

# COMMENTARY: An unkind fate (premium)

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*HawkeyeDrive.com*

CHICAGO, Ill. – Another gut-wrenching loss came the Iowa Hawkeyes' way at the Big Ten Tournament on Friday, and one that may have solidified their position on the outside looking in at the NCAA Tournament.

Moments after watching a 12-point second half lead evaporate into a 59-56 loss to eighth-ranked Michigan State at the United Center, Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery his team was "deserving of a better fate" than what it received. This comment stemmed from what transpired over the final 10 minutes, as Iowa lost its cool with the officiating crew and lost its focus on the game itself.

Two things I'll get out of the way right now: First, yes, the officiating was bad. At the very least, it was inconsistent. Secondly, The inconsistency between when they made calls and what calls were being made proved costly in ways for Iowa because it changed the dynamic of its game.

Officiating wasn't the sole reason for the Hawkeyes not being able to beat Michigan State, but to say it wasn't a factor would be being naive to the game of basketball, especially when a referee such as Ted Valentine is involved like he was Friday.

Two reasons Iowa's fate may have been sealed on Friday. One is poor execution at both ends of the floor. The other reason was allowing Michigan State to have as many second-chance opportunities that it, as the Spartans managed to haul in 16 offensive boards.

Should the Hawkeyes merit conversation for next week's NCAA Tournament? No doubt. But what many don't seem to realize is that while Iowa might be one of the best 68 teams in the country, it's not really the best 68 teams that get in. Not when a school like Morgan State (who didn't even with the MEAC without its star player) suddenly goes off over a weekend in Vegas.

The only thing different about this loss compared to others is that the calls being made by officials eventually took their toll.

Good teams find ways to win games and can find a solid way of putting itself into NCAA tourney discussion without having officials impact their team's flow. Iowa had many chances like that all season.

One can complain about the officiating, but Iowa did just as much to making the challenge as difficult as it has been all season. Playing teams like Texas-Pan American, Central Michigan, Coppin State, South Carolina State isn't going to really help matters for the Hawkeyes. Iowa needed to beat Michigan State and proved unable to cap an Illini comeback.

The Hawkeyes had opportunities early on against teams like Wichita State and Virginia Tech and couldn't win those games. If anything was unkind, it wasn't Iowa's fate. It was its inability to make plays late in games, and in particular, games played on the road. Wisconsin took advantage of this against Michigan earlier in the day.

Now Iowa finds itself in a unique predicament where there are no more signature wins available for this team. Until Sunday comes, the Hawkeyes are going to sweat it out profusely. Unfortunately for Iowa, it's a position it has been in before.

The inconsistencies led to further anger from McCaffery making similar changes in depth Friday night and this burned him. Players like freshman center barely saw any second-half

minutes after playing an instrumental part in Indiana's.

The question now is where fate delivers for the Hawkeyes or continues to be unkind. Safe money would be on the latter.