

Commentary: Basketball should be the furthest thought from Cougill's mind now

By Brendan Stiles

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NORTH LIBERTY, Iowa – I don't at all condone whatever Brennan Cougill did (or in this case, didn't do) to now find himself being academically ineligible for the 2010-11 season and leaving the Iowa men's basketball team in a position where it only has 10 scholarship players.

But I got to give Cougill credit for one thing (only one thing): He is taking this like a man.

I was among the throng of reporters he had to deal with after his Prime Time League game Tuesday night, and to his credit, he knew it was coming and accepted the scrutiny he got from us and will continue to get down the road.

As I left the North Liberty Community Center though, I found myself wondering what type of guidance Cougill has received for some of his decision-making.

I was informed after interviewing Cougill that by deciding to play basketball at Kirkwood Community College while improving his grades, he loses a year of eligibility. Wouldn't it be better for him to not be playing basketball right now? That way if and when he fixes his grades, he'd still have all of his eligibility remaining? Part of me now wants to know who advised him with that decision.

If you want my honest opinion, I really think basketball should be the last thing on Cougill's mind right now. One thing that became clear after Tuesday night is he has not

fully figured out how to balance basketball with school, so why should anyone expect it to be different at Kirkwood?

Jarryd Cole, who is about to enter his senior year and has been a team captain the past two seasons, told me during Cougill's game on Tuesday about how time management is the biggest lesson that has to be learned as a freshman between your sport and your school work. He added that once you survive your freshman year, things tend to get easier as far as that balance is concerned. That, to me, makes complete sense.

I'm not going to act all holier than thou when it comes to grades, because when I was in college, by no means was I an A-student. But I also had a four-year scholarship working for *The Daily Iowan* that I'm proud to say I held onto from start to finish, and in order to receive it each semester, I had to maintain a cumulative 2.7 grade-point average.

Talking to a number of Hawkeye players Tuesday night, they all said they like Cougill and want him to succeed. Some even said they'd gladly welcome him back to the team if head coach Fran McCaffery ultimately decides to next year, assuming Cougill holds up his end of the bargain.

But the fact of the matter is Cougill has to earn back the coaches' trust as well as his teammates' trust if he ever wants to fulfill what he called "a dream."

Basketball may be his sanctuary, like it is for anyone else that plays for the Hawkeyes. At this time, however, it should be off to the side. It will be there again for Cougill if he gets his academic issues straightened out.

Right now, better grades should be his biggest priority. That should be where his mindset is, and if he can stay in shape during this process, even better.

I hope Cougill figures it out, and that someday, he gets a

chance to wear black and gold again. I say that because I think he's willing to accept the obstacles that are now set up on his path to recovery, and because Cougill has acknowledged his mistakes publicly. I also hope that he gets proper guidance as he works towards making amends with the rest of the Iowa basketball program, and that he is doing this for the right reasons.

But in order for him to achieve any of this, school has to be the bigger priority in his life right now. Because if or when the day comes where he does play for the Hawkeyes again, school will still have to be a bigger priority then as well as now, but at least next time around, he might have a better understanding of what is expected.

Cougill has an opportunity to turn this into a valuable learning lesson, not only for himself, but for anyone else who plays basketball at Iowa. And that's what he should be more focused on doing right now.