

COMMENTARY: Getting over hump proves challenging (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Following the Iowa Hawkeyes' 75-72 loss to Michigan in overtime on Saturday at Carver-Hawkeye Arena, freshman forward Melsahn Basabe mentioned how a friend of his texted him about how Iowa's now 10-17 overall record could be very different.

The Hawkeyes have lost four straight, but three of those losses have each been by a total of three points, with two of those three occurring in overtime. This is just over the past two weeks.

Before Big Ten play even began, Iowa had two other losses both by exactly three points – at Wake Forest on Nov. 30, and at home against Iowa State on Dec. 10. That's five losses this season, all by a single possession.

There are a few other defeats that have also come by single digits, but just take those five 3-point losses and turn them into wins. Iowa would be 15-12 overall, and 6-9 in the Big Ten. At the very least, that would put the Hawkeyes in the conversation for some sort of postseason tournament. Not to mention every Iowa fan out there would be clamoring for Fran McCaffery to be Big Ten Coach of the Year given what he inherited when he took over last year.

And if Iowa, under this scenario, went into the Big Ten Tournament with three straight wins at Illinois, at Michigan State, and at home against Purdue, the Hawkeyes would be 18-12 and finishing .500 in the league. Given the Big Ten's perception nationally, that is a résumé for a team that likely

makes the NCAA Tournament, even after starting conference play 0-6.

Yes, that is all hypothetically speaking. But given all this team's flaws right now, thinking about everything in that light can be telling, and it wasn't something I considered until Basabe touched on in with me.

Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery was asked in his postgame press conference about how to rise back to the top of the standings after being in the position the Hawkeyes currently find themselves in – dead last in the Big Ten at 3-12. McCaffery said it's not too far off.

Thinking about all this in terms I just gave, he might have a point.

Forget about whether or not the Hawkeyes were screwed over by a call at the end of the first half against Michigan that all indications suggest was correct. Even though Iowa lost by three points and that 3-pointer from Bryce Cartwright would've been significant had it counted, there were still areas in the Hawkeyes' game where they struggled, and the Wolverines took full advantage.

This is why instead of talking about a team that at the very worst could be .500 entering the Big Ten Tournament next month, we're talking about a team that is trying to avoid repeating last season's total of 10 wins.

There also seems to be a lot of talk about McCaffery's fire, his intensity. At one point in the second half, he reamed into Cartwright and guard Matt Gatens, then proceeded to call out the entire team during the timeout that ensued. Even though the players tend to respond whenever McCaffery does snap, just think if it never reaches that point on Saturday where he had to do that, or two nights ago against Northwestern.

Right now, 10-17 shows this team is far. But this team is also

getting close, perhaps closer than many might be thinking.

Only time will tell when that moment the Hawkeyes do eventually “turn the corner,” because simply put, getting over the hump of close losses is far from an easy task, especially in a conference like the Big Ten.