

11/3/2010: Iowa men's basketball notebook



Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery discusses the Hawkeyes' upcoming exhibition game on Nov. 7 against Illinois-Springfield during his first press conference of the season on Wednesday at Carver-Hawkeye Arena.

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa — With injuries right now to two marquee players, the starting five Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery puts on the court Nov. 7 for the Hawkeyes' exhibition against

Illinois-Springfield is eye-opening to say the least.

As junior guard Matt Gatens continues to heal from surgery done on his left hand to repair a torn tendon, the starting backcourt for this exhibition will feature a couple of 6-1 guards in sophomore Cully Payne and junior Bryce Cartwright.

During his first press conference of the season Wednesday, McCaffery announced that Payne will continue to play the point while Cartwright is at the 2-spot. Cartwright transferred to Iowa last June after playing at Paris Junior College last season in Texas.

McCaffery has liked what he has seen in practices thus far when the two guards have been on the court together, especially given what Cartwright has shown he can do playing the 2-guard.

"He can make plays from the wing and he can score the ball," McCaffery said. "When we signed him, we knew he could be a point guard for us and run the offense. We weren't sure of his scoring ability. He shot the ball well, gets in the lane, draws the defense, then he kicks it off.

"Having two smaller, quicker guards has been a good thing for us. I think you'll see that lineup on the floor periodically."

Rounding out the starting five are sophomore Eric May and freshmen Zach McCabe and Melsahn Basabe. Senior Jarryd Cole is currently dealing with plantar fasciitis in his left foot.

May said on Wednesday that his role will be specifically playing on the wing.

"This year, it's more of a set position for me," the Dubuque native said. "It's more stable in the sense of I know what I need to do and the things I get to do on the court."

One thing McCaffery cleared up was what fans can expect when they arrive at Carver-Hawkeye Arena for the 3:30 p.m.

exhibition.

"Everyone is going to want to come out flying. Crowd wants to see it, I've been talking about it," McCaffery said. "But, you know, you can run yourself right into a butt-kicking if you don't know how to play fast. I think that's the hardest thing for us in the first couple of weeks.

"Sometimes you go fast to probe the defense, then you pull it back. There's nothing there. Now we grind it."

McCaffery addresses secondary violation

When McCaffery first walked into the press room to address the media, he immediately addressed the situation regarding an article in the Des Moines Register revealing Iowa committing a secondary recruiting violation. The school has since cleared the air with the NCAA in a release that was sent on Nov. 1.

The violation had to do with two recruits – one of whom has verbally committed to Iowa – coming in contact with former Hawkeye players Dean Oliver and Reggie Evans, as well as avid Hawkeye supporter Ashton Kutcher and wife Demi Moore, during the weekend of the Iowa-Iowa State football game last September.

"I've been in this business 28 years, pride myself doing things the right way, so does the University of Iowa. Anything that took place on any recruiting weekend is by the book," McCaffery said. "Anything that happened other than that is unintentional. Without question, this has been blown way out of proportion."

Gatens to learn more next week

Since having surgery on his left hand Oct. 28, Gatens has been spending the past week recovering from the surgery, and Wednesday was the first time he publicly addressed the situation.

Gatens said he will be able to participate in a few things, but he will definitely be held out of the Nov. 7 exhibition.

McCaffery said the reason for having Gatens opt for the surgery was to keep the injury from being what he called "a chronic problem" that could linger the entire season.

"Eventually, we'll give him something on there that's less intrusive, but it wouldn't be right away," McCaffery said. "Might be he misses the first game or two. Might be we run him out there with something on there that would protect him.

As far as whether he will be able to return in time for the Hawkeyes' season opener against South Dakota State on Nov. 14, that will hinge on what doctors tell Gatens when he visits with them next week to get his cast removed.

"Right now, it's just a matter of staying in shape and watching all the new things they put in and helping the guys out as much as possible from a teammate standpoint and also from a coaching standpoint," Gatens said. "If it's good, and [the doctors] tell me I'll be able to play, then I'll definitely be out there."

At least one teammate could tell that Gatens is itching to return to the hardwood in time for next week's opener.

"Knowing Matt, I'm pretty sure he'll be out there," junior forward Andrew Brommer said. "But it's up to the doctors and how it all heals correctly and all the kind of stuff, so it's all up in the air. But knowing him, I know he wants to be out there."

McCabe emerging

McCaffery, during his press conference, was asked about McCabe's progress during practice and referred to him as the team's "most consistent player."

Teammates shared a similar sentiment regarding the Sioux City

native.

“It has been really encouraging to see him play,” May said about his Prime Time League teammate last summer. “He’s shooting the ball really well, and he has a good court sense. He has been showing that he knows where to be on the court on offense and defense, and it’s making a big difference in the type of style that we get to play.”

McCaffery believes that McCabe, as well as the other freshmen, are likely to benefit because the learning curve has started out the same for every player with the coaching transition.

“To settle down and be able to play through a mistake is not always a luxury you give those guys. These kids will have that opportunity,” McCaffery said. “Zach McCabe will come on the floor. If he misses a couple of shots, turns it over, I’m going to leave him in there. I think it will help him dramatically in the long run.”