

Hawkeyes record fifth straight win over Wildcats

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

EVANSTON, Ill. – For the second time this season, No. 10 Iowa secured a 26-point victory over Northwestern on Saturday after beating the Wildcats 76-50 at Welsh-Ryan Arena. But unlike the contest in Iowa City just 16 days earlier, the Hawkeyes' fifth straight win in the series didn't feel quite like a 26-point contest.

When these teams previously met, it was one-sided in every manner. Northwestern came into Saturday's game having won three of four since its debacle at Carver-Hawkeye Arena and played like a more confident team for at least one half.

Even though the game was being played at Iowa's pace, 10 first-half turnovers by the Hawkeyes enabled Northwestern to hang around and only trail Iowa 30-24 going into halftime.

Three big factors led to Iowa (5-2, 16-4) dominating the second half of this game. One was the play of senior guard Devyn Marble. After being shut out for the game's first 20 minutes, he still managed to finish with a team-high 14 points by playing more aggressive and getting to the free-throw line, where he shot a perfect 7-of-7.

"Dev did not have a particularly good first half. I jumped him big time when I took him out and I jumped him at halftime," Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery said. "But he is incredibly confident in himself and has the ability to take it and come back. The way he played in the second half is indicative of who he is and he recognizes what we need."

The second key was something both McCaffery and sophomore guard Mike Gesell alluded to afterwards, which was getting stops defensively. Iowa held a 44-20 rebounding edge on Northwestern and as a result, the Hawkeyes did a better job in the second half of finishing in transition.

Gesell played a vital role Saturday. He tallied a team-high six assists to only one turnover. He also finished with 11 points on 5-of-10 shooting. One of those made buckets was a 3-pointer that put Iowa up 41-30 with 15:46 left. From there on, the Hawkeyes' lead was double figures for the majority of the last 15 minutes.

"It felt good," Gesell said about the 3-point shot. "As of lately, I haven't been shooting the 3-ball as well as I'd like to. But I'm always going to stay aggressive and I'm always going to look to shoot when I'm open.

"[Adam Woodbury] got me a very good screen and I was able to knock it down."

Then the third key was Iowa's bench production. After only contributing eight points in a 75-67 loss to No. 21 Michigan three nights earlier, the Hawkeye reserves quadrupled that total Saturday. Two players who provided a bulk of the bench scoring were junior center Gabe Olaseni and senior forward Zach McCabe.

Olaseni put together a double-double of 14 points and 10 rebounds, both of which were team-highs. His top highlight from the afternoon came during the first half when he threw down a one-handed putback dunk off a missed shot by McCabe.

"If you go after it, good things will happen," Olaseni said. "You're not going to stand there and get anything, so I just tried to go after it. I found myself in a good position and I didn't want to come back down with it, so I just decided to dunk it."

Moments later, McCabe came back by draining a 3-pointer that extended Iowa's lead to 28-21 in the first half and forced Northwestern head coach Chris Collins to call a timeout.

"I think we were just more aggressive," McCabe said after providing eight points on 3-of-4 shooting. "We knew this was going to be a dogfight in this game and Northwestern wasn't going to ever back down. We just came prepared."

Now the Hawkeyes enter the crux of their Big Ten schedule, playing three of their next four at home with all three home games coming against currently ranked teams. Up first is No. 3 Michigan State, who visits Carver-Hawkeye Arena on Jan. 28. Tip-off is scheduled for 6 p.m. Central and the game will be televised nationally on ESPN as part of its "Super Tuesday" doubleheader.

"It's going to be a great atmosphere. It's going to be a tough basketball game," McCabe said. "It's going to be physical. We've been through it. We know what Michigan State does and we'll be ready."