

# COMMENTARY: A damaging defeat at Carver (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

IOWA CITY, Iowa – For Iowa fans, there's no way of sugarcoating what happened Saturday inside Carver-Hawkeye Arena. In a game the 15th-ranked Hawkeyes desperately needed to win to remain alone in third place of the Big Ten, they were defeated by No. 16 Wisconsin, 79-74.

The Badgers now control all possible tiebreakers with a season sweep. They also moved a half-game ahead of Iowa into third place and the Hawkeyes are now staring at the possibility of letting a first-round bye in the Big Ten Tournament slip away altogether.

Iowa now sits at 8-5 in league play, remaining percentage points ahead of Ohio State for fourth place and that final first-round bye with two weeks remaining in the regular season. This is a dangerous spot for the Hawkeyes to be in, especially now with three games coming up next week – the next two of which are both on the road over a 3-day span.

But let's get back to what happened Saturday. In front of a frenzied crowd inside Carver-Hawkeye Arena, Iowa found a way to disappoint again. In the Hawkeyes' four biggest home games of the season, they came away with three of their five losses in Big Ten play.

Once again, this team had a chance to exorcise the "can't win a game in the final seconds" demon and couldn't. It had a chance to remain in position to solidify itself as the third-best team in the Big Ten and possibly even remain in position where it could emerge with a Big Ten title.

It didn't matter that Devyn Marble had game-highs of 21 points and 11 assists. It didn't matter that Josh Oglesby had played one of his best games as a Hawkeye, coming away with 17 points on 8-of-12 shooting in 24 minutes off the bench. Everything good the Hawkeyes were able to do in this game, they negated with a porous defensive effort in the first half, as well as a disastrous final minute where Iowa was outscored by Wisconsin 8-2.

Whatever hopes there were of that after last weekend appear to be gone. After Sunday, either No. 13 Michigan State or No. 20 Michigan will have created further separation from Iowa and with two weeks left in the season, the hopes of a Big Ten title appear slimmer than before.

Going back to the whole aspect of Wisconsin now sitting alone in third place, there's a major difference between third and fourth place this season. If Iowa were to finish third (which it still could, but it made that harder than need be Saturday), it would not only a possible game against whoever wins the Big Ten until the championship round. It would also be avoiding the likes of both Wisconsin and No. 24 Ohio State.

Meanwhile, fourth place would ensure a first-round bye. It would also mean a likely date against either the Badgers or Buckeyes in the quarterfinals of the Big Ten Tournament, followed by the possibility of playing both the Spartans and Wolverines should Iowa somehow reach the title game.

In other words, a much taller task would lie ahead.

The Hawkeyes had an opportunity to avoid all of those potential land mines with a win Saturday. Instead, they came away with a damaging defeat that could now really define how this season ends now.