

Awful start too much for Hawkeyes to overcome

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

EVANSTON, Ill. – When the Iowa Hawkeyes came into Welsh-Ryan Arena to face Northwestern on Thursday, head coach Fran McCaffery had a message to his team – not to fall too far behind. The Wildcats put the Hawkeyes in an insurmountable hole when the two met in Iowa City last month, and McCaffery didn't want history to repeat itself.

But falling behind is exactly what happened again to Iowa, and while the Hawkeyes did scratch and claw their way back into this contest, it wasn't meant to be on this night as Northwestern emerged with a 73-70 win. With this loss, Iowa fell to 10-16 overall and 3-11 in the Big Ten, and the Hawkeyes now sit in last place by themselves in the conference.

At the start, Northwestern looked poised to simply bury Iowa. At the 17:55 mark in the first half, McCaffery called a timeout, clearly frustrated by his team's play early to the point where less than five-and-a-half minutes in, five reserves were on the court for the Hawkeyes. Meanwhile, the Wildcats pushed the lead up to as much as 13 points early on.

"I just felt like those guys have been playing well, and we weren't getting out of our starters what we wanted to in this game," McCaffery said. "They're not a team you want to get down big. You get down 20 to Northwestern, it's like being down 40.

Iowa would make a comeback though in the first half, and even held a two-point lead before entering halftime down 39-37. The

Hawkeye spark came from freshman forward Zach McCabe, who tallied 11 points, all of which came in the game's first 20 minutes.

McCabe was one of five Iowa players who posted double figures scoring.

"We definitely needed it, especially with me being on the bench in foul trouble basically the whole half," said freshman forward Melsahn Basabe, who scored 11 of his 13 points in the second half. "We needed him, and he came up big.

"His points in the first half was the reason why we didn't get buried. Zach is a really good player and he has been struggling, but today, he came out as a warrior, he was hitting shots, battling, and we really needed him."

Basabe wouldn't be the only starter to get it going in the second half for the Hawkeyes. Senior center Jarryd Cole ended up scoring a game-high 17 points and also led the Hawkeyes in rebounding with eight boards, while junior guard Bryce Cartwright had 10 points and nine assists, with the latter being a team-high on the night.

Iowa had a chance to tie the game on the final possession. The play was designed for McCabe to throw a deep pass into Cole and for the 3-point shot to be taken, but poor execution resulted in the Hawkeyes not being able to send the game to overtime.

"That was a set play," Cartwright said. "I don't think we had it, but I don't think Jarryd had his balance. If he has his balance, we would have been able to get off a shot. We hadn't worked on it in a while, but I think it was good for what happened."

Iowa will have to make a quick turnaround, as its next game is set for Saturday at Carver-Hawkeye Arena against Michigan. Tip-off is scheduled for 3:30 p.m. Central, and the game will

be aired nationally on the Big Ten Network. The Hawkeyes lost their first meeting to the Wolverines back on Jan. 30 in Ann Arbor, Mich., 87-73.

“You got to keep your head up,” Cole said. “The locker room was kind of down, and you can’t be like that when you’re in a league like this where you can play games back-to-back like we’re about to do. We got to get in the gym tomorrow, work out some kinks, and hopefully come out with a win.”