

COMMENTARY: Guard play steps up in win over Huskers (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

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LINCOLN, Neb. – At a time when the Iowa Hawkeyes really needed to generate some offense Wednesday against Nebraska, the backcourt managed to deliver, guiding Iowa to a 62-53 victory over the Cornhuskers inside the Devaney Center.

The four players in particular I want to focus on here are the ones who really seemed to carry their weight at the offensive end during the second half – Josh Oglesby, Matt Gatens, Devyn Marble and Bryce Cartwright.

Let's start with Oglesby. Here's a true freshman who made only his fifth career start Wednesday evening. After Iowa shot a meager 9-of-24 from the floor in the first half (including just 1-of-7 from 3-point range), Oglesby set the tone in the second half by draining a pair of 3-pointers. He finished the game with eight points just three nights after a game where he scored nine points against Illinois, all of which came in the second half.

With teams game-planning to stop Gatens, Oglesby is a player that needs to continue growing here in the tail end of the season, especially in the second half when opponents make defensive adjustments to ensure Gatens isn't the one beating them. This is kind of his audition for staying in the starting lineup next season. If he continues to have nights like the last two, he'll remain on the right track as far as staying in the starting lineup is concerned.

This leads me to Gatens and the role both he and Marble played in the second half. Gatens is coming off being named co-Big Ten Player of the Week last week, and only had five points in the first half Wednesday against Nebraska. Meanwhile, Marble was completely shut out in the first half and was essentially a non-factor.

But right after the Cornhuskers trimmed the Hawkeye lead down to 31-30 early in the second half, this duo of second-generation Iowa basketball players combined to score the next 16 Hawkeye points in the game. What was just a one-point lead became a 12-point lead for Iowa as a result.

This stretch began with Gatens hitting a 3-pointer that put the Hawkeyes up 34-30. After Nebraska scored to cut its deficit down to two, Marble got his first points of the game with a lay-up. Gatens then proceeded to hit another 3-pointer and also had a dunk, while Marble found his stroke and hit a pair of 3-pointers himself.

With Iowa up 47-35, the next seven Hawkeye points in the game came from Cartwright, who was only playing in his third game back following an ankle injury suffered back on Feb. 11. He nailed a jump shot that extended the lead to 14, then following five unanswered Nebraska points, he drew contact on a floater he made right before the U-8 timeout. Cartwright missed the free throw that would've capped the 3-point play, but he later sank a 3-pointer himself that pushed Iowa ahead for good.

The biggest takeaway from this game is that if Iowa's going to be successful both on Saturday against Northwestern and in the Big Ten tournament next week, guard play will be key. It's what led to the Hawkeyes avenging an earlier loss to Nebraska this season on the Cornhuskers' home court Wednesday night. Guard play is what will play a significant role the rest of the way, whether it's Iowa keeping its winning ways going, or the Hawkeyes fading away down the final stretch.