

Hawkeyes cruise in exhibition

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Everything about this was different. Well, maybe not everything.

What remained the same was the design of the Carver-Hawkeye Arena hardwood, about half of the roster, and how postgame interviews are conducted.

But that's where the similarities between the recent past and now are different.

Sure it was an exhibition game, one that Iowa won handily over Illinois-Springfield, 111-66. But think about that score. 111-66.

This might not count in the standings, but consider this: The last time Iowa had more than 100 points in a game of any sort was way back in December of 2006. That was nearly four years ago, and there have now been two head coaches at Iowa since that point in time.

"That's how we're going to play, like Coach said," sophomore guard Cully Payne said. "We're going to get up and down.

"This was a game to me."

It might have been an exhibition, but the crowd looked similar to any regular-season game last winter (well, any regular-season game that didn't have another school's student section behind one of the baskets). The reported attendance was 9,050. It was probably less than that, but nevertheless, that's not bad for anything involving the men's basketball program given the dregs it has been in.

This game was an opportunity for first-year head coach Fran McCaffery to give the fans a taste of what they could expect. What the crowd received was a variety.

Iowa won the opening tip-off, and the first Hawkeye shot was taken with 17 seconds remaining on the shot clock. The first Hawkeye bucket swished through the net with 23 seconds still existing on the shot clock.

The defenses differed from time to time. One minute, Iowa showed a 2-3 zone. The next minute was man-to-man. The next was a 3-2 zone.

What really stood out were the different combinations Iowa had on the floor. In the first half alone, there were 11 different rotations of players. When the first batch of substitutions was made at the 13:31 mark of the first half, the five guys who started weren't together again on the court until the start of the second half. Ten different players, including walk-on Jordan Stoermer, saw action in the first half. Everyone except an injured Matt Gatens received playing time.

"I would say that as a team, we do have depth. A lot of people don't believe so," said freshman Melsahn Basabe, who had 19 points and eight rebounds. "Coach has confidence in everybody on the team, so he throws different guys out there depending on match-ups going on, on the floor.

"He feels that a lot of us can contribute."

There were games last season where maybe eight or nine players were even used. Seeing 10 different players and 11 different sets in a 20-minute stanza. Yes, it was an exhibition, but still. This is different.

Payne finished this game with 10 assists, seven of which came while playing 18 minutes in the first half. In those 18 minutes the 6-1 point guard was on the floor, everyone who played in the first half was out there with him.

“That’s kind of a point guard’s job – to know who’s in and who does what,” he said. “It’s an instilled confidence I have in these guys and that they have in me, and that as a team, we have in our coach.”

Iowa shot 43-of-70 from the field (61.4 percent). Inside the 3-point arc, the Hawkeyes were 37-of-50, or 74 percent. This was a stark contrast from a team that not too long ago, placed an enormous emphasis on slowing the pace down, and taking an open 3-point shot if it was there.

There was a time in the second half of this game where the five players on the court for Iowa weren’t wearing Hawkeye uniforms at any point last year. To be fair, Devon Archie was injured the entire the 2009-10 season. But nevertheless, the contrast was startling.

And then off the court, after the game, there was another noticeable difference. The players weren’t arriving to Carver-Hawkeye Arena or talking to members of the press wearing any sort of Hawkeye apparel. All of them wore a dress shirt, slacks, a tie.

It didn’t matter that this was an exhibition game. The players viewed this the way a reporter views covering a game, or how McCaffery views coaching – as a job. They aren’t getting paid, but they still viewed what they did Sunday as work. They meant business. At least with this cast of characters, or at least the ones who remained from the recent past, this never seemed like an occurrence.

McCaffery said point blank fans shouldn’t be expecting 111 points every night, and he’s right. Illinois-Springfield probably couldn’t match up against anyone on the Hawkeyes’ regular season schedule, but that’s not the point.

The point is this – the differences between the then and now are as clear as clean water. This might not look as apparent next week or next month in terms of wins and losses. But it is

all part of a building process that takes time.

When the success does show, look back to this point. Because it might not mean much now in the grand scheme of things, but it's a story that will someday be worth telling.

Iowa stat leaders:

Points – Eric May, 21 points

Rebounds – Melsahn Basabe and Roy Devyn Marble, 8 rebounds

Assists – Cully Payne, 10 assists

Postgame video:

[Fran McCaffery](#)

[Melsahn Basabe](#)

[Roy Devyn Marble](#)

[Cully Payne](#)

[Zach McCabe](#)