

COMMENTARY: Quick-shooting issues not going away (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

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STATE COLLEGE, Pa. — In his postgame press conference following the Iowa Hawkeyes' 65-51 loss to Penn State on Wednesday at the Bryce Jordan Center, Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery used the term "baffled."

What McCaffery was baffled about was what he calls "quick-shooting," something he believes the Hawkeyes did way too much of against the Nittany Lions.

Part of what intrigues me about this is that quick-shooting is something McCaffery has touched on a few times already this season. Before Iowa played Northern Iowa back on Dec. 7, "quick-shooting" became a McCafferyism, if you will. At that time, he said how against a team like the Panthers, taking too many shots early during possessions could lead to major breakdowns at the other end of the court. In that particular game, Iowa slowed it down and the decision to do so paid off en route to a 51-39 win.

Any time since in which McCaffery has brought this up, it has usually come when Iowa has prepared for a road contest. The reason being that when the Hawkeyes are playing in an opposing team's venue, sticking to the game plan becomes even more essential.

Now fast forward to Wednesday night. Early on, it was Iowa, not Penn State, that was in complete control of this game. The Hawkeyes were up by as many as 11 points during the first

half.

Yet that early lead slipped away right before halftime and once the Nittany Lions regained the lead during the second half, they never seized control and started playing better, while Iowa continued to play worse.

A 33-33 tie suddenly became a 40-33 Penn State lead. Later in the second half, a five-point lead for the Nittany Lions quickly escalated to 15 points.

In the second half, the Hawkeyes shot 8-of-25 from the floor. McCaffery knows that isn't good enough to win on the road in the Big Ten, so there's no reason to think his players don't realize it, either. As a matter of fact, when players were asked afterwards about the quick shots that were being taken, they echoed the same line as McCaffery about how they need to play smarter basketball away from home.

The comment that really stuck following this contest was one said by senior center Jarryd Cole about how the Hawkeyes need to learn how to win. It stuck because this is an Iowa squad that entered Wednesday coming off a 91-77 victory last weekend at home against Indiana.

Yet his comment is on point. Again, this game against Penn State was one Iowa was dominating early on and could have won rather decisively if it weren't for some of the ill-advised decisions that were made with the quick shooting in the second half.

Maybe it's a good thing for the Hawkeyes that their next game is on the road at Michigan. The lessons that McCaffery and his staff hope are instilled in the players could be put to practice sooner than later. Whether that actually happens remains to be seen, but it's an opportunity for the players to learn on the fly here.

That's what I'm sure fans are hoping for with this team – that

the simple things get situated soon so that the coaches can work on more complex, more detailed intricacies that accelerate this rebuilding process Iowa is going through.

It will be interesting to see this weekend just how much is learned.