

Hawkeyes mauled by Bears at the Garden

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

NEW YORK CITY, N.Y. – For four consecutive games, everything clicked for the Iowa Hawkeyes. They were winning, playing effective at both ends of the floor and every player seeing heavy minutes appeared to be on the same page.

On Thursday, nothing went right for Iowa. Shots didn't fall, its defense was lackluster and when the clock struck zero, the Hawkeyes watched as Baylor was recognized for winning the NIT Championship 74-54 on Thursday at Madison Square Garden.

This game began with Iowa shooting 3-of-13 from the floor. It finished the first half shooting 25 percent (7-of-28) and finished the entire game making just 18 field goals on 69 attempts. Making this even more baffling was the Hawkeyes made just 18 shots despite hauling in 20 offensive rebounds.

"That's effort. That's special. That should have equated to more success offensively," Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery said. "But I think what ended up happening is I think it affected our attention to detail defensively."

Baylor jumped out to an 11-4 lead in part because the Bears made four of their first five shots. Iowa's defense clamped down for the rest of the first half and found itself down 27-22 at halftime.

The Hawkeyes would have momentum early in the second half and cut their deficit down to 28-27. But Baylor went on a 9-2 run to push its lead back up to eight points and from there, the Bears began to look unstoppable as they made 15 of their final

23 shots.

Baylor's lead reached as many as 23 points, a deficit Iowa hadn't encountered since a 72-63 loss to Ohio State back on Jan. 22.

"We didn't play our best basketball clearly, offensively or defensively," sophomore forward Aaron White said. "We didn't really stick to the game plan. We didn't play as tough as we had been playing and we didn't play as together as we had been playing.

Leading the way for the Hawkeyes on this night were White and freshman guard Mike Gesell. White finished with 12 points and six rebounds while playing a team-high 34 minutes. As for Gesell, he played 17 minutes off the bench for Iowa and finished with a team-high 13 points on 4-of-6 shooting.

In what was his final game as a Hawkeye, senior forward Eric May tallied eight points before fouling out with 2:41 remaining. May exited the floor to a standing ovation from the Iowa fans on hand and to chants of his name from the Hawkeye faithful.

"It was special," May said. "I'm blessed to be a part of this program and to have fans like that is nice. I don't take that for granted."

As Iowa moves forward, it will lose May, but add three pieces in redshirts Kyle Meyer and Jarrod Uthoff, along with incoming freshman Peter Jok. The Hawkeyes will also have their leading scorer, junior guard Devyn Marble, returning for his senior season.

Marble knows what will be said on the outside and said he's ready for what's in store, even if it means he has to become a more vocal leader than he had previously been.

"I've always led by example and hoped my team would follow,"

Marble said after finishing with only six points Thursday night. "I tried to help out as much as I could down the stretch and needed to be more vocal."

Along those same lines, McCaffery said he sees benefit in Iowa being able to not only play in the NIT, but make the kind of run it did, even though it ended in such a brutal fashion on Thursday.

"There's just no substitute for experience," McCaffery said. "It can only make us better, especially our young guys."