

A stumble in the end



Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery arrives at UD Arena and starts walking toward the Hawkeyes' locker room prior to their first round game in the 2014 NCAA Tournament against Tennessee on Wednesday, March 19, 2013, in Dayton, Ohio. McCaffery coached the game after being back in Iowa City earlier in the day for his son Patrick's surgery to remove a thyroid tumor.

By Brendan Stiles

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DAYTON, Ohio – What proved to be the final game for the Iowa Hawkeyes this season ended up being a microcosm of their 2013-14 campaign as a whole.

Iowa started out 16-4, only to lose nine of its final 13 games. Oddly enough, the Hawkeyes jumped out to an early 16-4 lead Wednesday in its first NCAA Tournament game in eight years and led most of the night. But overtime was needed and it was there where Tennessee put an end to Iowa's season,

defeating the Hawkeyes 78-65 by outscoring them 14-1 in that extra five-minute period.

With that, a 16-4 beginning ends 20-13. The frustration was on display inside an emotional Iowa locker room at UD Arena.

"We were battling with them right then and there for the first half," senior forward Zach McCabe said as he sat in front of his locker holding back tears. "It was just tough second half. Some fouls didn't go our way and I think that just softened us a little bit and it just gave them an advantage."

Earlier in the day, Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery was back in Iowa City with his family as his son Patrick had surgery to remove a thyroid tumor. He returned to Dayton hours before tip-off in awe of the support his family had received not only from those associated with Iowa, but nationwide.

"The outpouring of support is something that you never really expect. You think your immediate friends and members of the Hawkeye family are going to reach out to you," McCaffery quote. "The national scope of the support was something that we never envisioned."

"... I've had 3-5 text messages every five minutes from somebody in the United States thinking about my son. I just can't imagine anything making you feel any better than that, to know that people care and the Hawkeye community was right at the forefront."

From the start, his players looked inspired. Leading the charge was sophomore center Adam Woodbury, who played what was undoubtedly the best game of his career on the biggest stage anyone on the team had experienced. Not only did he finish with team-highs of 16 points on 8-of-11 shooting and eight rebounds, but he set the tone at the start of both halves for the Hawkeyes by being active on both ends of the floor.

"I had some easy looks early and they were fortunate enough to fall," Woodbury said. "My teammates were looking for me and I'm fortunate they found me in the spots I needed to be.

"But I would trade all of those points for a win right now."

Iowa built its lead, but Tennessee began to chip away at it. For one thing, the Volunteers got to the free-throw line and forced both McCabe and fellow senior forward Melsahn Basabe into foul trouble. Iowa also had off nights shooting from key starters such as Devyn Marble, Aaron White and Mike Gesell.

Tennessee hit a shot as time expired in the first half to trim the Hawkeye lead down to 29-26 at halftime. For most of the second half, Iowa had an answer anytime it appeared the Volunteers would seize momentum.

Among those playing a vital role in keeping Iowa ahead at this juncture was freshman guard Peter Jok, who played 16 minutes off the bench Wednesday and tallied 10 points on 4-of-5 shooting.

"I don't lack any confidence," Jok said. "Every time I go out there, I always have full confidence. I hit the first couple of shots and I just kept shooting and it was going in."

But Tennessee continued to climb back and finally took the lead at 59-57 with 3:07 remaining in regulation. Within a matter of seconds though, Marble responded back with a 3-point play to put Iowa back ahead.

The Hawkeyes led 62-61 when the Volunteers climbed back ahead 63-62. Then after a foul called on White, Tennessee's Jarnell Stokes made 1-of-2 free throws. As he missed the second attempt, Marble came down with the rebound, took the ball all the way up past the 3-point line and nailed a mid-range jumper with 18 seconds left to tie the game and force overtime.

"I was struggling to hit a shot all game," Marble said. "But I

still had confidence in my shot. That's why I wasn't mad. I wasn't getting frustrated. Shots felt good. A lot of them were just going in-and-out or I just missed them.

"It felt good as it left my hand, so did all the rest."

But at this point, the Hawkeyes simply ran out of gas as Tennessee went ahead and never looked back. Iowa shot 0-of-8 from the floor in overtime, while the Volunteers got to the charity stripe 11 times and knocked down 10 of those attempts.

"They left it all out there," McCaffery said of his players. "When you come into the locker room and you're just absolutely, completely physically exhausted, then you don't have anything to apologize for."

With that, the season ends and in the cases of Marble, Basabe and McCabe, so too did their careers. Now comes a long offseason as Iowa prepares to make another run in 2014-15.

"Being in this tournament, there's nothing like it," Woodbury said. "We'll be back. Mark my words. We're going to get back to this tournament if it takes everything I've got."