

Hawkeyes fumble lead, fall to Huskers

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – On a night where the Iowa Hawkeyes looked to take command, they instead took a costly step backwards. With a horrific defensive display down the stretch, Iowa let a 11-point first-half lead slip away and allowed Nebraska to escape Carver-Hawkeye Arena with a 79-73 win over the Hawkeyes on Thursday.

Instead of climbing back to .500 in Big Ten play, Iowa now sits at 3-5 in the conference standings and 11-10 overall following this defeat.

The issues defensively began at the midway point of the second half for the Hawkeyes. With 11:22 remaining, Iowa took a 50-43 lead following a highlight-reel slam dunk by senior forward Devon Archie.

From that point forward, however, the Cornhuskers proceeded to score on all but four of their remaining possessions – three of those in the game's final minute– and tallied 36 of their 48 second-half points during that stretch. Paving the way for Nebraska was guard Brandon Richardson, who finished with a game-high 25 points on 9-of-10 shooting, including 6-of-7 from 3-point range.

“It was disappointing because defensively tonight, that’s about as bad as you can play,” Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery said. “And I’m not blaming my players at all. We’ve got to do a better job. We did not play good defense tonight.

“Richardson’s a good player, but 9-of-10, 6-for-7, 25 points.

He hasn't shown that, but you've got to give him credit."

For the second straight contest, Iowa received a huge performance offensively from sophomore forward Zach McCabe, who matched his career high of 20 points he set back on Jan. 17 against Purdue. Of those 20 points, 13 of them came in the first half.

McCabe was one of four Hawkeyes to reach double figures scoring. Freshman forward Aaron White had another strong outing with 11 points and a team-high nine rebounds, while sophomore guard Devyn Marble finished with 15 points and senior guard Matt Gatens had 12 points.

The game began with both teams finding a shooting stroke early, as Nebraska made seven of its first 10 shots, while Iowa opened up 6-of-10 from the floor. The Hawkeyes would break a 19-19 tie by going on an 12-1 run that made it 31-20 in their favor. But the Cornhuskers would score eight straight points themselves to cut Iowa's lead to three.

"We were up 11. We've got to keep going," McCabe said. "You're up 11 and you got to get it to 15, 20. That's what we're not doing, and that's what we haven't done all season, really.

"We just got to be mentally tough, tougher physically. We need to stop giving them second opportunities."

After the Hawkeyes took a 38-31 lead with them into the locker room, Nebraska began the second half by scoring seven straight to tie the score at 38-38 apiece. Iowa then took control again and got it to the seven-point advantage it held when the defensive meltdown began.

"It was disappointing that we didn't learn from the two Purdue games that we lost almost exactly like this," White said. "We had leads, played well enough to win. Just couldn't get stops in the end."

Iowa will look to bounce back this weekend with a contest against No. 16 Indiana (16-5, 4-5) on Jan. 29 at Assembly Hall in Bloomington, Ind. The Hawkeyes enter having won four straight head-to-head match-ups with the Hoosiers. Tip-off is scheduled for 5 p.m. Central and the game will air nationally on the Big Ten Network.