

COMMENTARY: Finding the motivation (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – There was little doubt that Iowa entered its first round NIT contest a better overall team than its counterpart in Indiana State. But after missing the final cut for the NCAA Tournament on Selection Sunday, the question surrounding this team's motivation was a fair one to ask.

Would Iowa, even in front of a sellout crowd Wednesday evening, find the motivation needed to put away a team like Indiana State? The Sycamores were going to come into Carver-Hawkeye Arena hungry, especially since they had a résumé that included wins over NCAA tourney teams such as Miami (Fla.), Creighton and Ole Miss. Could the Hawkeyes set aside disappointment and fully shift their focus on trying to win this NIT tourney?

Iowa managed to pull out a 68-52 win over Indiana State on Wednesday, but it had to overcome a sluggish start to do so. The Hawkeyes only made four of their first 18 shots on the night and trailed by as much as eight points in the first half.

They looked like a team going through the motions against a squad that while inferior in talent, was having its way in transition. At one point in this game, the Sycamores were shooting 50 percent and had nine points off eight Iowa turnovers. But in the final minutes of the first half, Iowa used a 13-4 run to take a 31-30 lead with it into halftime.

From the start of that late first-half run to the final buzzer, the Hawkeyes played with a vengeance. They looked like

they wanted to be there. They embraced the crowd rallying for them and started playing with energy at both ends of the floor.

Simply put, Iowa found motivation. Players like Devyn Marble, Aaron White, Melsahn Basabe and Zach McCabe all played with more motivation.

Marble played one of his most complete games not just this season, but perhaps in his entire Hawkeye career. He left the floor with 24 points, five rebounds, six assists and four steals.

White posted a double-double of 11 points and 13 rebounds and this came just five nights after he was basically MIA against Michigan State in the Big Ten Tournament. Basabe ended up with nine points and eight rebounds, with a good chunk of those points and boards coming in the second half when Iowa began to separate from Indiana State.

And then there was McCabe, who had a stretch where he scored eight straight points for the Hawkeyes. Not only that, but it may have been the key stretch of the entire game. Iowa was up by seven points when the Sycamores were called for a technical foul for having six players on the floor. McCabe went to the line, made both free-throw attempts, then managed to sink a pair of 3-pointers to extend the Hawkeyes' lead to double digits and essentially putting the game out of reach.

Now with Stony Brook beating Massachusetts, Iowa gets the luxury of playing against the Seawolves on Friday back at Carver-Hawkeye Arena. Once again, the Hawkeyes will be playing a Stony Brook squad that while good, isn't as talented as Iowa is.

As long as the Hawkeyes keep the motivation they were able to find Wednesday night, there's no reason to think they won't go into the weekend one step closer to playing at Madison Square Garden in New York City in a few weeks.