

Hawkeyes finish off sweep of Badgers

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – On a miserable evening weather-wise, the Iowa Hawkeyes were anything but.

Coming off a 12-point victory earlier in the week against Indiana, Iowa jumped out to an early lead Thursday night and never looked back, beating No. 16 Wisconsin 67-66 at Carver-Hawkeye Arena. The win capped a sweep of the Badgers this season and the Hawkeyes now sit alone in seventh place of the Big Ten at 7-8 in conference and 15-13 overall.

“It’s a big step for us,” freshman forward Aaron White said. “Beating them down at their place was Step One. Realizing that they were going to come with their best shot on our home floor and taking the first punch and reacting how we did, it’s just huge for us, it’s huge for the program

Once again leading the way for Iowa was senior guard Matt Gatens. After scoring a career-high 30 points against the Hoosiers, Gatens went for another career-high Thursday, finishing with 33 points, 18 of which came in the first half.

“He just pulled the trigger, and once he got going, he was on fire,” Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery said.

In the Hawkeyes’ last three games, the Iowa City native has accumulated 84 points. McCaffery said he hadn’t seen a player perform over a three-game stretch the way Gatens has since the second half of Iowa’s 69-64 loss to Penn State back on Feb. 16.

Taking it a step further, sophomore forward Melsahn Basabe

likened Gatens' performances over the past week to that of former BYU guard Jimmer Fredette, now of the Sacramento Kings, and the success he had last season for the Cougars.

"You get in that zone and you don't really care who's on you," Gatens said. "You just want to get the ball and go put it in."

Gatens scored 10 of Iowa's first 13 points on the night and was the focal point in the Hawkeyes jumping ahead 6-0 at the start. Of the seven 3-pointers he made, Gatens drained four of the seven during the first half on 100 percent shooting from beyond the arc.

Iowa held a 43-34 halftime lead and bumped its lead up to 49-36 before a 12-2 run by Wisconsin allowed the Badgers to climb back into the contest and find themselves down 51-48. Then it was the Hawkeyes' turn to go on a 12-4 run completed by a lay-up from White that forced Wisconsin to burn a timeout.

Despite not making a single bucket in the game's final 7:29, Iowa found a way to keep its lead and was ahead 63-61 when sophomore guard Devyn Marble made two enormous free throws to make it a two-possession game.

"It was just baffling to me, but it happens," Marble said after an 11-point, 8-assist outing. "I wasn't really too down about it. I had a lot of confidence in myself, and I practice those situations all the time in practice by myself.

"I just went up there and knocked them down like it was nothing."

After Gatens would also make a pair of free throws down the stretch himself, Wisconsin's Jordan Taylor nailed a 3-pointer as time expired to make it a one-point game.

With three games remaining before the 2012 Big Ten Tournament in Indianapolis, Ind., the Hawkeyes will head on the road for

their next two contests, starting with a trip on Feb. 26 to Champaign, Ill. for their lone meeting this season with Illinois. Iowa has won once at Assembly Hall – during the 1998-99 season – in the last 25 years. Tip-off is scheduled for 5 p.m. Central and the game will air nationally on the Big Ten Network.

While plenty of discussion will continue to center around Illinois' recent woes, the Hawkeyes will be looking for their third straight win and a chance to climb back towards .500 in Big Ten.

"To be able to see them kind of enjoy all this hard work, to see the students rush the floor, the fourth ranked team we've beaten this year, it just goes to show you what they're capable of doing," McCaffery said.