

# Hawkeyes fight off Boilermakers for 20th win

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

IOWA CITY, Iowa – A lot of fighting had to be done by the No. 20 Iowa Hawkeyes. Whether it was internal or external didn't matter. It had to be done if Iowa was going to end the three-game losing skid it entered Sunday's contest against Purdue carrying.

For one half, the Hawkeyes were in complete control. Then the Boilermakers came back with a counter-punch and even led by two possessions at one point in the second half. But Iowa continued to fight and it fought itself to an 83-76 victory that not only snapped that losing streak, but also put the Hawkeyes back into fourth place of the Big Ten and back into the conversation for a first-round bye in next week's Big Ten Tournament.

"We lost three in a row and people were doubting us and stuff," junior guard Josh Oglesby said. "But I thought we responded well today."

Throughout the game's first 20 minutes, Iowa (9-7, 20-9) was ahead. But Purdue managed to keep things close. With 3:35 before halftime, the Hawkeyes were up 35-32 when they proceeded to go on a 15-5 run to carry a 50-37 lead with them into the break. Leading the charge once again was senior guard Devyn Marble, who scored a game-high 21 points and also led Iowa with five assists and four turnovers.

But then came that counter-punch by Purdue. The Boilermakers scored six unanswered points to open the second half, prompting Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery to burn a timeout and

light into his entire team and more specifically, junior forward Aaron White.

Purdue got back in it in large part to Kendall Stephens' ability to get away from defenders and knock down open jumpers.

"He was a guy that we marked," McCaffery said. "You know, we've done a pretty good job on the guys that we've marked. It has been the 'X-factor' guys that have been getting us."

As the second half progressed, the team would get McCaffery's message. But before it did, Purdue would build up a 64-60 lead with 11:21 remaining. Iowa would cut the deficit back to two points with a jumper from sophomore center Adam Woodbury.

Then White, who was on the receiving end of McCaffery's wrath, made his biggest shot of the game when he drained a 3-pointer to give Iowa the lead back at 65-64 with 8:09 to go. That lead would remain with the Hawkeyes the rest of the way.

"That was a big stretch in the game," White said. "From then on, we got eight consecutive stops, got to the free-throw line, executed on offense and that's where we want it obviously."

In the final two minutes, it would come down to free throw shooting for Iowa. With the Hawkeyes up 75-70, sophomore guard Mike Gesell went to the charity stripe, but was only able to make 1-of-2 attempts. As a result, fouling Gesell became a priority for Purdue head coach Matt Painter, who elected to prolong the game down by two points with the hope that Gesell would miss another attempt.

Except the South Sioux City, Neb., native bounced back and managed to start knocking them down, including that pair of attempt with 41 seconds remaining when he was fouled on purpose.

"I felt a little bit disrespected," Gesell said. "But at the same time, I've been up and down this year. I had already missed one in the game. Last year, I shot about 80 percent.

"I still view myself as a very good free-throw shooter. I just have to go up there and knock them down and it felt good to do that when I needed to."

Gesell would finish the game 8-of-11 from the foul line and Oglesby – who played the final 16:32 of the game – made two more attempts in the final seconds to push the Hawkeye lead up to the 83-76 final they won by.

With two games remaining before the Big Ten Tournament, a first-round bye is within Iowa's grasp. The Hawkeyes currently hold a tiebreaker for the No. 4 seed over Nebraska and are also a half-game ahead of No. 22 Ohio State in the league standings after the Buckeyes lost to Indiana on Sunday.

Iowa's next contest comes March 6 when it visits No. 18 Michigan State at the Breslin Center in East Lansing, Mich., a place the Hawkeyes haven't won at since 1993. Tip-off is scheduled for 8 p.m. Central and the game will be televised nationally on ESPN. The Spartans won the first meeting between the two teams in overtime 71-69 back on Jan. 28 at Carver-Hawkeye Arena.