

# COMMENTARY: Valiant second half effort not rewarded (premium)

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*HawkeyeDrive.com*

MINNEAPOLIS, Minn. – After suffering its fifth straight loss to open Big Ten play on Sunday, Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery made the comment he thought his team got better.

Sure, the 69-59 loss to Minnesota inside Williams Arena wasn't the end result he or any of his players wanted. In fact, freshman forward Melsahn Basabe made sure to emphasize that McCaffery doesn't preach "moral victories."

But after having a horrendous week where both Purdue and Northwestern just manhandled the Hawkeyes in every facet of the game, Iowa showed the kind of fight that had fans somewhat encouraged when it went toe-to-toe with Ohio State earlier in the month.

Early on in this game, Iowa showed aggression at both ends of the court. Sophomore forward Eric May played a huge role early, and it helped him throughout the game because whatever swagger he lost last week was suddenly reappearing. Meanwhile, Basabe proved to be a force once again, finishing with 20 points to lead all scorers and 13 rebounds.

But after the first media timeout, when Iowa held a 6-5 lead, the Hawkeyes would only muster 13 points the rest of the half. As for the Golden Gophers, things began clicking for them, and it looked as though Minnesota would be the latest in a line of good teams to just overpower Iowa for 40 minutes.

So it's halftime, and the score is 30-19 in favor of the

Golden Gophers. One facet the Hawkeyes had consistently struggled in this season has been starts to the second half. More often than not, opposing teams feasted on early second half opportunities, and in some cases, games Iowa may have won became losses.

But this time was different. This time, it was the Hawkeyes jumping out to a big second half run. Suddenly, the scoreboard read "Iowa 35, Minnesota 34." For a brief moment, the Gopher faithful were in disbelief at what they were seeing.

It would become a back-and-forth game until about the 12-minute mark in the second half, when Minnesota took the lead for good. During this timespan, the Golden Gophers had success with what worked for them in the first half, and the Hawkeyes couldn't answer until the outcome already looked to be in doubt.

Even at the end of the game, Iowa could have just folded. There was simply no way any miracle was happening once Minnesota climbed to a 60-46 lead. But the Hawkeyes refused to quit. Sophomore forward Eric May and junior guard Matt Gatens continued to drain 3-pointers, and the deficit was two possessions in the contest's final minute.

Confidence looked to be shot just a few days ago. Now, it's slowly coming back.

Sunday was a reminder of what the Hawkeyes just won't be able to do in the Big Ten this year. But it was also a reminder that they're not as far off as some may have feared after the two games last week.

This team didn't win on Sunday, and when it goes to Columbus, Ohio to play No. 1 Ohio State on Jan. 19, the odds of them pulling an upset against the Buckeyes appear much slimmer than they were when Iowa and Ohio State met at Carver-Hawkeye Arena back on Jan. 4.

But if there is one lesson, one “moral victory” from this game, it’s that for some of these players at least, there is enough confidence in one another that things can work if done right and done consistently.

The Hawkeyes weren’t rewarded for their resiliency against Minnesota, but seeing that resiliency in this team on the road and in a tough environment has to be encouraging to Iowa fans going forward.