left in the half.

Mizzou had a chance to tie it late in the half, driving from its 16 to the Iowa 14.

But Gabbert's pass to Jackson in the end zone bounced off Jackson's hands and was intercepted by Iowa's Brett Greenwood when Jackson batted it up as he tried to bring it in.

"Very frustrating," Jackson said. "because not only did I drop it, I tried to catch it again which tipped it back up to the defender."

The Tigers had to punt on their first drive of the second half, but initially that didn't seem to be such a bad thing: Matt Grabner's 55-yard boot went out of bounds at the Iowa 3.

Thirteen plays and 93 yards later, though, Iowa made it 20-10 on a 21-yard Mike Meyer field goal.

MU, though, promptly cut it to 20-17 on Gabbert's 7-yard TD run.

And two snaps later, Kevin Rutland intercepted a Stanzi heave at the Mizzou 18 and ran it back 30 yards to spring the Tigers to their first lead of the game on Gabbert's 3-yard bubble screen to Michael Egnew that made it 24-20.

Midway through the fourth quarter, Jarrell Harrison picked off Stanzi at the Mizzou 31, giving Stanzi half as many interceptions in the game as he had thrown all season coming in.

"We were in control of the game pretty good at that point," Pinkel said.

But just when MU seemed to be administering the knockout punch to an Iowa team that hadn't scored more than 24 points in its previous five games came the pivotal interception.
McCaskill to cheer on Mizzou at bowl game

By Jordan Fabian - 12/28/10 02:29 PM ET

Sen. Claire McCaskill is in Arizona to cheer on her alma mater University of Missouri Tigers as they face off against the University of Iowa Hawkeyes in the Insight Bowl.

McCaskill tweeted that she was on hand with the governor to watch the game, in which the 14th-ranked Tigers are favored to win:

Lucky to be in AZ today w/ Gov and many Tiger fans for the Mizzou victory tonight against Iowa.

But the Democrat had to clarify that she was with Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon (D), not Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer (R):

Whoa....in AZ with MO Gov Nixon, who is also big Mizzou fan. Not AZ Governor....

McCaskill said that the last time she was at a Tigers game in Arizona was as a student 38 years ago:

Wish our stay was longer than 24 hours, weather is perfect. Last time I was in AZ to watch Mizzou play I was a MU student, Fiesta Bowl '72...
Kit Bond

A remembrance

By Henry J. Waters III

In our Dec. 19 issue, reporter Rudi Keller wrote a very good piece on Republican Kit Bond’s career in state and national politics, remembering the Mexico, Mo., native as state auditor, the “Kid Governor,” a protege of statesman Jack Danforth and finally our four-term U.S. senator.

Bond has been one of the most important progressives in Missouri political history. Many today will not think of him that way because in recent years he has moved to the right by the flow of national politics and the drift of his political party, but often as a lonely Republican among recurring Democratic majorities he made progress because he learned how to work effectively outside his party. He did this with persistent intelligent persuasion, a skill too often lacking among today’s officeholders. As he urged remaining lawmakers in his goodbye remarks in the Senate, he played “nice.”

Most of his progress was seen in his ability to get funding for projects and programs. He got initial money for landmark programs such as Parents as Teachers, the University of Missouri’s Food and Agriculture Policy Research Institute (FAPRI) and the GetAbout program to build an alternative transportation system in Columbia. It’s hard to count the various buildings, roads and other amenities Kit Bond has made possible through his skill at getting federal appropriations, projects that do not include a bridge to nowhere.

One of his proudest achievements is transforming Missouri from a net donor to a state receiving more gasoline tax than it sends to Washington. He did so by consistently making sense about why the nation’s transportation system requires additional development of Missouri’s centrally located network.

These important intrastate gains have come largely through earmarks, the system providing direct funding to senators for pet projects in their states. Without earmarks, few of these initiatives would have been possible.

Often earmarks are criticized as wasteful pork projects, but the system allowed people like Bond to work with local officials for quick and efficient funding. Of course, projects should be well conceived and well understood by the public, but the very system of earmarks largely defined the good work Bond and his counterparts have been able to do for constituents. Earmarks are an efficient way to distribute small amounts for local projects in the several states.
Unfortunately, in a fit of misguided reformist zeal, the Senate recently killed the use of earmarks. The budget deficit will not be reduced, and a slew of worthy local projects will go wanting. As Bond said, removing earmarks transfers this funding authority to chief executives and arcane budgeting processes. Talk about loss of accountability.

I can find a few things about Bond’s career to dispute, but they pale compared with his 42 years of accomplishment and, most of all, the way he went about doing the public’s business. I will miss him and pray his successor, Roy Blunt, will achieve a similar record.