

Top-ranked Hoosiers too much for Hawkeyes

By Brendan Stiles

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BLOOMINGTON, Ind. – One team entered Saturday night's showdown inside Assembly Hall ranked No. 1 in the country. The other team entered with hopes of being talked about as a bubble team once again.

On the surface, this appeared to be a mismatch. The outcome would never be in doubt as Iowa saw itself defeated by top-ranked Indiana 73-60 in a game it never led. But the Hawkeyes, who fell to 7-9 in Big Ten play and 18-11 overall, weren't overwhelmed by the Hoosiers.

Defensively, Iowa played about as well as head coach Fran McCaffery could've hoped for. But it was in the first half when the Hawkeyes lost this game.

Even though Iowa only trailed by a dozen at halftime, it had as many turnovers (14) as it did points. Not only that, but the Hawkeyes allowed Indiana to crash the boards and the Hoosiers kept getting to the free-throw line while Iowa couldn't get anything going.

"We were not in sync offensively," McCaffery said.

Coming out of halftime, the Hawkeyes began to play more aggressive at the offensive end of the floor and it paid off. Junior guard Devyn Marble was able to get a hot hand and went from scoring just two points in the first half to finishing the game with a team-high 20 points.

"We were struggling to score and I had to look for my shot a little bit more. I had to take some more difficult shots than

normal," Marble said. "In the first half, I was trying to get too good a look.

"I just took what they gave me in the second half and it worked out from that standpoint."

Also contributing to the cause for Iowa were sophomore forward Aaron White and senior forward Eric May. Both players finished with seven rebounds. White also tallied 14 points.

As for May, he ended up scoring 12 points and played a total of 30 minutes off the bench in an effort that McCaffery described as "phenomenal."

"What are you going to say about the guy?," McCaffery said. "Guard a small guy, guard a big guy. Play a guard spot, play a forward spot. Offensive rebound, run the break, execute the half-court. Score, rebound, defend.

"The guy was fabulous."

But even though the Hawkeyes started to get it going offensively in the second half, so did the Hoosiers. Indiana scored 47 second-half points and was led by 7-0 center Cody Zeller, who posted a double-double of 22 points and 10 rebounds on the night.

The Hoosiers managed to coast their way to a win despite an off-night shooting across the board. Their only two made 3-point attempts of the entire game came in the final minute of play with the outcome well decided.

In the end, it was a game where the Hawkeyes were never really in a position to win. But that didn't mean there weren't opportunities the Hawkeyes let go to waste, either.

"In the first half, we played for them to not go on a run," White said. "We played good defense, held them to 26, but we couldn't get the ball in the hole. We were just kind of going East and West instead of North and South and attacking."

Iowa enters the final week of regular season play with a pair of home games against Illinois and Nebraska. The first contest against the Fighting Illini takes place on March 5 at 6 p.m. Central inside Carver-Hawkeye Arena. The game will be televised nationally on the Big Ten Network and will be the only regular season meeting this year between Iowa and Illinois.

Should the Hawkeyes lose to the Fighting Illini on Tuesday, they would be locked into the 8-9 game in the first round of the Big Ten Tournament, which would be played March 14 in Chicago.

“I’m excited to get back in [Carver] and play,” said May, Iowa’s lone senior on scholarship. “It’s a great way to end the season with two home games. I’m lucky for that.”