

2011-12 Big Ten men's basketball previews: Iowa

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The Big Ten kicks off its 2011-12 men's college basketball season next week, so this week, *HawkeyeDrive.com* will give you rundowns on all 12 conference teams. The series concludes with a look at the Iowa Hawkeyes, who are coming off an 11-20 season last year and enter Year Two of the Fran McCaffery era.

Like many coaching transitions that take place in sports, what took place last season in Iowa City shouldn't have come as a surprise as McCaffery came in looking to install a different brand of basketball and create a vibe that would get fans excited about Iowa once again. Entering the second year of his regime, optimism among fans is probably the highest it has been in years, because while the results didn't show it, the Hawkeyes did make progress throughout last season and managed to close out their regular season with an upset win over then-No. 6 Purdue.

Looking ahead to this year, the Hawkeyes lost one mainstay from last season's squad in Jarryd Cole. It maybe doesn't show in the stats, but Cole was unquestionably the heart and soul of the team. He was the presence in the locker room that kept things positive whenever Iowa did face adversity. McCaffery even made the comment of how he wished he could have had Cole for more than one season.

This season, that leadership is being placed on a pair of senior guards, Matt Gatens and Bryce Cartwright. Gatens has always been a known commodity being an Iowa City native and emerged as one of Iowa's better defensive players last season. Cartwright, on the other hand, found his way in the starting

lineup last season and made the most of his opportunity, as he ended up leading the Big Ten in assists during conference play.

Add in sophomore forward Melsahn Basabe, who started every game as a true freshman and led the Hawkeyes in rebounding, and you have a solid nucleus to build around.

As for the other two positions, one appears to belong to junior forward Eric May, who really has a chance to follow in the path of players such as Gatens and Cartwright this season and become a key figure in this team's success. At center, my feeling is that it will eventually be Andrew Brommer whenever he does return from his sprained knee, but for the time being, Devon Archie has a chance to prove to people he belongs.

Sophomores Devyn Marble and Zach McCabe and freshmen Aaron White, Josh Oglesby and Gabe Olaseni are all going to have a chance to provide sparks off the bench for this team, as McCaffery has said he would go 11-deep when Brommer does return. This is only going to help all of these players as the season progresses because all five of them are capable of playing multiple positions on the court.

The schedule this season is somewhat favorable. Five games are noteworthy during non-conference play – against Creighton on Nov. 20 in Des Moines, vs. Clemson on Nov. 29, and the three in-state showdowns, with games against Northern Iowa and Iowa State played away from Carver-Hawkeye Arena.

As for Big Ten play, the schedule is basically a tale of two halves. The first nine games of conference play are brutal, with trips to Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan State, Purdue and Indiana, while teams such as Ohio State and Michigan play their lone contests against the Hawkeyes. February is much more favorable, and if the Hawkeyes can survive the January slate, they'll have a chance to put themselves in a position where a postseason tournament of any kind shouldn't be out of

the question.

Record-wise, remember that this is a process. This year's team should be better and should win more games. Given how the rest of the Big Ten looks and how Iowa's schedule looks, anything between 14-16 wins is probably a fair expectation for the Hawkeyes. That's not to say they can't do better, but again, a lot of it depends on how they end up handling themselves when Iowa does enter the Big Ten portion of its schedule.

If the conference record ends up being something like 7-11 or 8-10, that to me would indicate that Iowa is further along than anticipated under McCaffery. Last year's mark was 4-14, so anything beyond this shouldn't come as a disappointment to fans.

Click here to read our season previews of the other Big Ten teams (please note you must have either a paid monthly or yearly subscription, or a three-day free trial, to *HawkeyeDrive.com* to access all of these):

[Illinois](#) – Feb. 26 (A)

[Indiana](#) – Jan. 29 (A), Feb. 19 (H)

[Michigan](#) – Jan. 14 (H)

[Michigan State](#) – Jan. 10 (A)

[Minnesota](#) – Jan. 4 (A), Feb. 1 (H)

[Nebraska](#) – Jan. 26 (H), Feb. 29 (A)

[Northwestern](#) – Feb. 9 (A), March 3 (H)

[Ohio State](#) – Jan. 7 (H)

[Penn State](#) – Feb. 4 (H), Feb. 16 (A)

[Purdue](#) – Dec. 28 (H), Jan. 17 (A)

[Wisconsin](#) – Dec. 31 (A), Feb. 23 (H)

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