

Hawkeyes implode in Mad-town

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

MADISON, Wis. – For the first 28 minutes, Sunday's top 25 Big Ten tilt between No. 22 Iowa and No. 4 Wisconsin was forming a familiar script. The Hawkeyes build a lead before the Badgers gain second-half momentum with the question of whether or not Iowa can cling to victory looming. Just like previous meetings between the two teams, nothing seemed different.

Then in the blink of an eye, everything began to unravel for Iowa.

It started after junior center Gabe Olaseni was called for a foul leading into the under-12 timeout. The Hawkeyes were hanging to a 41-39 lead, but Wisconsin had started its second-half run.

With 11:52 remaining, Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery picked up a technical foul. Then he picked up a second after it appeared he bumped an official while arguing and was promptly ejected from the Kohl Center. Wisconsin senior guard Ben Brust – who once signed a letter of intent with Iowa prior to McCaffery's arrival in 2010 – sank four consecutive free throws and Nigel Hayes proceeded to make 1-of-2 free throws off the original foul call.

Just like that, a five-point swing gave the Badgers a 44-41 lead and they would remain ahead the rest of the way, defeating the Hawkeyes 75-71 to drop Iowa to 1-1 in Big Ten play and 12-3 overall.

It was not only the Hawkeyes' third loss of the season, but it was also the third loss to a ranked team it held a second-half lead against.

"I'm sick of losing to teams that we're better than," junior forward Aaron White said. "We got to start making plays down the stretch. We got to stop giving up leads that we make in the first half because all of our three losses, they've kind of been the same formula.

"We get up big in the first half. We prove that we can play and that we can beat these teams and then we let them back into the game and end up losing down the stretch. I'm sick of that happening."

McCaffery was immediately asked about what led to his technical fouls and ejection, which he declined to publicly comment on. He did say though he thought what happened with him was not the reason for his team's demise.

Iowa controlled the first half and led 35-24. During the first 20 minutes, Wisconsin was held to just one second-chance point and shot just 8-of-30 from the floor. The Badgers outscored the Hawkeyes 15-6 to open the second half when the lead was cut to two points and McCaffery's technicals occurred.

"I think we lost the game at the start of the second half," McCaffery said. "We got Brust going, we don't pick him up. We quick-shot the ball. You can't go on the road against a ranked team and quick-shoot the ball when the momentum is shifting.

"It's a hard one because it's not like you would say any of those shots we took were horrible shots. Good players were taking good shots. But we didn't do anything like we had done in the first half."

As the momentum swung in Wisconsin's favor, the Badgers were able to build their lead up to as many as eight points with 7:47 remaining. Iowa got back in it and trimmed the lead all the way down to one point at 64-63 when senior guard Devyn Marble hit a 3-pointer with three minutes to go. Marble finished with a game-high 27 points on 10-of-24 shooting.

But outside of Marble, there wasn't much scoring for the Hawkeyes outside of a 12-point effort from White, who also tallied eight rebounds in defeat. Wisconsin wound up shooting 21-of-26 from the free-throw line in the second half, including 6-of-7 shooting in the final 1:06.

The Hawkeyes' next game is back home on Jan. 9 when they play Northwestern in a game scheduled for 8 p.m. Central on ESPNU. But the talk afterwards Sunday night wasn't so much about that next overall game, but rather Iowa's next crack at Wisconsin, which comes Feb. 22 at Carver-Hawkeye Arena.

Marble echoed White's sentiments about Iowa being the better team despite losing and said the rematch is one they look forward to.

"It's not even a debate and we've got another chance at them," Marble said. "We will be ready and I know they will be, so we'll just expect another battle like this one, most likely.

"I know for a fact that me and my team, we'll definitely be ready to push the throttle."