

COMMENTARY: Little things can make a difference (premium)

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DES MOINES, Iowa – Iowa entered its biggest challenge to date this season with a 3-0 record thanks in large part to doing the little things that good basketball teams tend to do. The Hawkeyes dominated the glass, made their free throws, and found ways to win as a team as opposed to have 2-3 individuals completely put the team on their backs.

On Sunday, it was Creighton, not Iowa, that did the little things needed to win, which is why the Bluejays were the ones leaving Wells Fargo Arena with a 82-59 win while the Hawkeyes returned to Iowa City with its first blemish of the 2011-12 season.

This wasn't a game where Iowa kept pace only for Creighton to pull away. The Bluejays beat the Hawkeyes straight up, from the get-go, in every facet of the game.

Let's start with the most important part of basketball – scoring. Creighton shot 32-of-58 from the floor Sunday, and was effective both inside and out. The Bluejays finished with 40 points in the paint, so almost half of their scoring. They also shot 9-of-19 from 3-point range, and it was their perimeter shooting that separated themselves from Iowa.

As for the Hawkeyes, a team that shot the ball extremely well in their previous contest against Northern Illinois, were 21-of-58 from the floor, had only 16 points in the paint, and shot 7-of-21 from behind the arc. Against a team the caliber of Creighton, who showed why it's a favorite to win the Missouri Valley Conference this season, that just won't cut

it.

Then there's free-throw shooting. Last season, Iowa was anemic when shooting from the foul line. In their first three games of the season, the Hawkeyes made 56-of-72 free-throw attempts, which is about 78 percent, leaps and bounds better than a year ago. On Sunday, Iowa was 10-of-19 from the line. Ironically, two of the poorest free-throw shooters from last season – forward Devon Archie and sophomore Devyn Marble – were both 2-of-2 from the line in this contest.

But it wasn't just scoring that was an issue. Iowa's rebounding was awful against Creighton. The Bluejays outrebounded the Hawkeyes, 43-27. What stood out to me most though was that at the offensive end in particular, when opportunities for offensive boards were there, guys that were position to come down with rebounds instead tried to get quick putbacks that didn't go. Iowa finished with three second-chance points, compared to Creighton's 18. Again, not going to get it done.

Finally, let's address the assists. Iowa had just 10 of them Sunday after compiling 26 assists on 33 made field goals against Northern Illinois. Now senior guard Bryce Cartwright didn't have the best afternoon, and McCaffery even acknowledged after the game something isn't right with him at this time. Not having him hurt this team in the first half, but his absence on the floor shouldn't be an excuse for such a drop-off over a span of two games.

To call this a lackluster showing would be an understatement. This was a worse loss than any of the 20 defeats Iowa had last season. Not because of point-differential (Iowa did lose a game by 23 points last season at Purdue), not because of the opposition, but because this came at a time when things should be routine for this Hawkeye squad.

Yes, this was the first game of the season away from Carver-

Hawkeye Arena, but Iowa is currently in a seven-game stretch over a 19-day period where there are exactly two days in between each game. This is a time when this team that's supposed to be on the rise continues to get better because the routine isn't changing during this slate of non-conference games. Instead, the Hawkeyes not only took a step back Sunday, but reverted back to some of the issues that plagued them last season.

It may just be one game, and make no mistake that Creighton is a much better team than Iowa at this time. But this one revealed quite a bit, mainly that the consistency McCaffery wants from game-to-game still hasn't been displayed.

That consistency only happens if Iowa gets back to focusing on the little things that allowed it to be successful in those first three games.