

Hawkeyes tame Wildcats to snap skid

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

EVANSTON, Ill. – Nearly two weeks since opening Big Ten play, the Iowa Hawkeyes finally secured their first conference win of the season Sunday and in doing so, rid themselves of a proverbial monkey that had hung around for nearly three years.

Iowa took its frustration from losing three games to three ranked opponents out on Northwestern, who it beat 70-50 for the Hawkeyes' first win at Welsh-Ryan Arena since March 2008. The victory puts Iowa in a three-way tie at 1-3 in Big Ten play and 12-5 overall. It also was Fran McCaffery's first win as Iowa's coach over Northwestern and snapped a five-game losing streak the Hawkeyes had against the Wildcats dating back to 2010.

The things Iowa lacked against teams like Indiana, Michigan and Michigan State were things the Hawkeyes had on display Sunday. Efficient scoring, toughness, leadership. Everything it didn't possess during its three-game losing streak was there against Northwestern.

"We were locked in," senior forward Eric May said. "We took care of business. That's a tough cover, guarding Northwestern at their place, with their offense. We took the challenge and I think we did well."

Iowa managed to take a 25-15 lead with it into halftime following an unwatchable first half in terms of offense, as the two teams combined to shoot 15-of-52 from the floor in those first 20 minutes. It was a portion of the game though McCaffery felt was critical for his team.

As it turned out, Northwestern simply couldn't buy a bucket. The Wildcats finished shooting 15-of-51 (29.4 percent) for the entire game. From 3-point range, Northwestern shot an anemic 5-of-26.

"The pressure was giving them trouble. They weren't getting anything easy," McCaffery said. "We weren't giving them a lot of [second chances]. That's the one thing about this team. When they get seconds, it makes you guard them again and they usually break you down."

The Hawkeyes' first half was sparked by junior guard Devyn Marble, who scored all eight of his points early on. After Northwestern cut Iowa's lead to 25-19 right away in the second half, McCaffery called timeout.

From that moment on, Iowa dominated. Igniting the Hawkeyes' second-half fury was sophomore forward Aaron White. The Strongsville, Ohio native scored seven straight points in the second half to push Iowa's lead up to 34-23 and ended up finishing with a game-high 17 points, along with six rebounds and four assists.

"I wanted to make an emphasis to not only lock in defensively, but be aggressive offensively and jump that lead back out," White said. "We had it at 10, but when you have it at 10, you want to jump it to 15, then 20. That's what we did."

Once White set the tone, it was production from the Hawkeye bench that put the game completely out of reach. Inside the arc, it was junior forward Melsahn Basabe who shot 5-of-6 from the floor and came away with 11 points. Behind the 3-point line, sophomore guard Josh Oglesby began heating up and nailed four 3-pointers to account for 12 of his 14 points he finished with.

"They went to the 1-3-1 and our game plan was to move the ball quick and make the defense shift side-to-side," Oglesby said. "We did that, and it feels good to finally make some shots."

Iowa now gets five days in-between games. The Hawkeyes' next contest takes place the evening of Jan. 19 at Carver-Hawkeye Arena against Wisconsin, who is currently one of two Big Ten teams still undefeated in conference play. Tip-off is scheduled for 7 p.m. Central with the game being televised nationally on the Big Ten Network.

Iowa will be conducting a special pre-game ceremony paying tribute to the late Chris Street, as its game versus the Badgers falls on the 20th anniversary of his death. Street was killed in an accident during his junior season with the Hawkeyes.