

COMMENTARY: Hawkeyes have plenty to improve on (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. – Sunday's contest at Mackey Arena between the Iowa Hawkeyes and No. 11 Purdue Boilermakers was one the visitors might want to forget after Iowa was crushed by Purdue, 75-52. The loss was by far the worst performance of the season for the Hawkeyes, and it happened to come against one of the better teams in the country.

A valid point was made by junior guard Matt Gatens afterwards. He said the excuse of Iowa being "a young team" is beginning to get old. Which is exactly why I believe this isn't a loss where the Hawkeyes should burn the tape immediately upon arrival back in Iowa City.

In fact, a lot can be taken away from this contest.

Before I expand much further, I will say the following about the Boilermakers: They played like a nationally-ranked team is supposed to at home against a team like Iowa. Purdue is a no-nonsense squad, and for 40 minutes, looked like a team that deserves everything coming its way.

I will also stick to what I said at the beginning of the year that the Boilermakers, even without Robbie Hummel, have what it takes to be a Final Four team this season. In fact, before Hummel tore his ACL again, I pegged Purdue as my favorite to dethrone Duke and win the national title.

Now, back to the Hawkeyes, and back to the premise of this commentary. Iowa allowed Purdue to start the game on an 11-0

run. That blitzkrieg by the Boilermakers sucked the life out of this team, because even when the Hawkeyes were starting to score, they were still making careless decisions with the basketball.

Aside from maybe Devon Archie, I'm not sure anyone on this team could hold their heads high after this debacle. I don't say that to completely bash this team, by any means, because I think the consensus on this team coming into the season was well-established.

I say this because throughout the season, I've seen better. For instance, freshman forward Melsahn Basabe had eight points, but six of those points came from the free-throw line. This is following what was by far his best performance of the season on Jan. 4 against Ohio State, where he had 22 points, 13 rebounds, and six blocks, becoming the first Big Ten player in 15 seasons to go 20-10-5 in those specific categories.

Continuing with the theme, senior center Jarryd Cole had six points and zero rebounds. Not a single board. Last month, he had a pair of double-doubles, one of which came when he was sicker than a dog. Gatens had 13 points, but on 4-of-10 shooting and he only attempted three 3-pointers the entire game, including the lone attempt from beyond the arc from the Hawkeyes during the entire first half.

Junior guard Bryce Cartwright shot 2-of-10 and had more turnovers than assists. Sophomore guard Eric May only took four shots and played just 17 minutes. Freshman guard Roy Devyn Marble came off the bench and shot 3-of-10.

Maybe the step back taken on Sunday was expected given how talented Purdue is and the environment Mackey Arena presents to visiting teams, but I'm certain everyone within the Iowa program thought they'd be able to build off the near-monumental upset it had at Carver-Hawkeye Arena just five days earlier. And why not?

Now the question becomes how the Hawkeyes respond, because with every other loss this season, they gave themselves chances to climb back in those games and come out on top. That's not what happened here against Purdue.

Northwestern might be struggling right now in Big Ten play, but the Wildcats aren't exactly a pushover. It will be important for Iowa to take whatever lessons that could from this loss and take them to heart not just in this next contest against Northwestern, but throughout the remainder of the season.

That's when everyone will have a better sense of just how much progress is being made.