

COMMENTARY: Contributions all around (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – The scene was everything one could want for a big-time rivalry game. Between Iowa and Iowa State entering as fairly even teams with high aspirations and a raucous crowd inside Carver-Hawkeye Arena, Friday's contest between these two intrastate rivals had it all.

The Hawkeyes won 80-71. Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery called it his team's best performance of the season. Conversely, Iowa State head coach Fred Hoiberg was less than pleased, saying the Hawkeyes probably deserved to win by more than nine points.

There are two key reasons why Iowa pulled off this monumental victory. One, it did everything it set out to do going in. Two, all nine players who saw playing time Friday night contributed in some way, shape or form.

Yes, the rotation was tightened and no, it wasn't as though the nine players who played all had their best games Friday night. They all had ups and downs over the course of 40 minutes. But they all played a role, which makes this win all the more meaningful for Iowa.

The most telling stretch came in the second half as the Hawkeyes started to separate themselves. In the first half, Iowa only got six points from its bench. At a time where it was ahead 48-41 and the game still hung in the balance, the next 12 Iowa points came from reserves.

This is huge because from an offensive standpoint, players

like Devyn Marble and Mike Gesell didn't necessarily have their best nights. Even then, both of them did their part. Everyone did.

Iowa State turned the ball over 19 times, which led to 22 Hawkeye points. Iowa also managed to out-rebound the Cyclones, who came into Friday's game as the nation's leading rebounding team. With Iowa State jacking up 28 3-point attempts and only making nine of them, there were going to be plenty of opportunities to grab long rebounds. Then at the offensive end, Iowa hauled in 15 boards. Again, huge.

If individual performances are worth pointing out, here are two of them. First, for Iowa State, its leading scorer was held scoreless. That's not a misprint. Will Clyburn, someone who had 32 points in a win over BYU last weekend, played 24 minutes, shot 0-of-5 from the floor and never got to the free-throw line.

Conversely for the Hawkeyes, they received another stellar performance Friday night from Anthony Clemmons. He scored 14 points, seven of which came in a crucial stretch late in the second half. Clemmons also had second straight game with eight assists and only turned the ball over once.

Here's someone who has played his best basketball since being inserted into the starting lineup, which says a lot. As a matter of fact, all three freshman who played (and started) have done well.

Games like Friday night are when Iowa is at its best and will continue to play at its best this season. That's big in terms of exposure, playing in front of a lively crowd with an energized student section.

Once again, the key for this team is consistency. If Iowa can put together more nights like Friday, where contributions are coming across the board from all those seeing the court, this team will continue to win and will make the NCAA tournament.

That's obviously easier said than done, but it's possible.

Hawkeye fans ought to remember this one and enjoy it. Because if everything does come together this season, Friday night will be the one to look back on first.