

# COMMENTARY: Finally turning the corner (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Before Fran McCaffery was named Iowa's head coach back in 2010, his predecessor spoke about the importance of one day "turning the corner."

That never took place during the three years Todd Lickliter coached the Hawkeyes. But as the second season of McCaffery's tenure winds down, it's now safe to say Iowa has finally "turned the corner."

The Hawkeyes' 67-66 win over No. 16 Wisconsin sealed this in my eyes, and there are plenty of reasons why I feel this way.

First off, consider that this victory over the Badgers was the second for Iowa this season (the Hawkeyes won the first meeting Dec. 31 in Madison, Wis.). Considering that Wisconsin's other losses this season have all come to teams ranked in the top 25 – something Iowa is still far from right now – doing this once might seem successful to some. To beat the Badgers twice in one season, it's just rare to have happen.

Two other factors make this particular performance impressive. For one, the Hawkeyes had just defeated a ranked Indiana squad four days earlier and this win over Wisconsin became the fourth over a ranked opponent this season. The other thing to consider is that Iowa never trailed. Not once. There was a moment where the Badgers tied the game in the early going, but a Wisconsin comeback never materialized.

Now some are going to say "too little, too late" as it

pertains to how this season will ultimately end for the Hawkeyes, and that's a fair point. Iowa has lost 13 games this season that feature defeats to the likes of teams such as Campbell, Clemson, UNI, Nebraska and Penn State. Yet the Hawkeyes also have the aforementioned four victories, some of which a team currently on the bubble would kill to have on its NCAA tournament resume.

Nothing has changed as far as what it takes for Iowa to be dancing – the only way this has a chance of happening is if the Hawkeyes miraculously win four games in four days at the Big Ten Tournament in Indianapolis two weeks from now.

But go back to expectations. Iowa won 11 games last season after only winning 10 games the season prior. The Hawkeyes currently possess seven victories in Big Ten play alone. They've won 15 games overall and still have three remaining regular season games left that are all winnable.

Now the conversations of Iowa playing in any sort of postseason are not only alive, but they're alive and well. Just like when college football teams that get hot late in the season typically end up in better bowl games, a college basketball team that manages to end its season on a strong note is going to gain heavy consideration for the postseason, whether it's the NCAA tournament, the NIT or the CBI.

Iowa's next contest comes Feb. 26 at Illinois, a place where the Hawkeyes have won once in the last quarter-century. Yet consider what will be at stake – if Iowa leaves Assembly Hall triumphant, it will guarantee itself no worse than the No. 8 seed in the Big Ten Tournament and could possibly even inch itself closer to being the No. 7 seed.

Given the strength of the conference this season, finishing seventh or eighth ought to provide enough consideration to play past the Big Ten Tournament. Again, the Hawkeyes will benefit greatly from both a strong finish to the regular

season and a slew of marquee wins.

That is a sign of “turning the corner.” McCaffery has this team going in the right direction and it couldn’t prove to be anymore obvious after Thursday night.