

COMMENTARY: Inconsistency strikes (premium)

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BLOOMINGTON, Ind. – Watching the Iowa Hawkeyes lose 73-60 to top-ranked Indiana on Saturday wasn't so much a good team losing to a great team. It was watching one squad that's inconsistent not have enough to pull a monumental upset of a far more consistent team.

This final outcome should surprise no one. The Hoosiers are ranked No. 1 nationally for a reason and that reason was on full display inside Assembly Hall. But it wasn't because Indiana's so far head and shoulders above Iowa.

You want to know why the Hoosiers are going to win the Big Ten and probably even win the national championship this season? Because they're consistent with what they do. You want to know why Iowa is 18-11 overall, 7-9 in the Big Ten, and on the brink of a second straight NIT appearance? Because the Hawkeyes are still inconsistent with what they do.

At times on Saturday, Iowa showed it could go toe-to-toe with one of the best teams in the country away from Carver-Hawkeye Arena. Then there were times that the Hawkeyes couldn't do anything and would've been run out of Assembly Hall had Indiana brought its A-game.

Here's the evidence to back this: In the first half, Iowa scored 14 points. In the second half, it scored 46. Unfortunately for the Hawkeyes, this is the second straight road game where they've scored 60 points, but did so by scoring more than 40 in one half and less than 20 in the other. It happened just last week against a Nebraska squad

that's nowhere close to the caliber of opponent Indiana is.

The best basketball teams are the ones that feature players who know their exact roles and are consistent in playing them (at least more often than not) on a night-in, night-out basis. That's what you have right now in Indiana. Iowa, on the other hand, isn't there just yet.

If you took the points per game average of every Hawkeye player who sees regular minutes and added them together, you'd get more than the 60 Iowa scored Saturday. As a matter of fact, before Mike Gesell's foot injury forced him to sit out, that total number was above 70 points.

This season, the Hawkeyes have lost two games where they've scored at least 70 points. In other words, if Iowa was consistent with the scoring and the amount each individual player was providing, the talk surrounding this team would be about how it's a lock to play in the NCAA tournament.

Certain players have shown that consistency, but it hasn't come across the board. Now does this mean the Hawkeyes would've beat Indiana on Saturday? Not necessarily. But the upset was there for the taking because even though the outcome never really seemed in doubt, the Hoosiers never really separated themselves from the Hawkeyes until late.

Aaron White, Eric May and Devyn Marble all said afterwards how the aggressiveness was there, but not for the whole game, and how this is an issue Iowa needs to address entering the final week of Big Ten play. To a degree, they're right. It won't win every game, but the Hawkeyes have looked their best this season when that aggressiveness has been there for 40 minutes.

Iowa's close. Not close enough that it will find itself dancing two weeks from now (barring some sort of miracle at the Big Ten tournament in Chicago), but close. When the consistency that it currently lacks is there, that's when this team will finally win close games, finally get ranked, finally

be in a realistic position to compete for Big Ten titles and finally become a regular in the NCAA tournament.

This is how Indiana got to the point it's now at and that consistency – or lack of it on Iowa's end of things – is what stood out most on this night.