

Hawkeyes blitz early, coast late to 3-0 start

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – The first half was a blitzing. The second half was a coasting. In the end, it was a convincing win for the Iowa Hawkeyes from start to finish as they defeated Maryland-Eastern Shore 109-63 on Thursday at Carver-Hawkeye Arena to move to 3-0 on the season.

This victory came for Iowa just four days after the Hawkeyes had to battle hard – perhaps harder than initially anticipated – for an 83-75 win over Nebraska-Omaha. In that game, Iowa trailed by seven points at halftime before putting together a second-half surge to emerge victorious.

When Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery was asked about his team's response from this past weekend on Thursday, he made abundantly clear how the competition had just as much to do with what occurred.

"That took everything we had to get them and that's just the way the game is," McCaffery said. "I continue to be amazed at how everybody is surprised. Turn on the TV every night, somebody is getting beat."

McCaffery then went on to say his team is "getting there, but still has a ways to go."

Two things contributed to the blitzing Iowa put on UMES in the first half – the play of sophomore guard Mike Gesell and the Hawkeyes' 3-point shooting. Gesell came into Thursday's contest averaging just two points and two assists per game, but had the type of start he needed and that Iowa needed.

He had assists on the Hawkeyes' first two buckets of the game (including a 3-pointer from senior guard Devyn Marble). Then with Iowa ahead 7-5, Gesell took his first shot of the game from the top of the key and drained a 3-pointer. One minute later, Gesell hit another 3-pointer and then made a lay-up in transition to put Iowa ahead 17-7 when Maryland-Eastern Shore burned its first timeout of the game.

The 6-1 guard went on to finish with those eight points, and also tallied four assists to help spark the Hawkeyes. What stood out even more was that he was doing all this while playing the point, a spot Marble had started each of Iowa's first two games at this season.

"I felt like the first two games, I wasn't being aggressive enough," Gesell said. "Tonight, I just wanted to go out there and play my game, be aggressive and maybe open things up for other guys."

As for the 3-point shooting, Iowa made three of its first four looks from beyond the arc. At halftime, the Hawkeyes had shot 20-of-36 from the floor, with 4-of-9 shooting from 3-point range. They went on to finish 7-of-17, making as many 3-pointers on Thursday as they had in the first two games combined (Iowa entered Thursday's game 7-of-26 from behind the arc).

"It is encouraging," McCaffery said about the 3-point shooting he has repeatedly mentioned taking place in practice finally being on display during a game. "I'm not surprised. I expect Mike to shoot like that. He's a really good shooter. Dev's a really good shooter. We've got guys that can shoot, but it's like anything else.

"Sometimes, you're just off a little bit. A couple of guys are off, a couple of in-and-outs, then you get behind, then you start pressing a little bit. Now you've got to drive the ball, you've got to throw it inside, you've got to mix up the in-

and-out. I think we have enough maturity and talent to know and understand that.”

Over a span of 14 minutes in the first half, the Hawkeyes put together a 43-8 run, turning what was a 5-5 tie into a 48-13 lead with 3:40 remaining before halftime. The exclamation point on that 35-point swing was a play in transition where Marble threw the ball off the backboard to junior forward Aaron White for an alley-oop dunk. White finished with 22 points on 9-of-10 shooting, while Marble had 10 points, five assists and four steals.

“I kind of knew not to do it, but ‘Weezy’ was really nagging me in my ear to do it,” Marble said while also introducing the world to his nickname for White. “I was being pulled two different ways. I shouldn’t have done it, but it’s all good.

“He gets in just as much trouble because he told me to do it.”

Then came the coasting in the second half. By the 14:12 mark, all five starters had been taken out of the game. When the under-8 timeout came with 7:57 left, McCaffery began clearing the bench and with 5:09 remaining, sophomore forward Jarrod Uthoff was taken out of the game after he compiled a double-double of 11 points and 11 rebounds and the lone player from Iowa’s 10-man rotation still on the court was freshman guard Peter Jok, who emerged with 10 points and put Iowa in triple figures with a pair of free throws in the final minutes of the game.

“We’re getting a lot out of the 5 spot, we’re getting a lot off the bench and our guard play has been solid,” McCaffery said. “I think our defense at half court has to get better and that hasn’t been as good as it’s going to need to be, whether we’re man or zone. But that’s why you work on it now.”

Iowa returns to action Sunday afternoon when it plays host to Abilene Christian in a game that is considered part of the Battle 4 Atlantis, the 8-team tourney in the Bahamas that the

Hawkeyes will participate in over Thanksgiving weekend. Tip-off from Carver-Hawkeye Arena is set for 3:30 p.m. Central and the game will be televised locally on the Mediacom Connections Channel and available via online stream on the BTN's Digital Network.