

COMMENTARY: A night to remember, even in defeat (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

AMES, Iowa – Depending on which end of the Iowa spectrum one falls under, Friday's game between No. 23 Iowa and No. 17 Iowa State proved to be memorable. Or forgetful.

This was the first time in 26 seasons the Hawkeyes and Cyclones had faced each other as ranked foes. Both teams entered among the nation's best in scoring, rebounding and assists. Friday's intrastate showdown had the makings of a classic that would be memorable for years down the road and it lived up to the hype with Iowa State scoring eight points in the final 1:21 to win 85-82.

Those were two good basketball teams on the Hilton Coliseum hardwood Friday night. In fact, I'd argue both teams are better than their rankings coming in and it would be kind of disgraceful if Iowa dropped out of the top 25 next week because it lost by three points on the road to an in-state rival that was ranked higher than the Hawkeyes beforehand.

For Iowa fans, this was a tough pill to swallow. But there's still a lot to be said for what the Hawkeyes displayed. Because Iowa lost, you can't say it did everything it needed to, but it came awfully close.

The Hawkeyes outrebounded Iowa State 49-35. To put this in its proper context, the Cyclones were the nation's best defensive rebounding team. Iowa not only held Iowa State to just 29 defensive boards, but the Hawkeyes even hauled in 14 offensive

boards of their own. The toughness was there.

Iowa also had two, maybe even three players, who played some of the best games of their careers Friday night. That was certainly the case with junior forward Aaron White. Scoring 25 points on 11-of-15 shooting and hauling down a career-high 17 rebounds, White was the best player on the floor

Sophomore center Adam Woodbury also had a career-high 11 rebounds and was active at both ends of the floor despite the foul trouble that ultimately caught up to him late. He ended up playing 25 minutes Friday night and he rewarded McCaffery twice. The first time was McCaffery opting to keep Woodbury in the game with two fouls during the first half because his other options at center both had two fouls as well.

The second instance was playing nearly eight-and-a-half straight minutes in the second half before fouling out. Had Woodbury managed to stay on the floor for the final 1:21, there's no doubt in my mind Iowa would've won this game.

Then there's sophomore guard Mike Gesell. If there's anyone I find myself feeling for on this team after watching it lose like that, it's him.

Everyone's going to remember those two missed free throws in the final seconds that would've put Iowa ahead and maybe even won the Hawkeyes the game. But before that, Gesell had one of his best outings of the season and McCaffery even said afterwards something I've mentioned on numerous occasions about Gesell being a guy you want at the line in that spot if you're Iowa.

Some might say this game doesn't matter in the grand scheme of things. But this would've been a huge victory for Iowa and the dejection displayed by McCaffery and his players afterwards was as strong as I've ever seen after a defeat like this one. They wanted this one badly.

Even in defeat, this will prove as a night to remember for Iowa. No matter how one looks at this, it was a memorable game and there are lessons the Hawkeyes can take away – mainly placing an emphasis on finishing. An unfortunate sequence of events allowed this one to slip away from Iowa. How it builds off of this going forward is going to be telling in terms of just how much growth has actually been made.