

# COMMENTARY: Determined Gatens wills Hawkeyes (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Matt Gatens had an evening that will go down in Hawkeye lore Sunday, as Iowa pulled a 78-66 upset of No. 18 Indiana at Carver-Hawkeye Arena.

Gatens scored a career-high 30 points in the victory. But it wasn't the 30 points alone that made his performance special. It was how he ended up having this performance, and the appropriate context it needs to be put in, that made it one those on hand won't soon forget.

The 6-5 senior guard bleeds black and gold. He always has. Gatens committed to former head coach Steve Alford during his freshman year at Iowa City High (which coincidentally was my senior year at said school).

When Alford left for New Mexico in 2007, Gatens could've de-committed and found elsewhere to play college basketball. Instead, he opted to stay with his hometown team even with a coaching change. After two years at Iowa, Todd Lickliter was fired and replaced by current head coach Fran McCaffery. Again, an instance where Gatens could've left and chose not to.

In hindsight, maybe Sunday's performance isn't completely surprising. The reason for this is actually simple – Gatens has been doing this for most of the season. Well, at least in Big Ten play anyway.

Look back at all six of Iowa's victories during league play, and you'll see a common trend. Gatens has proven time and

again he has an ability to take over a game and put the Hawkeyes on his back. Sunday's win over Indiana was no exception.

I think back to games such as the one Iowa won at Minnesota. That night, Gatens went on a tear when the Hawkeyes completely had momentum in their favor. Same goes with the game Iowa won over Michigan last month.

Heck, three nights ago in State College, Pa., Gatens almost single-handedly capped an Iowa comeback at Penn State. He scored a game-high 21 points, with 19 of those points coming in the second half of a game the Hawkeyes wound up losing 69-64.

Now there's this game against Indiana. The Hoosiers had gone on a 9-0 run and trimmed what was a 19-point Hawkeye lead down to 10. This is when Gatens started developing the hot hand from beyond the arc. He sank five straight 3-pointers in the second half of Iowa's loss to Penn State, and proceeded to hit four straight 3s Sunday night at a time when the Hawkeyes desperately needed him to step his game up as he did.

Gatens has scored 51 points in the last two games. Considering he has never won Big Ten Player of the Week honors before, one would think maybe he finally will garner that accolade this week. Even if he doesn't, this recent stretch has been an example of how vital his role is for the Hawkeyes.

He's the team leader at both ends of the floor and has been the most consistent player for Iowa all season long. You know exactly what you're going to get from him, and he still goes out there and can amaze night after night. That's a rare trait for any athlete to have.

When it's all said and done, Gatens won't be first-team all-Big Ten, and it's highly unlikely his name gets called during the NBA Draft next June. But he will be considered one of the best to ever don the Iowa uniform, and that's deservedly so.

As much as people want to see him have the opportunity at some sort of postseason (even if it's the CBI), the odds still don't appear to be in Iowa's favor of this happening just yet. So with that in mind, my hope for Hawkeye fans is they start building up an appreciation for Gatens now before he plays his final game inside Carver-Hawkeye Arena. For his sake, I hope the last two home games of the season feature the type of crowd that was on hand for Iowa's win on Sunday.

This story might not have the kind of ending many would've hoped for, but despite that, Gatens has been determined and his will to win has become unparalleled. He's the kind of player Iowa fans should appreciate, because through the good times and bad, Gatens stuck it out and has been nothing but a positive contributor to this team, especially this season.

Regardless of how this season ends for Iowa, one thing is for certain – Gatens won't go down without fighting, so you can count on Iowa not going down without a fight, either.