

COMMENTARY: Sluggish showing all around (premium)

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – This might not have been the worst performance of the season, but the Iowa Hawkeyes' 62-45 loss to Minnesota on Sunday was probably the worst this team has looked inside Carver-Hawkeye Arena in the Fran McCaffery era.

Might seem a bit harsh to say, especially considering that in this contest against the Golden Gophers, Iowa once had a 14-6 lead. But what happened from that point on was lackluster, to say the least.

What was an eight-point lead quickly evaporated when Minnesota went on a 10-0 run to move ahead. Suddenly, shots weren't falling for the Hawkeyes, and they found themselves trailing the Golden Gophers at halftime by 10 points.

Now two things need to be taken into account here. First, Minnesota played 2-3 zone for essentially the entire game. The Golden Gophers are in a position right now where they have no other choice with guard Al Nolen being out with an injury, and given the size Minnesota has in its frontcourt, it just made sense. Also, Iowa got some decent looks offensively from 3-point range against this zone, particularly in the first half. Unfortunately for the Hawkeyes, most of those shots from behind the arc weren't falling.

With those two points established, however, they aren't silver linings for what was witnessed. Nor should they be.

Going back to Iowa having an eight-point lead in the first half, the Hawkeyes were outscored from that moment on 56-31.

When one team builds that big an advantage during a game, there's no other way to slice or dice it other than saying the performance was pitiful.

Even in the second half when Minnesota looked to be struggling at the offensive end of the floor, it wasn't as though Iowa was doing anything themselves to lead anyone to think it would come back from the deficit it fell into.

This game's complexion changed the second freshman forward Melsahn Basabe picked up his second foul. As documented earlier in the season, McCaffery has little patience for anyone who picks up two fouls in the first half. It doesn't matter if it's the star player or the last guy off the bench – anyone with two fouls is getting pulled from the game, plain and simple.

The problem on Sunday though goes back to Minnesota's size in the interior, especially when three guys over 6-8 are starting. With Basabe in foul trouble, and junior forward Devon Archie missing a second consecutive game due to a concussion suffered on Feb. 5 at Indiana, Iowa was forced to combat the Golden Gopher bigs with two guys – senior center Jarryd Cole and junior forward Andrew Brommer.

Cole played 32 minutes on Sunday, Brommer played 27 minutes. Neither looked awful by any means. Basabe, however, only played 17 minutes and eventually fouled out of the game with 3:31 remaining, heading to the bench with just four points and four rebounds.

I don't make mention of this to call out Basabe, let me make that clear. My point here is the Hawkeyes didn't have enough to combat the Golden Gophers on Sunday, as evident by Minnesota forward Trevor Mbakwe nearly outscoring Iowa in the second half by himself (Mbakwe scored 22 of his 24 points in the second half, while the Hawkeyes finished with 25 second-half points as a team).

The other part of this is that Iowa needs to knock down shots if it wants to have any chance of beating a team as good as Minnesota. Because of the Golden Gophers' 2-3 zone, the Hawkeyes wound up shooting 28 3-pointers on the evening, with only six of them going in. Iowa ended up shooting 16-of-47 on Sunday. Even against mediocre competition, that usually doesn't result in wins.

Where the Hawkeyes go from here, who knows? They still have five regular season games left before the Big Ten Tournament, so there is still time to turn things around.

But one thing is clear – performances like the one Iowa had Sunday can't continue. Because not only would they result in losses the rest of the way, but they would result in defeats where they don't have a chance.

That's not the note this team needs to be ending on.