

COMMENTARY: Let the players learn from defeat (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – So the Fran McCaffery era of Iowa basketball got off to a shaky start. No big deal.

Really, it's not a big deal.

Look, I get the frustration that might mount from watching the Hawkeyes lose 79-69 in their home opener on Sunday against South Dakota State. It clearly wasn't the best game these guys have played or will play together.

But before anyone out there starts ripping this team to shreds for losing to a team named the Jackrabbits, memories need to be refreshed on a few items.

First of all, this South Dakota State team that just came into Carver-Hawkeye Arena and won on Sunday is a team that went into Hilton Coliseum in Ames two years ago and defeated Iowa State. It's not as if this team was coming into Iowa City and be shellshocked by a Big Ten opponent.

More importantly, this is a young Iowa team. Most of the guys on this team literally went through a season from hell a year ago. They know what rock bottom feels like.

They know this wasn't their best effort. But they know where this game went array.

Back when I was at *The Daily Iowan*, I spent two years covering the Iowa women's basketball team, which is still coached by Lisa Bluder as it was when I covered it. One thing I always remembered her emphasizing during any interviews or press

conferences was how basketball is a game of runs. If you're looking for a turning point in any basketball game, look for big runs.

Now back to what happened Sunday. In this particular game, South Dakota State went on a 10-0 run in the final 3:49 of the first half and went into the locker room up 38-29 at halftime. During this sequence, not only were the Jackrabbits scoring, but the Hawkeyes were turning the ball over in bunches.

Of Iowa's 18 turnovers in this game, 14 of them came during that first 20-minute stanza. The players acknowledged most of those were simply a matter of first-game jitters and not something that had been a recurring issue in the days leading up to this contest. Right now, I would take these guys at their word.

McCaffery even said during his postgame press conference that it isn't just the style of play that's different, but that the terminology of plays and where guys need to be at certain times on the floor is also different.

There are at least 30 more opportunities the Hawkeyes are going to have this season to rebound from this one loss and show off what they have learned. Again, it's a process.

I understand we live in a here-and-now, "What have you done for me lately?" sort of society, but when it comes to this Iowa basketball team, the Hawkeyes are attempting to dig themselves out of an enormous hole they have been in for at least four years now. It's going to take time.

There are going to be growing pains, like this game, along the way for Iowa. This isn't to make excuses for how and why they lost because this was a winnable game, but at the same time, it's not like Iowa came into this game as a preseason Big Ten favorite or even as a ranked team.

The good news for the Hawkeyes is that they have another home

game here on Tuesday against Louisiana-Monroe. It's a chance for this team to fix mistakes before flying to the Virgin Islands to play Xavier in the first of three contests at the Paradise Jam.

Right now, the key for those on the outside is patience. The key for the players is to learn from what happened on Sunday.

It's really that simple.