

COMMENTARY: Showing poise under pressure (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

NEW YORK CITY, N.Y. – For most of the 2012-13 season, the Iowa Hawkeyes were a basketball team that seemed to shrink in the pressure of a game's closing moments. All the close, gut-wrenching defeats in Big Ten play had a role in Iowa ending up in a second straight NIT instead of reaching the NCAA Tournament.

But one thing has been evident in the Hawkeyes' NIT run, which now has them playing in the tourney's championship after winning 71-60 over Maryland on Tuesday in the semifinal round. Iowa is showing poise in crucial moments.

Frankly, it's the most encouraging aspect of this team's current four-game winning streak.

There are a lot of reasons why the Hawkeyes are finding success right now. Junior guard Devyn Marble is playing out of his mind. Freshman center Adam Woodbury said after Tuesday's game his confidence was "at an all-time high."

But perhaps more than anything else, the mindset of this team and how consistent it has been from the moment it learned it was playing in the NIT has stood out. This wasn't what the Hawkeyes intended, but they've channeled that energy.

Iowa looks and to this point has acted the part of a team that wants to be here. It has embraced everything that has come with being in the NIT and it has done so while keeping its focus on basketball.

Now this isn't to say Maryland didn't want to win because no

one gets to this point of the NIT, playing in what many consider to be the “mecca” of college basketball, without having any sort of desire to win. But the Hawkeyes came out ready to play at the start and never allowed the Terrapins to seize control from them.

Think back to their win last week at Virginia. The Cavaliers got close and even took the lead in the second half before Iowa stormed back and held off Virginia’s late rally.

Tuesday’s game, while played on a neutral court, presented similar parallels. This suggests development is being made.

There was one point in the second half where the Terrapins had momentum. They trimmed Iowa’s lead down to four points and got the Hawkeyes’ entire front court into foul trouble. But just like against Virginia, Iowa didn’t allow itself to be phased like it might have during Big Ten play.

The Hawkeyes once again showed they could play with a lead. Whether it was Marble, Anthony Clemmons, Zach McCabe or Eric May hitting clutch shots when Iowa needed them, the main takeaway here is that the Hawkeyes got them.

Now this team is playing for the NIT Championship on Thursday against a very athletic Baylor squad that beat BYU in the other semifinal game Tuesday night. The Bears are going to present a significant challenge for Iowa, significant enough that two months ago, there was potential for a team like Baylor to blow out a team like the Hawkeyes.

But if the recent developments of the NIT have shown anything, it’s that Iowa probably won’t go down without one last valiant effort that could carry over into what could be a promising 2013-14 season for the Hawkeyes.