

COMMENTARY: Cole shows why he's a leader (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Fran McCaffery described it as “one of the guttiest” he had been around. Some teammates couldn’t help but be left amazed.

Tuesday evening, senior center Jarryd Cole posted a double-double of 10 points and 12 rebounds as the Iowa Hawkeyes were able to defeat Louisiana Tech, 77-58, inside Carver-Hawkeye Arena.

It wasn’t the double-double that was significant. It was putting together those numbers while playing sick that stands out.

To call Cole’s performance “Jordan-esque” would be a reach, but considering how he played against the alma mater of former Utah Jazz forward Karl Malone, it was pretty close.

Junior point guard Bryce Cartwright, who is Cole’s roommate, talked after the game about how Cole was up throughout the evening vomiting. He wasn’t with the team during its shoot-around before its game with the Bulldogs. He also wasn’t there for the team dinner.

Yet there he was in the starting line-up, playing 23 minutes and being aggressive at both ends of the court for Iowa.

Forget for a second here that he played with an illness. In fact, he and freshman forward Melsahn Basabe both played Tuesday despite being sick. What became clear to everyone in attendance was just how important Cole is to this Hawkeye squad.

He may not always have the flashiest of numbers. He may not always be consistent statistically. But it's the heart of Jarryd Cole that sets him apart. It's why he never left Iowa when he could have and no one would have blamed him. It's also why he was capable of putting together this type of performance given the circumstances.

The Kansas City product was named a team captain following his freshman season, one that he missed most of due to a torn ACL. He is one of two seniors on the Hawkeyes, and the only one of which who came to Iowa on scholarship.

Cole is the glue that has kept everything together. When this program was at its lowest point in years, he stuck around to help bring it back to, at the very least, a little bit of respectability.

Now we're all starting to see a player that has slowly become a leader for what he gives the Hawkeyes on the court as well as off. Cole posted his second double-double this month (the other came in Iowa's 51-39 win over Northern Iowa two weeks ago). I would even venture to say that right now, Cole is playing his best basketball as a Hawkeye.

It makes sense that he would, given how it is his senior season, and usually, you want players to be at their best when they are seniors like he is with the experience that he has.

No matter what happens the rest of the season, those associated with the program and follow it close enough will remember what Cole did Tuesday night. Just like with when players were transferring left and right and he elected to stick it out, Cole could have said, "I can't go tonight," and instead played what might be his most memorable game by the time this season concludes.

This is the kind of thing that rubs off on teammates. They all saw how he was before the game, and they all saw what he did out there during the game. They know he has their back through

thick and thin.

That is what makes leaders. That is what makes Cole such a vital piece to the Hawkeyes' success.