

1/7/2011: Iowa men's basketball notebook



Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery discusses the Hawkeyes' upcoming game at No. 11 Purdue during his press conference on Friday, Jan. 7, 2011 at Carver-Hawkeye Arena in Iowa City.

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – There was a mixture of both good and bad news from Carver-Hawkeye Arena on Friday.

During his press conference, Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery wouldn't officially say that the Hawkeyes would be redshirting sophomore guard Cully Payne, but implied the likelihood of Payne returning to the court this season look bleak as he still is looking at possibly 7-8 more weeks of recovery.

Payne has missed all but the team's first five games due to a sports hernia and torn oblique.

"He's only played five games, so he can get the medical redshirt," McCaffery said. "We're probably heading to that being a formality at some point until somebody just makes it

final. But I would say right now, it doesn't look like he'll be playing."

While Payne has been out, junior guard Bryce Cartwright has been leading the point, and is someone who has become more confident in his abilities with each game.

Cartwright said Payne has been very supportive and has been helping him out while recovering from his operation.

"He has played in the Big Ten," Cartwright said. "You just take what you can learn and apply it."

Meanwhile, players such as sophomore forward Eric May (who came in with the same class as Payne) have witnessed what Payne has gone through and can't help but feel for the Schaumburg, Ill., native.

"The last few weeks, he has been doing a lot more, so I think it's feeling better," May said. "I've been talking with him, and it's a tough surgery. Pretty much everything you do, movement-wise, is affected by that.

"It has been hard for him to be sitting around this long, but he's getting better."

Now for the good news

Payne might not be returning this season, but May will be back in the starting lineup for Iowa on Jan. 9, when the Hawkeyes travel to West Lafayette, Ind., to face No. 11 Purdue.

May missed Iowa's previous contest, a 73-68 loss on Jan. 4 to No. 2 Ohio State, due to a pulled groin. McCaffery said following the game and May reiterated the same on Friday that the decision to keep him out of action was made by trainers.

"It's feeling a lot better," May said. "I've been doing more and more each day. Hopefully today, I could do the whole practice, or at least the majority of it, and then ice. But

it's feeling a lot better."

Freshman guard Roy Devyn Marble made his first career start in May's place against the Buckeyes, and McCaffery admitted Friday that Marble had his struggles. With Purdue having a solid 1-2 punch of its own in guard E'Twaun Moore and forward JaJuan Johnson, May's return to the lineup this weekend is significant from Iowa's end.

"You need all your weapons against a team like that, especially on the road," McCaffery said. "One of the reasons we held him out against Ohio State is so we'd have him for Purdue and for the games following, and you hope that it works out that way, that he doesn't have a setback."

Back on the road

When the Big Ten schedule first came out, the most notable observation regarding Iowa was what appeared to be a murderous stretch of six games at the start of the conference slate. The Hawkeyes have already played both then-No. 23 Illinois and No. 2 Ohio State at home, and in both games, fought each team to the bitter end.

Seven games remain in the month of January, with five of those seven being away from Carver-Hawkeye Arena, including this weekend's tilt with the Boilermakers at Mackey Arena.

Purdue has not been a gracious host to the Hawkeyes, as Iowa has not left West Lafayette with a victory since the 2005-06 season, which was Matt Painter's first season as the Boilermakers' head coach following in Gene Keady's footsteps.

This will only be the Hawkeyes' third true road game this season, with Iowa splitting road contests at Wake Forest and Drake during the non-conference portion of their schedule.

"It seems like the fans are on top of you," junior guard Matt Gatens said regarding what makes Mackey Arena a difficult

venue for an opposing player. "It's kind of a strange seating. The students are right there near the bench, which is cool for them, and the band's right there. It's pretty loud.

"It's fun to be a part of and play in, but it would be a blast to come out of there with a victory. To walk off that court with a victory would be a lot of fun."

Familiarity could play a factor

What makes this weekend's contest intriguing isn't just the players' familiarity with Purdue, but the head coach's as well.

McCaffery's final game as Siena's head coach before accepting the offer at Iowa came in the first round of last year's NCAA Tournament against the Boilermakers.

"I watched a ton of tape on them, a lot of the same players, very physical, very good half-court defensive team," McCaffery said in comparing last year's Purdue team he prepared for in March to the team he'll be facing this weekend.

Another similarity is preparing for a Boilermaker squad missing one of its best players in forward Robbie Hummel, who has torn his ACL twice now. The first ACL injury occurred weeks before Purdue played Siena, while the most recent injury for Hummel came on the Boilermakers' first day of practice this season.

But that's where the similarities end for McCaffery. One key difference he mentioned is the play of Moore.

"Moore is shooting it better. I mean, he's killing it," McCaffery said about Moore's current play, mentioning the Boilermakers' Dec. 31 contest against Northwestern as evidence to this. "Last year, we played him more as a driver because he was so good in that aspect of his game. It felt like we could zone with him out there."

Basabe slowly earning recognition

Since the Hawkeyes walked off the court against Ohio State earlier this week, there has been a lot of talk both around the state and around the Big Ten about Basabe's performance.

Basically going head-to-head against Buckeye freshman Jared Sullinger, the Glen Cove, N.Y., native held his own by finishing with a career-high 22 points and 13 rebounds.

"It's exciting," May said after having a front-row seat to Basabe's outing due to his groin injury. "You see it every day. He's putting in the work, and it's showing out on the court. He was really keeping us in that game, him along with the other guys, but his scoring was really helping."

McCaffery wouldn't go as far as saying he had a breakout game. In fact, McCaffery said he doesn't believe in breakout games. But nevertheless, he was pleased with Basabe's performance given that he played the previous two games sick.

"For his confidence, I think that was tremendous," McCaffery said. "But I think the next step is how does he respond and how does he back it up on the road against a really good team."

Basabe isn't letting his most recent showing get to him, though. While being unfamiliar with Purdue's marquee big man JaJuan Johnson, he isn't letting Johnson's credentials intimidate him, either.

"Right now, my focus is on what I can do in the game, my team, and I'm preparing for Purdue and preparing to go out and be effective," Basabe said. "I'm sure he's doing the same."