

COMMENTARY: The biggest win to date (premium)

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COLUMBUS, Ohio – Iowa's 84-74 win over Ohio State on Sunday at Value City Arena was the biggest win to date of the Fran McCaffery era.

Not only was it the Hawkeyes' biggest win in four seasons, but this might have been their biggest victory in at least 7-8 seasons and it's not even debatable. It really isn't.

Sure, there were times in McCaffery's first few seasons where Iowa pulled off stunning wins. Two that come to mind are his first year when the Hawkeyes beat then-No. 6 Purdue on Jarryd Cole's Senior Day and then the following season when Iowa beat then-No. 11 Wisconsin at the Kohl Center.

However, both of those got trumped Sunday afternoon. The Hawkeyes came into this game ranked 20th, the Buckeyes ranked third. This was the first time Iowa had played a game on CBS since 2006-07 and was the first win in a CBS televised game since the championship contest of the 2006 Big Ten Tournament. Yeah, it had been that long.

Before Sunday, Ohio State was the only Big Ten team McCaffery hadn't beaten while coaching Iowa. The Buckeyes had won the previous four meetings since 2010-11 and some of those contests were downright ugly. Thad Matta's program was basically the Hawkeyes' kryptonite. The key word there being, "was."

This was also huge because Iowa got big-time performances from its key players. Devyn Marble and Aaron White combined for

almost half of the Hawkeyes' points (41 of 84) and collectively shot 15-of-25 from the floor in doing so.

Throw in Melsahn Basabe's second straight double-double (11 points on 4-of-5 shooting and 10 rebounds) and just between those three players, that's 19-of-30 shooting from the floor, 13-of-17 from the free-throw line and 20 rebounds.

In addition to that, Iowa got 13 straight minutes from Josh Oglesby in the second half where he played some of his best basketball, maybe his best as a Hawkeye, period.

The Hawkeyes held a two-point lead at halftime despite only shooting two free throws the entire first half (which came from Gesell in the very final minute). Iowa got to the charity stripe 24 times in the second half and made 19 of them. For a team that had its struggles at the line this season prior to Sunday, going 21-of-26 on this specific stage was gutsy.

Then there's the obvious – Iowa finally showed the mettle needed to win a game like this. What wasn't there against Villanova, Iowa State and just last week against Wisconsin was there Sunday. It wasn't dumb luck that cost the Hawkeyes those games earlier in the season and it certainly wasn't dumb luck that finally enabled them to win Sunday.

Iowa flat out took this game from Ohio State and deserved every bit of it. That hustle play by White that led to a fallback jumper that extended the lead to six points? He earned it. Those free throws by Basabe down the stretch? He earned those with his ability to control the glass in the closing minutes. The way Iowa finished this particular game wasn't just impressive. It's the kind of thing teams that go on to greater things and manage to fulfill their preseason aspirations do.

That's not to say Iowa is going to win the Big Ten this season, but there's validity to that question now. Two weeks into league play and this is the most impressive win anyone

has at the moment. If the Hawkeyes can win on the road against a team that has been among the Big Ten's elite for the past several years, why can't they beat anybody else remaining on their schedule? That's not even to mention the confidence that can be gained going forward.

If there was ever a question about whether Iowa will make the NCAA Tournament for the first time in eight seasons, that question got answered Sunday. Even if the Hawkeyes struggle down the stretch, this is the résumé win they didn't have last year when the schedule wasn't anything close to what they've played and will continue to play right now.

There's still plenty of season left and there may be bigger victories for Iowa later in the season. But as of this moment, this is the one that will and should be remembered most for years to come.