

COMMENTARY: Marble proving worth with productivity (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

AMES, Iowa – In the midst of a disappointing stretch of basketball from the Iowa Hawkeyes, one where they have lost five of their last seven games, one positive has begun to emerge.

As bad as Iowa looked (especially in the first half) of its 86-76 loss to Iowa State on Friday at Hilton Coliseum, I couldn't help but focus on the play of sophomore guard Devyn Marble. For the second straight contest, he started in place of an injured Bryce Cartwright. For the second straight contest, he led the Hawkeyes in scoring, finishing with a game-high 21 points in defeat. Marble also posted a team-high five assists.

Iowa only lost this game by 10 points in the end because it continued fighting in the second half after trailing 48-27 at halftime. When the second half began, Marble put the team on his back.

When he was a freshman last season, he occasionally had some nice performances. But his 21 points Friday became a new career-high and followed back-to-back 14-point showings against Brown and Northern Iowa.

In other words, Marble has scored 49 of Iowa's last 211 points, which is approximately 23 percent of the Hawkeyes' points the last three games.

Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery has talked about the stamina

Marble has managed to possess. This was the second straight game where he played 37 minutes for the Hawkeyes, and as both Melsahn Basabe and Matt Gatens said after Friday's loss to Iowa State, they needed every one of those minutes from Marble.

Now McCaffery has a bit of dilemma to address between now and Dec. 17, when Iowa plays its next contest against Drake. Does he keep Marble in the starting five, and if so, who comes off the bench?

Cartwright has done nothing to warrant being benched. He played six minutes off the bench with a hamstring injury that prevented him from playing against UNI, and it was obvious the injury has hindered his play the past week. But after the last three games, I don't see any plausible explanation for taking Marble out of the starting lineup now. He's becoming too valuable an asset to McCaffery and this team.

Right now, Marble is showing something that you can't really say any other Hawkeye player has so far this season – consistency. I don't say this to throw anyone else under the bus, but 10 games is a decent sample to work with here because Iowa's about one-third of the way through its regular season.

Now does this mean Marble is going to score 15-20 points per game the rest of the way? No. But he's proving that he's capable of doing that while also having to play multiple positions on the court.

And let's not forget that he's still a sophomore. If Marble does continue to show the type of consistency he has over the past three games, this is only going to pay dividends in the long run when he's an upperclassman.

The grand scheme of things for the Hawkeyes has been bleak, but Marble's development has to be encouraging to this team. Maybe it's only a matter of time before others feed off his energy. Maybe not. But the more minutes he plays going

forward, the more likely it is he remains a catalyst for this team.

That's exactly what Iowa needs in order to recapture any sort of winning ways before time runs out on this season.