

Hawkeyes overcome deficit to blast Gophers

By Brendan Stiles

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – For the first seven minutes of Sunday's matinee between Iowa and Minnesota, the Hawkeyes looked downright awful. The Golden Gophers were crashing the boards, knocking down shots and befuddled Iowa at both ends of the floor.

Like any typical basketball game, Iowa eventually went on its run. The only thing was its run never really ended.

Iowa not only overcame a 21-5 deficit Sunday. It absolutely manhandled Minnesota to the tune of a 72-51 victory inside Carver-Hawkeye Arena. As a result, the Hawkeyes are now tied with the Golden Gophers for sixth place in the Big Ten, sitting at 6-7 in Big Ten play with five games left and 17-9 overall.

It was a perfect storm of sorts for Iowa as far as getting back in the game. Offensively, the Hawkeyes were sparked by sophomore forward Aaron White and junior guard Devyn Marble. Both players scored 15 points, with the bulk of those coming in the first half. White, in particular, kept attacking the hoop whenever the ball was in his hands.

"We're down 21-5, but the whole time, I'm thinking we're still going to come back and win the game," White said. "I haven't been quite as aggressive as I wanted to be in the past couple of games for whatever reason. I thought, 'What better of a time than to do it now and get us back in the game.'"

Defensively, Iowa switched to a zone defense – much like it

did in a win at Minnesota last season. Just like that game one year ago, the Golden Gophers looked flustered, having a stretch where they turned the ball over on six consecutive possessions.

After starting the game 6-of-9 shooting, Minnesota was held to just 17-of-47 shooting for the afternoon and committed as many turnovers (17).

"We started rebounding. They got too many offensive rebounds in the beginning," Marble said. "We had to get that knuckled down and then we had to start defending better and we did.

"I think the changes of our defense really had them struggling. We made some good coaching adjustments and it ended up working out for us in the end."

Late in the first half, the Hawkeyes would take their first lead after Marble sank a 3-pointer to go up 29-27. It was 31-29 in Iowa's favor when the Hawkeyes held for the final possession and junior forward Zach McCabe was fouled by Minnesota's Trevor Mbakwe while attempting a 3-pointer. McCabe knocked down all three free throws to put Iowa ahead 34-29 at halftime.

The second half then provided more of the same. Just as the Golden Gophers started to get something going, Iowa seized momentum entirely when junior forward Melsahn Basabe stole the ball along the baseline and dished it to senior Eric May for a dunk, plus one free throw to put the Hawkeyes up by 10. The lead would climb to as many as 23 points before the bench was emptied.

In 24 minutes of play off the bench, May finished with 10 points and led Iowa in rebounding with seven boards.

"Mel made such a spectacular play to go dive into the scorers' table and get me the ball," May said. "Those kind of plays spark an energy, spark a run and allow us to win games like

this.”

Iowa returns to the road later this week when it visits Nebraska on Feb. 21. Tip-off from the Devaney Center in Lincoln, Neb., is scheduled for 8 p.m. Central and the game will be televised nationally on ESPN2. The Cornhuskers enter with a 3-10 mark in Big Ten play following a 73-64 loss to No. 8 Michigan State on Feb. 16.

“We’re playing well,” head coach Fran McCaffery said. “We’re playing better. We’ve got a lot of different individuals contributing to what we’re doing.

“This is the time of year where teams tend to tire and feel pressure. For us, we’ve got s many different players contributing, everybody’s ready to go. Nobody knows who is going to get it done tonight and it’s a beautiful thing.”