

COMMENTARY: The difference between good and great (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

ANN ARBOR, Mich. – Anyone who witnessed Iowa getting shellacked 95-67 Sunday afternoon by No. 2 Michigan saw the difference between good and great. Iowa is a good team and Michigan is a great team.

As simple as that seems, that was really the case. For a good portion of the first half, the Hawkeyes showed why they're a good team that still has plenty to play for. But over the course of 40 minutes, the Wolverines showed why they're the best team in the Big Ten right now.

Michigan's a team that's every bit worthy of its current No. 2 ranking and after seeing both the Wolverines and Indiana in person this week, I'm telling you Michigan's better. Yes, this game was at Crisler Center as opposed to Iowa playing Indiana at home last week. But here's the difference: When Indiana had chances to bury Iowa on New Year's Eve, it couldn't. When Michigan had its chances Sunday, it did bury the Hawkeyes and did so in an emphatic fashion.

Now this doesn't excuse the fact that Iowa's defense was atrocious enough that head coach Fran McCaffery questioned his team's toughness. Over the final 26:10 of the game, Michigan shot 28-of-43 from the floor. But in the second half specifically, the Wolverines made everything they did look easy and an 11-point halftime lead quickly shot up to 16 points when McCaffery made the move of benching all five of his starters.

Iowa found itself trailing by as much as 35 points in the second half of a game where it was tied 29-29 with the No. 2 team in the country with 3:30 remaining before halftime. One of the Hawkeyes' worst halves of basketball this season aligned with an opponent that came in shooting the lights out of the basketball all year and rediscovered its shooting stroke just before halftime.

Michigan ended the first half making eight straight buckets and that streak carried over into the second half. As the game was slipping away from Iowa, the Wolverines had a stretch that consisted of 13-of-14 made buckets, including 6-of-7 from behind the arc.

That's why they're a great team. They can get in a hole like they did against a team like the Hawkeyes and then just shoot so efficiently that anyone who didn't see the game would've thought Iowa was overmatched from start to finish.

Going back to the other half of this premise, yes, Iowa is still a good team and I believe it to be as such. The odds of them winning either of their first two games were slim to begin with considering they were playing a pair of top five teams in Indiana and Michigan. But before the Wolverines went on their fury, the Hawkeyes showed their potential.

McCaffery was asked afterwards about getting those two teams out of the way now and fired back by saying the rest of the schedule is still tough because of the Big Ten's caliber top-to-bottom. In that aspect, he's right. But at the same time, this was the only time Iowa was playing Michigan (barring a match-up in the Big Ten Tournament) and the second game with Indiana isn't until March. So while the league is a bear and will continue to be as such, I highly doubt anyone else in the Big Ten scores 95 points on the Hawkeyes between now and that March 2 date at Assembly Hall.

Assuming Iowa still manages to be around a .500 team in

conference play and can keep itself in the at-large discussion come the Big Ten Tournament (which remains a pretty realistic expectation for this team), it'll learn from Sunday's blowout. Folks in Iowa City shouldn't press the panic button just yet because this game came down to one team being good and the other displaying its potential of greatness.