

Late first-half rally ignites Hawkeyes over Drake

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

DES MOINES, Iowa – Every game features that one turning point, that one sequence where the difference between winning and losing shows.

It maybe took a little longer for No. 23 Iowa to get going than it would have liked against Drake in the Big Four Classic on Saturday, but a 10-0 run to end the first half sparked the Hawkeyes en route to an 83-66 win over the Bulldogs at Wells Fargo Arena. Iowa moved to 9-1 overall as a result of the victory.

For most of the first half, Drake led. The biggest reason why was the Bulldogs' 3-point shooting, which was 50 percent (8-of-16 shooting from behind the arc) during that first stanza. After stormed back to take a lead, another 3 was drained to put Drake ahead 40-39 with 2:55 left in the half.

Then came the 10-0 run, which was fueled specifically by senior forward Melsahn Basabe. Whether it was crashing the boards or scoring four of those 10 points during this stretch, he was among the catalysts for the Hawkeyes as they took a 49-40 lead with them into the locker room.

"I just knew if we stuck with it and followed the game plan, we could usually make a team break or bust out," Basabe said. "We fought. We kept listening to our coaches."

That energy from late in the first half carried over into the second. Iowa outscored Drake 11-4 to start the second half and established a 60-44 lead. Again, it was Basabe that among the

catalysts and he ended the game with a team-high 15 points on 7-of-10 shooting, as well as eight rebounds (second only to sophomore forward Jarrod Uthoff's nine boards on the evening). As a team, Iowa out-rebounded Drake 47-28, scored 42 points in the paint and 29 second-chance points.

"I would just like to see him be aggressive like he was tonight all the time," Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery said about Basabe. "He's such a great teammate. He wants to follow the game plan. He wants to be part of a team that's winning and sometimes, I think he forgets that he's a guy that we think is one of our top guys."

"He's one of our guys who's special. Go play that way, and that's what he did tonight. He was a dominant player in the game tonight."

But Basabe wasn't the only key contributor for the Hawkeyes on Saturday. After a pair of shaky performances against Villanova and Notre Dame where he was used sparingly, freshman guard Peter Jok got into a groove early.

He scored seven straight Hawkeye points during the first half at a time that prevented the Bulldogs from building a bigger lead. Then when Iowa was ahead for good, he played the final 12:47 of the contest and remained a key part of the Hawkeyes' success by finishing with 14 points and seven rebounds while playing 20 minutes off the bench.

"I just tried to go in and play my hardest," Jok said. "I have to accept my role. I'm not supposed to be the main scorer. I just have to go out and play my hardest. I have to show the coaches that I can do more than that, so I can try to stay on the floor."

Looking ahead, Iowa has a very quick turnaround coming up. The Hawkeyes will be back at Carver-Hawkeye Arena on Monday for a 6 p.m. Central contest against Fairleigh Dickinson, who currently has a win over future Big Ten member Rutgers to its

name. Monday's game will be televised nationally on the Big Ten Network.