

# Hawkeyes edge out Nittany Lions

By Brendan Stiles

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STATE COLLEGE, Pa. – Inside the final two minutes of Thursday's game, the Iowa Hawkeyes found themselves with another late-game lead, but on the brink of another late-game collapse.

Throughout the evening, Iowa was in position to bury a Penn State squad that entered 0-11 in Big Ten play. But the Hawkeyes allowed the Nittany Lions to hang around and be in position to add to a laundry list of nail-biting defeats for Iowa this season.

Except this time around, the Hawkeyes wouldn't squander that late-game lead. They wouldn't collapse. Instead, they executed at both ends of the floor when the situation called for plays to be made. As a result, Iowa escaped the Bryce Jordan Center with a 74-72 win over Penn State to move into a three-way tie for seventh place in the Big Ten at 5-7.

"Phenomenally proud," Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery said of his team's effort down the stretch. "We've had a number of tough games that we didn't close. We didn't play perfectly down the stretch. But we made enough free throws, made enough plays, got enough stops to beat a team that was going to fight you like no other team."

It began with Iowa jumping out to an early 17-7 lead before Penn State put together a 16-0 run to move ahead 23-17 and with a majority of that run taking place against the Hawkeye reserves. Iowa would respond with a 11-0 run sparked by the play of freshman guard Mike Gesell, who scored 10 of his 13

points during those first 20 minutes.

“McCaffery always tells me to keep looking for my shot,” Gesell said. “Because when my shot’s falling, it opens up things for other guys. I got that first one to fall in, then I got that second one, which might have been a little lucky, that And-1.

“I just kept shooting and then it opened up things for my teammates and I kept finding them, too.”

The Hawkeyes would take a 38-34 lead with them into halftime after sophomore forward Aaron White hit a 3-pointer from the corner as time expired in the first half. Iowa then looked as though it would slam the door on the Nittany Lions after Penn State’s Sasa Borovnjak was called for an intentional foul. White would only make one of two free throws and Penn State managed to trim the Hawkeye lead down to four points.

With Iowa ahead 70-68, senior forward Eric May made one of the biggest plays of the game for the Hawkeyes when he got involved in a tie-up resulting in a jump ball when the possession arrow was in Iowa’s favor.

“We knew that the possession was ours,” May said. “We jumped on it and three of our guys were right there. That was big time.”

White would miss the front end of a 1-and-1 and Penn State had a chance to tie it. But a lay-up attempt by Jermaine Marshall would be swatted away by junior forward Melsahn Basabe, who had four blocks on the evening.

“I knew we needed it,” Basabe said of his block. “I knew they were driving, so I kind of just had a sense of where they were going to go.

“I knew they were going to go and I was just prepared to react.”

Junior guard Devyn Marble then got fouled and sank a pair of free throws that accounted for two of his team-high 22 points. In the closing seconds, Marble would make two more key plays. After Basabe missed a free throw that would've made it a two-possession game, Marble committed a non-shooting foul with Iowa up 73-70 that sent Marshall to the charity stripe for two attempts. Marshall ended up making both attempts despite trying to intentionally miss the second in hopes of the Nittany Lions getting a putback off an offensive rebound.

"We had definitely gone over that one before," Marble said about practicing situations such as fouling ahead by three points. "We knew exactly what Coach wanted and we were all in tune. It worked out perfectly for us."

Marble then went back to the free-throw line for Iowa with one second remaining. McCaffery told him to miss his second attempt intentionally since Penn State was out of timeouts. Marble did, and a last-second heave by the Nittany Lions fell short of the hoop, preserving the Hawkeye victory.

"We wanted Marble to miss the last one," McCaffery said. "If it was 0.1, I might have told him to make it."

Iowa will seek its third straight win when it returns home to face Minnesota on Feb. 17. Tip-off is scheduled for 1 p.m. Central and the game will be televised nationally on the Big Ten Network. The Golden Gophers sit one game ahead of the Hawkeyes in the standings at 6-6 after defeating No. 20 Wisconsin in overtime earlier Thursday night.

In their previous meeting back on Feb. 3, Minnesota defeated Iowa, 62-59, thanks in large part to a game-winning 3-pointer by Austin Hollins with 11.5 seconds left.

"We got to get them," Basabe said. "They're coming into our place. We got to win that game. It's a personal game so to speak because we just played them and we felt like we should have won that game."

“We need to come full force for them because we respect them. We respect how they play. They have talent, they have good players. But we need to be locked and loaded.”