

2010-11 Big Ten men's basketball previews: Iowa

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

The Big Ten kicks off its 2010-11 men's college basketball season next week, so this week, HawkeyeDrive.com will give you rundowns on all 11 conference teams. The series concludes with a look at the Iowa Hawkeyes, who come off a disheartening 10-22 record in 2009-10, leading to a coaching change and perhaps a culture change.

Here's the good news: I expect Iowa to have a better looking product on the court this year under new head coach Fran McCaffery. But given how the Hawkeyes compare to the rest of the Big Ten, the proper conclusion to make is that fans need to have patience with this new regime. This point cannot be stressed enough.

When this team is coming off a year where it won fewer games than the football team did (which at any school is quite sad), there's no reason for anyone outside the program to have high expectations with what's in place this year. That said, I can tell you from watching most of these players during the summer in the Prime Time League and just from talking to some of them over the past few weeks that there is a clear change present.

The players seem a lot more confident now than they were at this time a year ago. To me, it all starts with the backcourt on this team, especially because the previous regime placed a major emphasis on shooting. Sophomore guard Cully Payne looks a lot better now, and I think part of it is experience, and another part is confidence.

To be fair, I slowly saw the transformation with him happen at

the Big Ten Tournament last year. Even though Iowa lost in the first round to Michigan by a 59-52 margin, Payne had 25 points. This stems as a result of him looking more to drive to the bucket as opposed to kicking it back out every time he finds a lane to run through. It's a point of emphasis both he and McCaffery have stressed they've been working on, and from what I can tell, I expect him to look better.

The same goes for guys like junior Matt Gatens (when he does return from his hand injury) and sophomore Eric May. Gatens returns as the Hawkeyes' leading scorer from a year ago, and where I see him getting better is with mastering his specific role as a 2-guard as opposed to being asked to do everything on the court. It takes a lot of pressure off of him, and I think it will make him a better player. I also believe May is going to benefit as someone being asked to play a specific role on this team.

Then you have post players like Jarryd Cole and Andrew Brommer. One thing Cole has never lacked throughout his Hawkeye career is leadership, and I expect him to have his best season this year as a senior. I also think Brommer is going to surprise a lot of people when he comes off the bench. He's the one player I feel is benefiting the most from the change in culture, and the 6-9 junior looks a lot more relaxed and confident.

As for the newcomers on this team, it looks as though both Zach McCabe and Melsahn Basabe are going to get opportunities right away. McCaffery called McCabe the team's "most consistent player" throughout practice thus far, and Basabe gives Iowa some strength and athleticism inside that it lacked. I also think Roy Devyn Marble and junior college transfer Bryce Cartwright are going to contribute in some fashion, as will redshirt junior Devon Archie, who missed all of last season with an injury after transferring from junior college.

If fans can accept the fact that this team is going to experience growing pains and that the rebuilding McCaffery is doing will be a process that takes time, then I think they'll be more than satisfied. If Iowa wins anywhere between 12-14 games this season with five of those coming in Big Ten play, that to me would signal that McCaffery has the Hawkeyes going in the right direction, especially if the number of wins continues to increase each season to follow.

It might not be there this year in terms of wins and losses, but my sense is that Iowa is going to compete and be in most games. If fans put their money where their mouth is, then the Hawkeyes can definitely benefit from crowds that haven't been inside Carver-Hawkeye Arena in years, and who knows? Maybe there's an upset or two that happens in Iowa City come conference play.

But again, the key is patience. I truly believe McCaffery will right the ship, but I don't expect the results to pay off for anyone right from the start.

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[Illinois](#) – Dec. 29 (H), Feb. 26/27 (A)

[Indiana](#) – Jan. 23 (H), Feb. 5 (A)

[Michigan](#) – Jan. 30 (A), Feb. 19/20 (H)

[Michigan State](#) – Feb. 2 (H), March 2 (A)

[Minnesota](#) – Jan. 16 (A), Feb. 13 (H)

[Northwestern](#) – Jan. 12 (H), Feb. 17 (A)

[Ohio State](#) – Jan. 4 (H), Jan. 19 (A)

[Penn State](#) – Jan. 26 (A)

[Purdue](#) – Jan. 9 (A), March 5/6 (H)

[Wisconsin](#) – Feb. 9 (H)

(H) – Home game for Iowa; (A) – Away game for Iowa