

Second half surge pushes Iowa past PSU

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

STATE COLLEGE, Pa. – Saturday wasn't the first time this season where No. 16 Iowa played a subpar first half, nor was it the first time where mental toughness was being questioned as it trailed Penn State 33-31 at halftime.

But like it has in some of the Hawkeyes' biggest wins this season, the theme of a strong second half was again on display Saturday and a major reason why Iowa left Bryce Jordan Center with an 82-70 victory over the Nittany Lions in the teams' only regular-season meeting.

This win was crucial for the Hawkeyes. It enables them to remain alone in third place in the Big Ten at 8-4 and at 19-6 overall, Iowa is now one win shy of posting consecutive 20-win seasons. It also wouldn't have been possible without those final 20 minutes where Iowa seized control from Penn State.

In the first half, the Hawkeyes shot just 12-of-34 from the floor, 2-of-9 from 3, 5-of-10 from the foul line and only had one double-figure scorer. Meanwhile, Penn State had shot nearly 50 percent from the floor and had the game at the pace it wanted.

Iowa not only outscored Penn State 51-37 in the second half, but it also had the following go in its favor: It shot 10-of-21 overall, 5-of-10 from 3-point range and ended up with four double-figure scorers. The Hawkeyes also got to the free-throw line 30 times in the second half and knocked down 26 of those attempts. Conversely, Penn State had more turnovers (6) than assists (4) and shot just 11-of-33.

“We hit a bunch of shots early and I think we softened a little bit,” Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery said. “I thought we were much tougher in the second half.”

Senior forward Melsahn Basabe finished with team-highs of 16 points and eight rebounds with the majority of those coming in the first half. But as he played through illness Saturday, it was the team-high four blocks – all of which came in the second half – Basabe wasn’t hesitant to point out.

“I was blocking shots, rebounding and anchoring us on defense,” Basabe said. “I just knew what we needed to do at the time. The energy, I’m just trying to keep it consistent whether I’m scoring or not scoring.”

Early in the second half, Iowa converted an alley-oop from senior guard Devyn Marble to junior forward Aaron White that got both players going. After combining for just four points in the first half, Marble finished with 15 points and shot 10-of-12 from the charity stripe while White emerged with 14 points on 6-of-12 shooting and seven rebounds.

Trailing 44-42 with 13:03 to play, the Hawkeyes went on 16-4 run that gave them a 58-48 lead with 6:59 remaining. Of those 16 points during this rally, 11 of them came from Marble and White.

“They were getting to the rim at ease and we weren’t getting defensive rebounds. Once we buttoned that up, it opened up our transition game,” White said. “I got a couple in transition, Dev got to the line. We rebounded the ball and jumped out on them.”

As Penn State cut Iowa’s lead down to 60-55 with 4:06 left, Marble knocked down a pair of free throws to extend the lead back up to seven. Then came the biggest shot of the game from sophomore guard Mike Gesell.

One week after putting together what was perhaps his most

complete game in a 85-67 win over then-No. 10 Michigan, Gesell demanded the ball as he got open and drained a 3-pointer with 3:02 remaining to give Iowa a 65-55 lead that remained double digits the rest of the way.

Gesell finished with 13 points and shot 4-of-5 from behind the 3-point line. He also posted a team-high seven assists. Nine of his points and five of his assists came during the 18:20 of the second half he played.

“When I’m getting out and pushing the ball in transition is when we’re at our best,” Gesell said. “You saw that against Michigan and tonight, we were able to get out and run when we did get stops.”

The Hawkeyes go back on the road Feb. 18 and will seek their fourth straight win away from Carver-Hawkeye Arena when they play another single-play contest against Indiana. Tip-off from Assembly Hall in Bloomington, Ind., is set for 8 p.m. Central and the game will be televised nationally on ESPN. Should Iowa prevail, it would give the Hawkeyes their first winning road record in Big Ten play since 1997-98.