

COMMENTARY: May has his day (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – With Eric May, it isn't all about the numbers.

Playing his last regular season game at Carver-Hawkeye Arena Saturday afternoon, May only scored two points. He also had six rebounds and what turned out to be a game-high six assists while playing 27 minutes against Nebraska.

But the only number that really matters to him right now is 20. That's the number of wins Iowa now has this season after defeating the Cornhuskers 74-60 and the argument can be made that May is one of the biggest reasons for this team's current success.

Consider this: The Hawkeyes will seek their 21st win of the season on Thursday against Northwestern at the Big Ten Tournament. That's the number of games Iowa won during May's first two seasons, combined.

My first season covering the Hawkeyes was that abysmal 2009-10 campaign, May's freshman year. They went 10-22 and the record doesn't fully illustrate how deep in the dregs Iowa was as a basketball program at that time. Todd Lickliter, the head coach who brought May to Iowa, was promptly shown the door and in came Fran McCaffery.

May was part of a recruiting class that consisted of four players and he was one three true freshmen. Those other two freshmen were Cully Payne and Brennan Cougill, both of whom are now currently playing at Horizon League programs.

As it turned out, May was the one who stuck it out and on Saturday, he received the proper recognition for doing so from the Hawkeye faithful. When you see where Iowa was May's freshman year and where it is today, you can't help but feel happy for him.

He had teammates before him that rightfully received the same respect for gutting it out as Iowa went through an overhaul as a program under McCaffery. But those guys like Jarryd Cole, Matt Gatens and Andrew Brommer never got to play in the NCAA tournament, whereas May might still get that opportunity should Iowa put together a good string of fortune next week at the United Center.

Afterwards, McCaffery said he wants his team to consider this as "the next step" taken rather than get caught up in what has already been accomplished. But again, it's amazing to think how this team is now being talked about again as a bubble team just three years after one of the worst seasons in school history.

When I think of May, it's a testament to him as much as anybody. His sophomore and junior seasons were O.K., but not anything special. McCaffery designated him the team captain when the season began and he flourished.

May accepted being a role player, someone who until this past week was coming off the bench and being that player who brought the intangibles night in and night out, the non-numbers, if you will.

Right now, it's still too early to tell what will end up happening with Iowa. Big picture wise, it has to beat Northwestern in the first round and likely get a win in the quarterfinals to get serious consideration from the selection committee.

But whether it's the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2006 or a second straight trip to the NIT, this is a season

May can be proud and his career is one Iowa fans will be able to appreciate one day. The Dubuque native left his mark on the Hawkeye basketball program and for one day at least, it was nice to see those on hand reward him with the ovation he deserved.