

# COMMENTARY: Crowd making a difference (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

IOWA CITY, Iowa – If there was anything to be taken away from Friday night's NIT game between Iowa and Stony Brook, it was the significance a home-court advantage can play, especially in college sports.

Because the Hawkeyes entered with the higher seed (they were the No. 3 seed, while the Seawolves had the seventh seed), Iowa had the luxury of playing at home. But with the NCAA Women's Tournament taking place at Carver-Hawkeye Arena this weekend, the only way to assure the Hawkeyes of playing at home was to play this game Friday night, 48 hours after beating Indiana State.

Iowa made it work and in that 48-hour span somehow manage to sell out Carver-Hawkeye Arena for the second time in three nights. The Hawkeye faithful on hand were loud and ultimately rewarded, as Iowa defeated Stony Brook 75-63 to move into the NIT quarterfinals.

Normally when coaches and players rave about fans, what they say has to be taken with some grain of salt because most coaches and athletes regardless of team are going to speak highly of those who support them. But the home crowd made a huge difference for the Hawkeyes on Friday and this was legit in every way.

Never mind the notion of a school having consecutive sellouts for NIT games sounding absurd. The fans assisted Iowa in a big way. During the player introductions, which have to be done in a generic manner per NIT guidelines, Carver-Hawkeye Arena was

as loud as I could remember it at any point during the Fran McCaffery era.

There were many instances – whether it was Devyn Marble's hot start scoring 10 of Iowa's first 12 points or key dunks by Melsahn Basabe or 3s from various Hawkeye players – where it just seemed like the roof was going to blow off. That's how loud it got. Numerous times, too. Not just one specific moment.

Talking to players afterwards like Marble, Basabe and even senior forward Eric May, you could sense in their voices how the crowd energized each of them on Friday. Every single player to a T made mention of the fans during their postgame interviews and mentioned how it made a difference, especially when the Hawkeyes were able to completely seize momentum from the Seawolves late in the second half.

Now Iowa sees itself one win away from making a trip to New York City. The Hawkeyes will either travel to top-seeded Virginia, or get one last home game this season on March 27 against St. John's. It's not crazy to think Iowa players and coaches would much rather play the Red Storm at home.

If Iowa and St. John's tangle inside Carver-Hawkeye Arena, it'd be a safe bet that the place will be buzzing just like it was Friday and this past Wednesday when Iowa played Indiana State. As the Hawkeyes continue to progress as a team, this is also creating an opportunity for them to establish a difficult environment for opposing teams to play in.

Stony Brook found this out the hard way Friday. A home-court advantage can really be one for a team like Iowa. This week has been clear evidence of that.