

COMMENTARY: Living by the 3 (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

DES MOINES, Iowa – There's a well-known adage in basketball about how teams who live by the 3-pointer will ultimately end up dying by it as well.

The 3-point shot might end up being what does the Iowa Hawkeyes in when this season's all said and done, but on Saturday, it's what lifted them past Northern Iowa 80-73 during the inaugural Big Four Classic.

It's strange in the sense that when the Hawkeyes last played inside Wells Fargo Arena one year ago, it was a barrage of 3-pointers by Creighton that buried Iowa that day. But that was all last season.

Coming into Saturday's game, 3-point shooting had been unkind to the Hawkeyes. Iowa entered having shot just a little over 30 percent from behind the arc and there were some nights where 3-pointers just weren't falling for this team.

Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery and his players all insisted throughout their shooting woes that the 3s would eventually drop. This proved to be the case against Northern Iowa. Junior guard Devyn Marble and freshman guard Mike Gesell scored 30 and 23 points, respectively. You know why? Because they were a combined 8-of-15 shooting 3-pointers. Heck, Gesell made the first four attempts he took. As a team, the Hawkeyes were 12-of-25.

As a matter of fact, one of the biggest shots in the entire game came courtesy of the 3, and it wasn't even shot by either

Marble or Gesell. It was from sophomore forward Aaron White.

The Strongsville, Ohio native made one field goal the entire game and finished with seven points. But that one 3-point bucket he made took what was a 61-55 Iowa lead and extended it to nine points. That shot crushed any momentum the Panthers had in the second half and from that moment on, there was never a doubt that the Hawkeyes would end up winning.

Part of the onslaught of 3-point attempts had to do with Iowa's game plan, as White said afterwards the Hawkeyes knew they'd get the looks given the way Northern Iowa plays defense. But the other aspect of it here is McCaffery allowing his entire team to have that green light. He wants them to take those looks whenever they present themselves.

This is something that we're going to continue seeing with this team as it progresses through the season and enters Big Ten play later this month. The nights the 3-pointers are falling, as was the case Saturday afternoon, those are when Iowa has a chance to play at its absolute best.

It's also worth noting though that just because the Hawkeyes made these shots against the Panthers doesn't mean that will be the case every night going forward. Again, the chances are good that whenever this team's fate does get sealed come March, it will likely be after an off-night from 3-point land, much like previous games earlier this season.

Iowa will continue to live and die by the 3-pointer. On Saturday, it managed to live because of it.