

# COMMENTARY: Same old song in defeat (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

MADISON, Wis. – The Iowa Hawkeyes might be ranked 22nd in the country right now. But they also appear like a team that remains stuck in its old way and if there's any major takeaway from what transpired inside the Kohl Center on Sunday, there's reason for concern.

The most obvious concern is this – Iowa once again let a second-half lead slip away and lost 75-71 to No. 4 Wisconsin. This puts the Hawkeyes at 1-1 in the Big Ten and 12-3 overall. Problems that have plagued this team in the past and continue to currently plague them appeared on perhaps its biggest stage yet under head coach Fran McCaffery.

Speaking of, let's cut to the chase on McCaffery because while there's more to be dissected here, it'd be remiss to not make mention of his ejection, the second of his Iowa coaching career. It was bad. It was inexcusable.

It might not have been the biggest reason for Iowa's demise Sunday, but to say it wasn't a factor is naive, especially when Wisconsin gets four points out of the ordeal and ends up winning by that exact margin.

The trouble with this is two things – First, McCaffery bumped an official. There's no reason for that and while he couldn't get into specifics during his postgame press conference, it was implied that the first technical he had coming, the second was a mistake on his part. Secondly, this isn't something new. McCaffery got ejected from a game two years ago at Northern Iowa and also received a public reprimand after slamming a

chair during a timeout at Michigan State that same season.

Whether or not McCaffery draws a suspension for what he did Sunday remains up for debate, but if he is suspended from Iowa's next game against Northwestern, he has no one to blame but himself. That's indisputable and no one should complain if the Big Ten does take action.

Now looking beyond that, there are other issues with this team right now. McCaffery and his players all said his technicals weren't to blame for losing, but how the second half started. This was a game where Iowa was up 11 points at halftime. Wisconsin had outscored the Hawkeyes 15-6 in the second half before McCaffery's ejection took place.

Senior guard Devyn Marble finished with 27 points, primarily because he was the only one who showed aggressiveness from start to finish. He was the only Hawkeye to make any 3-pointers in this game and without him, Iowa has zero chance Sunday.

This team is 12-3, but the three losses have come to the three best teams Iowa has played to date. The Hawkeyes might still be a team that makes the NCAA Tournament simply because the schedule is tougher than it was a year ago. But the number of impressive wins to date is miniscule.

Iowa had a chance to show it was a legitimate Big Ten title contender Sunday night. It failed at that. Any realistic thoughts of this team maybe winning the Big Ten need to simmer down now. Even though Marble and junior forward Aaron White both basically said the better team lost Sunday night (despite Wisconsin still being undefeated even after winning this game), the Hawkeyes are now behind the 8-ball and it only gets tougher.

I have no doubt this team will continue to play even keel and will put itself in position to win a marquee game or two. But what's happening is basically a continuation of what happened

last season. Until the Hawkeyes learn how to close out games against the Villanovas, Iowa States and Wisconsin of the basketball world, this is what you're going to continue to see.

Maybe Iowa does get over the hump at some point this season. It's fair to wonder though if it ends up being too little, too late, whenever that does happen.

This wasn't a wake-up call the Hawkeyes got Sunday night. It was kind of a reality check that they still have a ways to go.