

Heartbreak at Hilton for Hawkeyes

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

AMES, Iowa – Eighty-one seconds were all that separated the No. 23 Iowa Hawkeyes from what would have been a monumental road win. Iowa led No. 17 Iowa State 82-77 and it looked as though it would emerge victorious in the type of close game it wasn't able to finish a year ago.

Except everything unraveled in those final 81 seconds. Not only did the Cyclones score the game's final eight points, but the Hawkeyes missed three critical free throws down the stretch and left Hilton Coliseum heartbroken, losing 85-82.

"A loss is a loss, but this is a tough one," sophomore forward Jarrod Uthoff said. "We were up with a minute to go. That makes it pretty hard."

This was the type of game that lived up to the billing. Both teams were among the nation's best in scoring, rebounding and assists, ranking in the top 10 of all three categories. Iowa State had the nation's best defensive rebounding team, yet Iowa managed to control the glass with a 49-35 edge, including 14 offensive boards. Assists were even at 19 apiece.

Then there's the scoring. For nearly 39 minutes, the Cyclones looked like the team that would see their opportunities slip away at the charity stripe shooting 23-of-36. The Hawkeyes were 14-of-21, but three of those misses came during that 81-second stretch.

When Iowa possessed this 82-77 advantage, it had played the prior 8:29 with a lineup consisting of Devyn Marble, Mike

Gesell, Uthoff, Aaron White and Adam Woodbury. All five played key roles in getting the Hawkeyes to this point where they might finally break through with that signature road win.

White played the game of his life. He shot 11-of-15 from the floor and tallied 25 points, as well a career-high 17 rebounds (the most by any Hawkeye player during the Fran McCaffery era). Woodbury had hauled down 11 boards, which was also a career-high for him. Uthoff provided 12 points off the bench and both Marble and Gesell had six assists.

For the majority of this game, any time Iowa State threw a jab, Iowa had a counter. It was in prime position.

Then those 81 seconds unfolded. It began with Woodbury picking up his fifth foul as he went for a loose ball near mid-court. Iowa State's George Niang knocked down a pair of free throws to trim the Hawkeye lead to 82-79. A missed jumper by Uthoff was actually rebounded by White, except he then had the ball taken from him by Cyclone guard DeAndre Kane.

"I'll probably have a handful of plays that I'll be replaying through my head and that will be one of them," White said. "You know, I had control of it. I wasn't planning on dribbling it. When he hit the ball out of my arm, it got knocked away and I tried to get at it."

Iowa State's Melvin Ejim was fouled by Gesell as he attempted a lay-up and hit a pair of free throws to cut the Cyclones' deficit to 82-81. Then Iowa State head coach Fred Hoiberg opted to foul Marble while the Hawkeyes were still only in the bonus.

Marble missed the front end, the Cyclones rebounded, and Niang hit a jumper with 18.2 seconds remaining to give Iowa State the lead. Following an Iowa timeout, Gesell drove to the bucket and drew contact. Iowa's best free-throw shooter had the opportunity to win the game with a pair of free throws.

Gesell missed the first, then saw his second attempt rattle in and out before Iowa State's Dustin Hogue hauled down the rebound, then made two more free throws to push the Cyclone lead up to three points and what ended up being the final score.

"I knew I wanted to try and get to the basket and either try to draw a foul or get a chance for an offensive rebound, something, just to try and make a play," Gesell said. "I missed two free throws – two crucial free throws – that I usually make.

"It really hurts, but we've got to move forward from this."

In 81 seconds, a night forever changed. The question now becomes, does a season forever change? Iowa has a chance to bounce back in its final non-conference game Dec. 22 against Arkansas-Pine Bluff before Big Ten play commences on New Year's Eve. But as far as what can be taken away from this moment of heartbreak remains to be seen.

"We fought and I was proud of our guys," McCaffery said.