

COMMENTARY: Bench play provides spark (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – While watching the Iowa Hawkeyes cruise to an easy 96-53 win over Chicago State on Friday at Carver-Hawkeye Arena, there was one statistic brought up post game that left my mind blown.

Iowa got 57 points from its bench. Yes, the reserves scored more points than the entire Chicago State roster did. It's really not something you see much in basketball, especially at the collegiate level.

Sure, the Dallas Mavericks did something similar in the NBA playoffs last spring, but that was an NBA team that went on to win a championship. We're talking about an Iowa squad that went 11-20 last season, and this is what takes place in the opener this season.

Aaron White stole the show on Friday. The freshman forward posted a double-double in his Hawkeye debut of 19 points and 10 rebounds. Now as atrocious as Chicago State played (27 turnovers is pretty bad, don't you think?), White earned what he ended up with on this night.

Consider that White is the first Iowa freshman to have a double-double in a season opener since 1993 when Jess Settles finished his Hawkeye debut with 13 points and 11 rebounds. That's pretty good company to associated with if you're White.

As big a role as White played in the outcome of this game, he wasn't the only reserve who provided a spark for this team. Sophomore forward Zach McCabe finished with 13 points and five

rebounds. Even more significant is that McCabe appears to be a more comfortable player than he was as a freshman last year. He seems more certain of himself and of the role he's being asked to play when he's on the court.

When you look at senior guard Bryce Cartwright only playing 15 minutes, this was a contest where sophomore guard Devyn Marble got to see plenty of live action playing the point, which isn't so much his natural position as it is his role on this team since Iowa lacks depth at point guard. Marble only scored six points, but he also had seven rebounds on the night, which was second to White's 10.

Even freshman center Gabe Olaseni got in on some of the fun. He only played nine minutes, but looked more comfortable than he did in the exhibition game Nov. 6 as he finished with eight points and four rebounds. Even more telling is that six of those eight points came from the free-throw line, meaning Olaseni is drawing fouls on opposing players when he is out there. As limited as his role might shape up to be, he looked better.

The one player not mentioned yet is freshman guard Josh Oglesby, who only scored four points. However, Oglesby also played 19 minutes and let's be honest, a shooter of his caliber won't be 1-for-7 every night. Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery even made the comment afterwards how Oglesby could just as easily have a 24-point game during any given performance.

It's not something that will always be effective through the course of the season (after all, it was only one game), but given what the Hawkeyes received from their bench Friday, their performance is noteworthy and one that could be telling at times later in the season when Iowa isn't playing teams like Chicago State regularly.

The effort was what the Hawkeyes needed. Now it's just a

matter of that effort becoming consistent, and that's really the next step here.