

COMMENTARY: Resiliency leads to potential turning point (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

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BLOOMINGTON, Ind. – There was a time in Saturday's game between Iowa and Indiana where the Hawkeyes looked defeated. The Hoosiers appeared to seize momentum away after the contest was tied at 39-39 in the second half when they went on a 19-9 run to go up 58-48.

But Iowa didn't quit.

Instead, the Hawkeyes ended the game on a 16-5 run capped by a jumper from junior guard Bryce Cartwright in the game's final minute. And when Indiana failed to convert on its last possession, the Hawkeyes managed to walk out of Assembly Hall with a 64-63 win.

This might not have been the more impressive victory this week for Iowa three days following a 72-52 win over Michigan State. But I'd make the argument that this was not only more significant, but one that could really be that program-changer.

Make no mistake – Indiana is not a better team than Michigan State. With that said though, the resiliency shown by the Hawkeyes in this game's final minutes speaks volumes of where they could potentially be heading under Fran McCaffery.

For the first time this season, I watched an Iowa team that not only overcame adversity being down 10 points in the second half, but really found a groove late that proved to be the difference.

One of the biggest reasons I feel this was a bigger win for the Hawkeyes (besides the fact it came away from Iowa City) is that the key players delivered. Just look at freshman forward Melsahn Basabe. He was a non-factor three days ago against the Spartans. Here, he was one of the players willing Iowa to the comeback win.

The Glen Cove, N.Y., native finished with 20 points and 13 rebounds, with 15 of those points coming in the second half. He also made 8-of-9 free-throw attempts, and as a team, the Hawkeyes shot 20-of-25 from the foul line.

What made what he did even more impressive was that at one point in the second half, he could have easily lost his cool. After Assembly Hall erupted when Will Sheehey put Basabe on a future poster somewhere in Indiana, Basabe responded and was not getting denied inside.

Then there was the play of sophomore forward Eric May. In Iowa's previous five road Big Ten contests, the only one where May was even a factor was at Minnesota last month. Early on, he looked as though he would be lost again.

But he stuck with the advice of McCaffery and the coaching staff, half of which wasn't even on hand because it was out recruiting. In the second half, he caught two alley-oops from junior guard Bryce Cartwright that brought the entire Iowa bench to its feet. He also made a significant steal that ignited the Hawkeye comeback.

The third player that deserves praise is Cartwright, a guy who has really matured into the point guard McCaffery hoped he would become. He finished the game with 15 points and eight assists. He also made the biggest shot of the season so far for Iowa, nailing a jumper with 1:28 remaining that gave the Hawkeyes that 64-63 lead they wouldn't relinquish.

This season will still have ups and downs for this young Iowa team. But this was a major test the Hawkeyes passed on

Saturday.

To put this into perspective, the last time Iowa won two consecutive Big Ten games was back in February of 2007. That was four years ago. Steve Alford (a former Hoosier) was coaching the Hawkeyes in what turned out to be his last season in Iowa City.

Indiana might not be an elite team right now, but the Hoosier faithful still packed Assembly Hall and were in it from start to finish. This still proved to be as crazy an atmosphere as there possibly is in the Big Ten.

Yet instead of talking about how Iowa succumbed to the pressure, we're talking about them winning their 10th game of the season, matching last season's win total.

Time will tell, but I'll make this prediction anyway: If and when the Hawkeyes finally do turn the corner under McCaffery, this is the game, not the Michigan State contest, that everyone will remember 5-10 years from now and be talking about.

Sure, Iowa breezed to a 20-point victory over Sparty, but the Hawkeyes dominated that game from start to finish. This game, Indiana gave Iowa everything it could handle, and the Hawkeyes still managed to win.

Now Iowa gets its next two games at Carver-Hawkeye Arena. This type of momentum could go a long way in this program's future.