

# COMMENTARY: Growing trends speak volumes (premium)

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MINNEAPOLIS, Minn. – Any excuses being made for Iowa's performance in Big Ten play no longer apply after the Hawkeyes' 62-59 loss to No. 23 Minnesota at Williams Arena Sunday afternoon.

Iowa's defeat now has it at 3-6 in the Big Ten and 14-8 overall. It was also the fourth conference loss this season that could've easily gone the Hawkeyes' way and the fifth of their Big Ten losses to come by single digits.

But the reasons for why this is are simple and the problems facing this team are now becoming its identity.

This game began with the Golden Gophers jumping out to an early 14-2 lead, marking the third consecutive contest where Iowa comes out lackadaisical or uninspired. Of all the things that seemed to upset head coach Fran McCaffery after this latest loss, spotting Minnesota a 12-point lead was at the top of the list.

Once again, junior guard Devyn Marble struggled mightily. The bottom line is he's hurt. That injury he suffered just before Iowa's game against Michigan State last month is lingering. He and McCaffery can both dismiss it all they want, but it's pretty obvious something's up with him.

That's not to make any excuse for how Marble looked Sunday. But let's face it – he came into this game as the Hawkeyes' leading scorer and only took two shots. He was held scoreless and not because of anything Minnesota was doing. In the second

half, there was a span of 11:25 where Marble sat on the bench, and this was when Iowa looked like it would be on the cusp of winning this game.

The Hawkeyes almost won despite lackluster shooting yet again. Whether it was on the floor or at the free-throw line, shots weren't falling for Iowa most of this contest. The final numbers were as follows: 21-of-58 shooting, 7-of-23 from behind the arc and 10-of-17 from the charity stripe. None of these things have been rare occurrences here over the past month.

Finally, let's look at how Iowa unraveled. Senior forward Eric May had just converted an enormous 3-point play that put the Hawkeyes ahead 59-55 with 2:10 left in the game. Iowa proceeded to get outscored 7-0 in that final 2:10. Not only that, but there were a couple of turnovers coming at awful times and the Golden Gophers' go-ahead bucket came via a 3-pointer from Austin Hollins, who just so happened to be their leading scorer on the day.

This was the third time in Big Ten play where Iowa lost a game it led in the closing minutes. Just winning two of those three games puts the Hawkeyes above .500 and in the discussion for the NCAA tournament. Now, forget that.

The bottom line is this: For all the what-ifs that can be contemplated about Iowa, this team is a 3-6 squad that honestly deserves the record it has right now. The reasons for all these close losses are strong enough evidence to show that not only is something wrong with this team right now, but the solution probably won't come anytime soon, if ever.