

COMMENTARY: Making the case for postseason (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

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INDIANAPOLIS, Ind. – The Iowa Hawkeyes were eliminated from the 2012 Big Ten Tournament on Friday by No. 8 Michigan State and in all likelihood saw their 2011-12 season come to a close.

The 92-75 final wasn't indicative of how ugly this game really was. If anything, this game will probably be remembered for head coach Fran McCaffery mimicking official Ted Valentine (brilliantly, I might add) in the final minute of the first half after being called for a technical foul. While Valentine tried his best to hijack this game from both teams, officiating wasn't what cost the Hawkeyes this game, so I'll digress.

As bad as it was from Iowa's standpoint, the team that clobbered it Friday won a share of the Big Ten regular season title and one that will probably make a deep run towards the Final Four this month.

Right now, the Hawkeyes sit at 17-16 and let's be honest – 17-16 isn't going to be enough to make the NIT.

I bring this up because after the game, Iowa athletics director Gary Barta basically said it's NIT or bust, even though the College Basketball Invitational (CBI) is probably a better-suited postseason tournament for the Hawkeyes if they are to be in one. Barta talked about having to draw a line as far as postseason goes.

Now personally, I'll admit I'm not fond of any postseason

tournament that isn't the one featuring 68 teams. But with that being said, this team had its first winning season in five years and to be honest, it could make a deep run in the CBI if it participated. Look at what that tournament has done for a team like VCU, who won it in 2010 and pulled off an improbable run to the Final Four last year. Oregon won the CBI last season, winning two of three in the championship round against Creighton, who won the MVC tournament earlier this week.

The players don't want this season to end. Senior guard Matt Gatens, an Iowa City native who poured his heart and soul into this program, doesn't want it to end. Iowa's not really in a position right now to look down upon something like the CBI, and doing so is a complete disservice to someone like Gatens.

I realize 17-16 isn't a superb record by any means, but I'd also argue that the players deserve an opportunity. For one thing, it's only going to help the players who will be back next season. For another, it's a chance to play games at Carver-Hawkeye Arena in front of fans that, this year, would actually pay to go see a CBI game.

No one is saying this should become a standard, but given the hell this program was in before McCaffery arrived, the benefits outweigh the drawbacks.

Now again, I don't expect this to happen. It would honestly be surprising if this team does reach the NIT with a worse record than it had five years ago when it didn't participate in that event.

But if it's really about continuing on a path that allows what McCaffery's envisioning for his program to become a reality, this isn't a bad idea. I would imagine the CBI wanting a program like Iowa to take part, and Iowa declining this sets a bad precedent going forward.

A line can still be drawn, but sometimes it's O.K. to revise

the line. This is one of the times Barta should consider it.