

# COMMENTARY: Hawkeyes regain swagger at critical point (premium)

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*HawkeyeDrive.com*

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Over the course of 72 hours, the Iowa Hawkeyes went from falling to a low point of surrendering 103 points against Indiana to a high point of capping a season sweep of Minnesota on Wednesday in Carver-Hawkeye Arena.

Three nights ago, Iowa had perhaps the worst effort defensively it has ever had in the two seasons Fran McCaffery has been head coach. Not only was Indiana scoring at will, but it also was rebounding at will. That performance led to McCaffery openly questioning his team's toughness, or lack thereof.

On Wednesday against the Golden Gophers, there was a defensive tone set. Minnesota only made one of its first eight shots, had turned it over eight times, and the Hawkeyes had a 15-3 lead at one point in the first half. Now while the Golden Gophers did end the half on a 24-9 run to take a three-point lead into the locker room, Iowa needed to start that game exactly as it did.

Why? Because it needed to prove on its home court there wouldn't be any sort of carryover from that Indiana game, and before that, the second half of the previous contest against Nebraska where the Cornhuskers made shots at will in the final 10 minutes.

By jumping out to a 12-point lead as it did, on its home floor no less, was one of the most encouraging signs of this game

because it showed that whatever is being done during practice as a “teaching moment” for McCaffery could carry over into an actual game.

But even more so than the better effort at the defensive end was the guard play, which really proved to be a true difference-maker for the Hawkeyes on this night. Senior guard Matt Gatens and sophomore guard Devyn Marble were not going to let Iowa lose this game.

Keep in mind, Minnesota once had a 10-point lead in the second half, and suddenly, sophomore forward Melsahn Basabe is hitting free throws to put the Hawkeyes ahead 51-50. Then it seemed like the Golden Gophers would escape as they wound up shooting 10-of-19 from 3-point range in the game and guard Julian Welch was practically draining every 3-point attempt he took late.

But Gatens and Marble both showed their will to win in the second half. Gatens ended scoring a game-high 18 points and did so on 7-of-14 shooting from the floor. Even more impressive when looking at Gatens’ numbers was the fact that he didn’t turn the ball over once on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, Marble proved his worthiness of being considered “clutch” during the final minutes of Wednesday’s contest. First, he nailed a 3-pointer. Then he posterized Minnesota’s Ralph Sampson III to tie the game at 59-59. Then with Iowa up by two, Marble had the ball and waited for Gatens to make his move to the hoop. Once Gatens did, Marble found him for the easy lay-up that pushed the Hawkeye lead back into a two-possession game.

Without the efforts of those two players on Wednesday, there’s no way Iowa would’ve won this game. One of the reasons is because both Gatens and Marble possess demeanors that make them capable of two things: 1. Have the amnesia necessary to play basketball at a high level. 2. Not back down from

challenges. Neither player was afraid to have the ball in his hands late and both knew exactly what they needed to do when they didn't.

Going forward, Iowa once again has an opportunity to build off this against some pretty favorable match-ups with the next three games featuring the two teams at the bottom of the Big Ten at the moment – Northwestern and two battles against Penn State. If the Hawkeyes can exude the type of grit and toughness they displayed Wednesday in these next three games, things might start looking good once again.

As McCaffery said afterwards, this team has proven it can accept and conquer challenges. The next step is doing so on a consistent basis. That's where regaining that swagger Wednesday night proved to be critical.