

10/14/2010: Iowa Media Day notebook

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – When Fran McCaffery took over as head coach on March 29, he made his intentions clear with turning around the Iowa men's basketball program. He wanted to change the style of play. He wanted the players who chose to stick around to be committed to rebuilding. He stressed conditioning and how he wanted his players to be in great shape.



Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery talks about the Hawkeyes' upcoming 2010-11 season during a press conference as part of the team's annual Media Day on Oct. 14, 2010, at Carver-Hawkeye Arena. McCaffery is entering his first season as Iowa's head coach.

Now with the 2010-11 season tipping off exactly one month from Thursday, there was a sense of what junior forward Andrew Brommer described as “a rejuvenation” surrounding the team.

At his press conference as part of the team's Media Day on Thursday at Carver-Hawkeye Arena, McCaffery said where everyone has the Hawkeyes pegged in the Big Ten doesn't matter to him. Not letting things on the outside get to him has rubbed off on the players. Senior forward Jarryd Cole talked about the importance of everyone being even-keel.

"If you're going to do something, do it hard all the way throughout," Cole said. "That's probably the most important thing I've learned, and hopefully the guys can get that message early and we can carry some kind of success throughout the season."

It's not just a change in culture, but a change in attitude. Sophomore forward Eric May said from the minute McCaffery and his coaching staff gave the players their plan to bring back winning ways, basketball became more fun for everyone involved.

"It's basketball that everyone wants to be playing," May said. "I don't know many guys that would rather just walk the ball up the court. It's what these guys are really excited about as well."

Iowa officially starts its preseason practices Friday, and will have three weeks before an exhibition game against Illinois-Springfield on Nov. 7. Then the actual season itself, which features a non-conference slate McCaffery described as challenging, begins with a Nov. 14 contest against South Dakota State.

The non-conference portion of the upcoming season also includes a trip to the Virgin Islands for the 2010 Paradise Jam, a visit to Wake Forest as part of the 2010 Big Ten-ACC Challenge, and the three intrastate games in December against Northern Iowa and Iowa State at Carver-Hawkeye Arena and at Drake.

"I think the way we have our schedule laid out makes sense for

this team," McCaffery said.

Knowing roles

Whether this results in more victories this upcoming season remains to be seen, but a structure has been put in place. McCaffery said Thursday his starting five hasn't been finalized completely, but he has an idea.

Two players that can be inked in as starters barring injury over the next month are junior Matt Gatens and sophomore Eric May, both of whom lost weight and put on more muscle.

Gatens, throughout his Hawkeye career, has played numerous positions on the court. With McCaffery at the helm, the plan is for Gatens to only play the 2-guard and nothing else.

"I think it's going to help him immensely," McCaffery said. "I want him to establish the fact that he can drive the basketball to the rim, not just to his right, which has always been the scouting report on him.

"I think when you take somebody like that, that you want to highlight, you want to make sure they're kind of locked into one position and stay there."

As a result, Gatens was asked to cut his weight down to around 208 pounds. He not only did that, but he also took time to watch film and study other 2-guards. He asked McCaffery for film of 2-guards that played for him while he coached Siena. He also studied NBA players who play the position, specifically Los Angeles Lakers superstar Kobe Bryant.

"Kobe does a great job of posting up, and coaches talked, 'I'd like to have you post up when smaller 2-guards are on you and take advantage of that, and get to the free-throw line or score easy buckets,'" Gatens said. "It's going to be a change. It's something I'm looking forward to, and I'm ready to learn."

Meanwhile, May is expected to play the 3, and McCaffery said of all the players he believes will benefit most from the new style of play, it's the 6-5 native of Dubuque.

"I've never really felt there's a different way to play but to run in the fast break," May said. "You can always pull it back out. But if you're not running the fast break, you're wasting opportunities."

"I couldn't have been more excited about that."

Just call them "brothers"

Freshmen Melsahn Basabe and Roy Devyn Marble might not actually be siblings. But since the two arrived on the UI campus last summer, they've nearly become inseparable.

The friendship between the two began in May. Marble, the son of Iowa all-time leading scorer Roy Marble, was playing high school basketball outside of Detroit and had already committed to Iowa prior to McCaffery being named head coach. Basabe, meanwhile, had originally committed to McCaffery at Siena, then decided to follow him to Iowa City.

Shortly after Basabe announced his intentions to be a Hawkeye, Marble said he friended the Glen Cove, N.Y., native on Facebook, and the two began to hit it off.

"I told him to watch my highlight tape on YouTube, and he said he liked it and stuff," Marble said. "Ever since then, we'd text – it was like a month before we got to the campus – every other day or something like that. Once we got to the campus, we were so much alike. Same music preferences, TV, games."

"It's like we're mirror images of each other. Body size is the only difference."

The two players are now roommates in the dorms, and are always hanging out with each other whenever they aren't on the court.

Basabe called Marble "his brother from another mother."

"It's definitely made [the transition] easier because there's somebody I can connect to, somebody that's with me every day," Basabe said. "It's just a real special thing that I was privileged to be able to have a connection with somebody in such a short period of time."

"Welcome back, welcome back, welcome back"

The hiring of McCaffery meant new people coming aboard as assistant coaches, as well as other duties within the basketball program. In the case of one new assistant and a new video coordinator, it was more of a welcome home.

Former Hawkeyes Kirk Speraw and Ryan Bowen returned to Iowa City this year. Speraw joined McCaffery's staff as an assistant after coaching 17 seasons at Central Florida. He had played at Iowa in the 1970s under then-head coach Lute Olson.

"It has been great reconnecting with a lot of Hawkeye people, and getting back into Carver, and getting back into black and gold," Speraw said. "I'm really looking forward to working with these guys on a day-to-day basis."

Bowen, who played in the 1990s at Iowa under then-head coach Tom Davis, rejoined the program in May after spending 10 seasons in the NBA. As the team's video coordinator, he's the one that edits film and puts it all together for the coaching staff to present to all the players.

Under NCAA regulations, Bowen is not allowed to do any sort of coaching with the players. What he is allowed to do though is share his playing experiences as both a Hawkeye and a professional basketball player.

"I've said this many times: When I was growing up, my dream was to play for Iowa," Bowen said. "Everybody says, 'What was it like to live out your dream in the NBA?' I'd tell them my

dream was to play at Iowa. My dream wasn't to play in the NBA.

"To get back here and be a part of it again is definitely something special, and I just hope we can do things and get this program going in the right direction, and kind of see how it goes from there."

[10/14/2010 – Fran McCaffery press conference transcript \(Source: UI Sports Info.\)](#)

AUDIO:

[Cully Payne](#)

[Andrew Brommer](#)

[Devon Archie](#)

[Roy Devyn Marble](#)

[Melsahn Basabe](#)

[Bryce Cartwright](#)

[Jarryd Cole](#)

[Zach McCabe](#)

[Matt Gatens](#)

[Eric May](#)

[Ryan Bowen, video coordinator](#)

[Kirk Speraw, assistant coach](#)

[Sherman Dillard, assistant coach](#)