

# COMMENTARY: Guard let down (premium)

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EAST LANSING, Mich. – If a word could sum up No. 24 Iowa's game against No. 22 Michigan State on Thursday, it would be embarrassing.

In the past, there have been meltdowns. In fact, Iowa has had meltdowns against Michigan State. Last year at the Big Ten Tournament, one of the biggest hot-button issues was officiating. That night, a valid argument could be made that Iowa was screwed.

That same argument can't be made here though as it pertains to Thursday. Even if calls went against Iowa or weren't getting called period against Michigan State, the composure (or lack thereof) shown by the Hawkeyes would suggest they got what they deserved in losing 86-76 to the Spartans at the Breslin Center.

Iowa led this game at halftime. It got Michigan State to commit five fouls in the first three minutes of the second half. Yet the Hawkeyes not only lost, but did so by double digits.

Once again, defense was an issue. Michigan State might not have dropped 90-plus points like Minnesota and Indiana did last week, but the Spartans shot 10-of-17 from 3-point range on Thursday. At some point, one can tip its cap. But when teams are doing this repeatedly, that suggests something's wrong with Iowa's effort on the defensive end.

To that same point, Iowa only had 14 rebounds at the defensive

end of the floor. No one on the Hawkeyes had more than three rebounds for the entire game. That's pretty dreadful.

Now, let's get into what everyone's talking about – the officiating. Was it suspect? Perhaps. But let's break down certain things here, starting with the technical fouls called – first on head coach Fran McCaffery and then the second one on senior forward Zach McCabe. Both of them were warranted.

McCaffery was practically begging for the technical foul he got and then McCabe's came after he essentially got away with throwing Travis Trice to the floor because the two players' arms were crossed.

Before Thursday, one of the biggest "concerns" from Hawkeye fans was that Ted Valentine (a.k.a. "TV Teddy") would be one of the officials because of what happened in Chicago last year. He wasn't there Thursday. The issues with officiating in college basketball are so complex that they're not going to be resolved before the season ends. Basically, the blaming officiating game is getting old.

Even worse was what happened with a minute left. McCabe had fouled out of the game (his technical was the fifth foul) and McCaffery had him leave the bench on his own accord before the game ended.

There's no defending that. There's no defending McCabe doing that and there's no defending McCaffery allowing him to do it. Football players and coaches who leave the sidelines before the clock expires get crucified for doing so. McCabe fouled out, but he wasn't ejected from the bench.

This was a team that mentally checked out Thursday. That's not to say the Hawkeyes quit because there were five players on the court in the last few minutes playing to the final whistle. But once it was dealt a little adversity, it didn't respond in the "professional" manner that McCaffery always says his team has.

Hawkeye fans should feel somewhat embarrassed by what was displayed Thursday because chances are that will happen two more times this month – when Iowa gets bounced from the Big Ten Tournament next week (having to now possibly win four games in four days seems too tall a task for this particular group) and whenever that loss in the NCAA Tournament comes.

It's kind of sad to think this is one of the ways this particular season is probably going to end up being remembered now.