

Boilermaker surge dooms Hawkeyes

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. – For a brief moment, it appeared the Iowa Hawkeyes were on their way to their third road victory this season in Big Ten play Tuesday night. Iowa held an 11-point first-half lead at Mackey Arena against a Purdue team that had already beaten the Hawkeyes in Iowa City a few weeks earlier.

But what looked promising at the start for Iowa proved to be anything but. With a 30-9 run that span the two halves of basketball, the Hawkeyes found themselves on the losing end against the Boilermakers once again, this time being defeated 75-68. Iowa now sits at 3-4 in the Big Ten, while falling to 11-9 overall.

“It was a tale of two halves,” freshman forward Aaron White said. “We came out in the first half and handled their pressure, took care of the ball, played them hard on defense, got up into them. Then it was the exact opposite in the second half.”

After falling behind 4-0 early, the Hawkeyes put together a 15-3 run that gave them a lead they wouldn’t relinquish the entire first half. Once again setting the tone offensively was sophomore forward Zach McCabe, who scored a career-high 20 points on 7-of-13 shooting Tuesday, prompting head coach Fran McCaffery to describe his outing as “spectacular.”

This comes three days after McCabe scored the first six points in Iowa’s win over Michigan last weekend.

"Lately, it seems like they've been leaving me open, so I take the open shot," McCabe said. "I've been hitting shots and making plays, getting people open, and try to get rebounds and stuff like that.

"I'm just playing with a lot of energy and toughness and try to bring toughness to our team."

In addition to McCabe's performance, three other notable efforts came from senior guard Matt Gatens (12 points and six rebounds), sophomore guard Devyn Marble (18 points, five rebounds, three assists) and White (nine points and five rebounds).

Iowa would build its lead up to 34-23. Then all hell broke loose near the end of the first half.

The Boilermakers would go on an 8-2 run, trimming the Hawkeyes' lead to five points at halftime. Purdue then would force McCaffery to call a timeout less than two minutes into the second half after tying the game at 36-36. Following the timeout, the Boilermakers would continue their surge and put the finishing touches on a 30-9 run that allowed them to hold a 53-43 lead.

"Some of it was fatigue, some of it was poor decision-making, and some of it was, you know, they were executing," McCaffery said. "At some point, I think you have to give Purdue credit for executing down the stretch better than we did."

Three areas ultimately cost Iowa on this night – rebounding, turnovers and missed free throws. The Hawkeyes allowed Purdue to haul in 16 boards at the offensive end of the floor, with the bulk of them coming in the second half during the Boilermakers' comeback. Conversely, Iowa ended the game with 12 turnovers, nine of which occurred in the final 20 minutes of play.

As for the free-throw woes, the Hawkeyes shot a lackluster 19-

of-30 from the charity stripe, costing them the opportunity to really bury Purdue before the Boilermakers could begin their comeback.

"I think if we had just made our free throws, that would've been key," said Marble, who shot 5-of-6 from the foul line Tuesday. "We usually make them and we're a pretty good free-throw shooting team. Today, a few guys that normally don't miss missed a few.

"We missed 11 and lost by seven, so there you go."

With nearly two-thirds of the season complete, Iowa now has a week-long layoff ahead before returning to the hardwood Jan. 26 at home against Nebraska. That game between the Hawkeyes and Cornhuskers is set for a 6 p.m. Central tip-off and the game will be televised nationally on ESPNU.

"There's nine days off, but we still need to concentrate on what's next," Gatens said. "We're sitting in, I think, a pretty good place right now. A lot of opportunities ahead of us that we can win.

"We need to continue to stay hungry over the nine days, and have some great practices and get better."