

COMMENTARY: Oglesby has redemption (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – For most of this 2012-13 season, Iowa sophomore guard Josh Oglesby has been a lightning rod. Brought in to be a 3-point assassin, the Cedar Rapids native has struggled mightily shooting the ball from behind the 3-point line, so much so to the point that harsh criticism has come his way from fans.

Yet Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery continued to keep faith in his sharp-shooter and on Tuesday, Oglesby delivered big in a 63-55 win over Illinois at Carver-Hawkeye Arena.

In all honesty, this shouldn't be as surprising as it felt the moment it happened. After all, Oglesby had just hit a clutch shot to lift Iowa to a win over Purdue last week in another performance kind of similar to what transpired Tuesday evening.

But because Oglesby's issues shooting the ball this season have become so glaring to the eyes of the Hawkeye faithful, doubts about him were out there, as well as doubts about why McCaffery continues to go to him.

There are a few things Iowa fans need to realize and these would all be worth mentioning even if he didn't hit those two 3-pointers against Illinois. First of all, without the services of freshman guard Mike Gesell, Oglesby is going to see minutes based on that alone.

Heck, he started the last two games before McCaffery decided to reward senior forward Eric May by putting him in the

starting lineup for his final two home games as a Hawkeye. But between backcourt depth being depleted and the fact that Iowa never went to freshman Pat Ingram on Tuesday, the minutes were going to be there for Oglesby and so were the opportunities.

McCaffery has stressed repeatedly this season about the things Oglesby has done well aside from shooting, things such as his defensive prowess and making the right reads when passing the ball. Simply put, Oglesby has earned the trust of McCaffery and the coaching staff because he's showing he has other parts to his game.

Those parts might not seem blatantly obvious, nor might they show up in a box score. But when Oglesby is on the floor, his plus-minus (a stat I've kept track of with every player during Big Ten play) suggests Iowa is doing well. The fact that he has rarely been a minus for this team when he's out there shows that he's doing other things.

What stood out to me was after the second 3-pointer he drained when he made those back-to-back shots on Tuesday. As the ball went in and the crowd erupted, the Fighting Illini called timeout. The entire Hawkeye bench all ran over to Oglesby to high-five him before they went into their timeout huddle.

It's one thing for the coaches to have faith in someone. It's another when teammates do as well. That moment validated the trust Oglesby's teammates have in him, because they see the effort from him during practices and team activities when no one else is around.

Oglesby was the difference-maker against Illinois that many thought he would be. Maybe this is the start of a hot streak to close out the season. Maybe he goes back to shooting horrendously. But for one night at least, he had his redemption.

At a time his team needed him, Oglesby delivered.