

Another Breslin nightmare

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

EAST LANSING, Mich. – An avalanche occurred in the second half of No. 24 Iowa's game Thursday against No. 22 Michigan State. In what seems like a recurring theme whenever the Hawkeyes and Spartans meet, Iowa unraveled in the second half yet again and lost its 18th consecutive game inside the Breslin Center, falling 86-76 to Michigan State.

With this defeat, Iowa now sits at 9-8 in Big Ten play and 20-10 overall.

Before everything began to snowball, there was evidence in the first half of doom ultimately striking the Hawkeyes. They led 41-39 at halftime and had gotten 16 points in those first 20 minutes from senior guard Devyn Marble, who finished with a game-high 24 points on 9-of-17 shooting and looked the part of someone legitimately in the running for Big Ten Player of the Year.

But despite his efforts, Iowa's defense was a sieve yet again. Michigan State shot 5-of-8 from 3-point range in the first half and finished the game 10-of-17 shooting from behind the arc. In fact, the Spartans made eight of their first 10 shots for the entire game.

"The only reason we had the lead was because Dev was on fire," White said. "It's not like we were doing great things in the first half to gain that lead, or we would've been up 11 or 13."

In the first three minutes of the second half, Michigan State was called for five fouls to the chagrin of its head coach, Tom Izzo. But despite the foul discrepancy, the Spartans

opened the second half on a 7-0 run to take a 46-41 lead. Iowa would get within a field goal at 53-51 when things began taking an ugly turn. Michigan State scored seven unanswered points to extend its lead to nine points and it eventually reached 13 when Travis Trice hit a 3-pointer to give the Spartans a 68-55 lead with 8:45 remaining.

“I don’t think we made the adjustments to come out in the second half and be able to be successful,” Marble said. “I don’t think it was a lack of energy on our part. I think we played hard for the most part.

“We just didn’t take care of the little intangibles that can make a difference in the game.”

Then came the unraveling. Shortly after senior forward Zach McCabe was called for two quick fouls – one at each end of the court – McCaffery exchanged words with official Bo Boroski and was given a technical foul with 5:27 remaining. Michigan State knocked down both free-throw attempts to go up 76-59.

“I surrender,” McCaffery said when asked about officiating afterwards. “Apparently, I’m the bad guy all the time.”

Moments later, McCabe was involved in a double foul with Trice and also picked up a technical after the two locked elbows and McCabe threw him to the ground. The technical proved to be his fifth foul of the game, thus fouling out. Michigan State’s Russell Byrd was also ejected from the game for leaving the Spartan bench.

Then with 1:00 remaining, McCaffery had McCabe leave the bench and go directly to the locker room before the game ended.

“I just think in that situation, there’s no reason to bring him ... it just makes no sense,” McCaffery said about his decision to have McCabe head to the locker room before the rest of the team. “Just go to the locker room. It was over. No big deal.

“Sparks can become a forest fire and we don’t need that.”

As the Hawkeyes enter their final regular season game on Saturday against Illinois back at Carver-Hawkeye Arena, they can still obtain the No. 4 seed in next week’s Big Ten Tournament and thus a bye from the first round altogether. However, that No. 4 seed is no longer in Iowa’s control, as the Hawkeyes would also need No. 9 Wisconsin to beat Nebraska on Sunday in addition to a win over Illinois. Iowa will be either the No. 4, No. 5 or No. 6 seed pending this weekend’s outcomes.

Meanwhile, the Hawkeyes are hoping to put together a better defensive showing and not allow this new nightmare at the Breslin Center to affect them going forward.

“I don’t know what it is, but we’ve lacked stuff defensively,” White said. “When we’re at our best, we’re turning our defense into offense. We’ve got length, we’ve got speed, we’ve got guys who can cover. We’ve got shot blockers and we’ve got rebounders and we’ve got to use that to our advantage.”