

COMMENTARY: Top 10 a warranted reality (premium)

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – There's good news for Iowa and then even better news. The good news for the 14th-ranked Hawkeyes is that they managed to protect home court on Sunday, defeating Minnesota 94-73 to improve to 4-1 in Big Ten play and 15-3 overall.

Now for the better news – when both the AP and Coaches Polls are released on Monday, there's a good chance the Hawkeyes are ranked in the top 10 of at least one poll, if not both. As far as the AP poll is concerned, a lot of teams directly ahead of Iowa this week all lost games (Iowa State lost two games).

Fourth-year head coach Fran McCaffery said after Sunday's game that the polls are something he finds irrelevant in terms of where his team fits in the national picture. But considering how Iowa was last ranked in the AP's top 10 in 2002 (a season that ended with colossal disappointment for Hawkeye fans), this is kind of a big deal.

Sure, McCaffery's right in suggesting it doesn't matter in the big picture and that "10" is simply a number. After all, Iowa could very well lose its next game at Michigan and fall back out of the top 10 a week from now. But in all honesty, just leaving it at that is diminishing everything this program has accomplished since March 2010, when he first arrived in Iowa City.

Iowa's about to be viewed as a top 10 team and for the time being, that distinction is warranted. As it pertains to Sunday's contest, both the Hawkeyes and Golden Gophers entered

coming off enormous wins over No. 11 Ohio State (in Minnesota's case, it won just three nights earlier at home over the Buckeyes while the Hawkeyes had a week between games). Both teams had the same limelight glowing on them, but one wound up handling it better than the other did.

In fact, let's take this a step further. Had Iowa won any of those three games it lost (all three of which it held second-half leads in, mind you), this team would've already been in the top 10. The Hawkeyes have earned the distinction they're about to receive.

They've earned it because their best players are playing the best basketball of their careers to this point. Look at both Devyn Marble and Aaron White. Both players were completely non-existent in the first half against the Golden Gophers. In the second half, both elevated their games. Marble finished with 16 points after being held to one. All 18 of White's points (which remarkably ended up being a team-high) came in the second half.

Iowa wasn't buried by Minnesota when those two struggled because other players came off the bench and played some of their best basketball Sunday. Whether it's Josh Oglesby shooting 5-of-7 from behind the 3-point line or someone like Gabe Olaseni crashing the glass with six offensive rebounds, the Hawkeyes are capable of getting contributions like that consistently.

This team might not win the Big Ten. It might not stay in the top 10 beyond this week or even finish there by season's end. But all the positive press Iowa is getting and will continue to get over the coming days on a national scale has been earned.

That will become as evident as ever in less than 24 hours.