

COMMENTARY: Basabe triggers fast start (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – Iowa sophomore forward Melsahn Basabe knew how much he had been struggling. Coming into the Hawkeyes' game against Brown, Basabe had combined for just eight points and 11 rebounds in each of Iowa's previous four games, three of which it lost.

On Saturday, Basabe broke out of his slump and delivered in a big way, as he finished with a double-double (just his second of the season) consisting of 14 points and 10 rebounds in the Hawkeyes' 75-54 win over the Bears on Saturday at Carver-Hawkeye Arena.

Say what you will about the caliber of competition, but Basabe needed this performance. More importantly, Iowa needed this performance out of him.

At the first official timeout of the afternoon, the Hawkeyes were ahead 11-4. Sophomore forward Zach McCabe, who was inserted into the starting lineup last week, scored Iowa's first five points. Then Basabe proceeded to score the remaining six, all of which were unanswered at both ends.

The reason this is worth noting is because the trend with Basabe has typically been when he doesn't play well that he starts out slow. Not only did his start spark him, but it also sparked everyone else.

Thanks in part to an 18-4 run that began with Basabe's six first-half points, the Hawkeyes pushed ahead 23-8 and didn't look back.

It wasn't just the scoring that made what Basabe did noteworthy, however. Six of his 10 rebounds also came in the first half. The effort (which had been in question after Iowa lost to Creighton on Nov. 20) was there, at both ends of the floor.

Two areas in this game where Iowa dominated Brown – points in the paint, and rebounding. The Hawkeyes scored 44 of their 75 points in the paint, and the 56-37 rebounding edge over the Bears included 21 offensive boards.

Now Basabe was far from the only player to have a productive showing on Saturday, but this question is a fair one to ask: Would Iowa have been that dominant in the interior had he struggled yet again instead of posting a double-double? Regardless of whether the answer is yes or no, I highly doubt the Hawkeyes win this game in convincing fashion without his efforts.

He wasn't the best player on the court Saturday, but Basabe was absolutely the difference-maker for this team. His teammates acknowledged how seeing his early success rubbed off on them (the big first-half run I alluded to is prime evidence of this).

After the game, Basabe said he had learned to value the opportunities that are there for him when he's on the floor. He knows now that while he might just still be a sophomore, his impact on any given night greatly impacts how the Hawkeyes play, whether it's positively or negatively. When Big Ten play does start up, Iowa is going to need more performances like this one from him in order to keep up with everybody else.

It may have just been Brown, and it may have just been one game. But if what he showed Saturday becomes the norm, this is the game Basabe and everyone else will pinpoint as to what got him going in the right direction again.

And as he goes, so goes Iowa.