

# COMMENTARY: Consistency finally pays off for Hawkeyes (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Iowa's 67-65 upset of No. 6 Purdue on Saturday at Carver-Hawkeye Arena was nothing short of huge. For one, it's that "signature victory" on first-year head coach Fran McCaffery's résumé. It also was the 11th victory of the season for an Iowa squad that had only won 10 games all of last season.

This win also came against a top-10 team that came in with a slight chance of being co-Big Ten champions and winning the tiebreaker for the No. 1 seed in next week's Big Ten Tournament in Indianapolis, Ind. In other words, Purdue had plenty at stake.

Meanwhile, the Hawkeyes came into this contest with the Boilermakers having lost six straight. The 10 seed in the Big Ten Tournament was already secured for Iowa earlier in the day when Indiana lost at Illinois. The outcome of this game wasn't going to significantly change the Hawkeyes' immediate future.

Yet the more I think about what unfolded here, it really isn't as surprising as perhaps it should be.

Covering this team all season, I've seen a few highs, and plenty of lows. As I wrote after Iowa's loss at Illinois last week in Champaign, most of the defeats followed a similar script.

Also, a lot of the same pieces that have comprised this broken record were in play again Saturday.

Except this time around, everything fell into place for Iowa, not for its opponent. For once, the consistency that had been there most of this season proved beneficial as opposed to hindering the Hawkeyes.

If you're an Iowa fan, ask yourself this: When the Hawkeyes were ahead 53-48 late in the second half, did you think Iowa would hold on? Or were you expecting that second-half collapse to take place?

The only major difference from the Hawkeyes' perspective here is that what didn't go their way before in prior games went their way on Saturday. All the shots people became accustomed to Iowa missing late in games went in. All the defensive possessions where an opposing team hit an open 3 to sink the Hawkeyes weren't falling, and eventually, the Hawkeyes began to secure rebounds.

Thinking back to the close losses this team has had in 2010-11, one consistent thing I've heard from fans is how Iowa never seems to stop fighting to the end. That same thing can be said again here, except this time around, it's being said after a victory.

Say what you want about Purdue choking away a potential share of the Big Ten crown. Iowa earned this win. The Hawkeyes went toe-to-toe with a top-10 team, one being considered by some as a possible No. 1 seed in the Big Ten Tournament and had a player McCaffery said point blank he voted as Big Ten Player of the Year in JaJuan Johnson, and came away victorious.

Just take that last field goal attempt by junior guard Bryce Cartwright in the final minute. There shouldn't have been a doubt in anyone's mind he was taking that shot. He took it before against Wisconsin and against Michigan. Neither time did the shot fall for him.

It did on Saturday.

Another example would be junior guard Matt Gatens. How many times have you seen him this season take a shot in crunch time and have it not go down? He not only made a key lay-up late in this game, but he sunk the two free throws to secure an Iowa win. For all the criticism he has gotten for not being “clutch,” Gatens was on Saturday.

And then look at senior center Jarryd Cole. This was his day to remember. Playing in his last game at Carver-Hawkeye Arena, he went out the way every fan wanted to see him go out after everything he endured through his Iowa career. The way he played on Saturday was no different from most of the Hawkeyes' games this season.

What this victory should tell everyone about the Iowa program is this – as long as the Hawkeyes remain consistent with their approach in these late-game situations, moments like Saturday will follow. More games in the future will be won this way because the changes made from losing close games weren't drastic.

That's a testament to the coaches believing in the players, and it sends a powerful message.

Someday, Iowa fans might look at this the way they look at the Hawkeyes beating Northwestern in football back in 2000. But for now, this ought to be remembered as a culmination of the hard work put in this season finally paying off.