

COMMENTARY: Different defeat, same story (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

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CHAMPAIGN, Ill. – The setting was different. The opponent was different. Even the circumstances were different.

One thing that remained the same though was not necessarily that Iowa lost to Illinois 81-68 at Assembly Hall on Saturday, but more so how this game was lost.

Like the previous two contests against Northwestern and Michigan, the Hawkeyes fell behind big early on. In fact, at the under-16 timeout in the first half, the Fighting Illini were up 10-0.

Yes, the Hawkeyes went nearly five minutes before freshman guard Devyn Marble scored the first Iowa bucket of the evening. In past seasons, things would have gone downhill from there for the Hawkeyes.

But also like the pair of games last week, Iowa found its way back and suddenly, this game was tied at 13-13 following a 3-point play from senior center Jarryd Cole.

Now, one of the Hawkeyes' pitfalls throughout the 2010-11 season in games they have lost are how they start out the second halves of these games. Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery even said afterwards that this was why the Hawkeyes suffered their 18th loss of the season on Saturday.

Iowa trailed at halftime by a mere five points, 36-31, after junior guard Bryce Cartwright nailed his sixth first-half buzzer-beater of the season. Nearly nine minutes into the second half, that five-point lead Illinois had climbed to 17

points at 60-43. During this stretch, not only were the Hawkeyes struggling to score, but their play at the defensive end was abysmal.

In most of Iowa's losses this season, opposing teams have more often than not shot an extremely-high percentage. On Saturday, the Fighting Illini shot 31-of-56 from the floor, including 15-of-24 in the second half.

Meanwhile, the Hawkeyes shot 24-of-59. That isn't extremely terrible, but it's not that impressive either. It's also not going to get it done against a team that proves it can score on you from both inside and out.

At the end of the evening, it's not a surprise Iowa lost. The Hawkeyes came into this game having only won once at Assembly Hall in their last 21 visits, and Illinois is a team that appears to be in position to return to the NCAA Tournament for the first time in two years. This was a must-win game for the Fighting Illini, and the urgency showed for most of the night.

The way Iowa lost this game really was no different than what I've been accustomed from seeing this season when the Hawkeyes have faced teams that right now are just simply better than them. Again, some of the same bugaboos that have haunted this team came back on display again Saturday.

All that was different was the uniform color, the environment, the names on the jerseys both front and back, and maybe a more raspy voice from the opposing head coach (in this case, Bruce Weber).

It was a different defeat, but the same story.