

Hawkeyes unable to squash Wildcat dreams

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – The Iowa Hawkeyes squandered a 15-point first half lead and found themselves coming up short Saturday, as Northwestern kept its NCAA tournament hopes alive with a 70-66 win over Iowa at Carver-Hawkeye Arena. As a result, Iowa finished in a tie for seventh place with Northwestern in league play at 8-10, but will be the No. 8 seed in next week's Big Ten Tournament. The Hawkeyes also fell to 16-15 overall with Saturday's defeat.

On an afternoon where Iowa honored four seniors as part of Senior Day, the Hawkeyes used an early 15-0 run to catapult themselves toward a 28-13 lead on the Wildcats with 9:27 left in the first half. But Northwestern used the rest of the first half by putting on a clinic at both ends of the court, outscoring Iowa 29-7 en route to a 42-35 halftime advantage.

"They got a lot of deflections that led out to easy opportunities," senior guard Bryce Cartwright said. "We didn't make them work to get back into the lead."

The Wildcats found themselves equipped to overcome their 15-point deficit in the first half because of two things – offensive rebounds and turnovers. Despite being outrebounded by Iowa, Northwestern hauled in 27 boards, 14 of which came at the offensive end and led to 11 second-chance points. At the other end, the Hawkeyes committed 18 turnovers, 13 of which came in the first half.

"They went 1-3-1 and we had no problem with it," Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery said. "Then they amped up the intensity

of it. Then we started going side to side and we just weren't seeing the guys that were open."

In the second half, Iowa climbed back and got its deficit down to 66-64 following a 3 by senior guard Matt Gatens, who scored a team-high 17 points while locking down defensively on Northwestern forward John Shurna by holding the Big Ten's leading scorer to nine points on 4-of-11 shooting.

After a missed free throw by Shurna, Iowa got the rebound trailing 68-66 and had a chance to win in regulation when Cartwright found freshman guard Josh Oglesby open for a 3 in the corner. Oglesby's shot was on mark, but didn't go through the cylinder, and Northwestern was able to convert free throws at the other end to seal it.

"I thought it was in and Coach even said afterwards he thought it was in," Oglesby said. "It just hit the front of the rim and didn't go in."

"I didn't feel like my feet were completely set. I was kind of in a rush."

Iowa will face Illinois in the first of four Big Ten Tournament first round games being held on March 8 at Bankers Life Fieldhouse in Indianapolis, Ind. The Fighting Illini won the lone regular season meeting 65-54 on Feb. 26 in Champaign, Ill. Tip-off is scheduled for 10:30 a.m. Central, with the game being televised nationally on the Big Ten Network. The winner will face top-seeded Michigan State in the quarterfinals on March 9.

"We know what they're all about and we've got payback on our minds," Gatens said. "We need to go there and have the mentality that we're going to be there for four days, but it starts with the first game and Illinois is a quality opponent."

"We're going to have our hands full."