

# COMMENTARY: Linking the past to present important (premium)

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – Not even five minutes after finishing his opening press conference as Iowa's new men's basketball coach, Fran McCaffery had a former coach and Hawkeye icon – Tom Davis – reaching out to him.

Almost two years have past since that afternoon, and on Saturday, Davis' first Iowa team was being paid tribute to. A pregame ceremony honoring that 1986-87 squad was capped off by McCaffery handing a commemorative basketball to Davis, who held back tears standing at mid court alongside his former players and at least one former assistant.

It's one thing for the UI to pay homage to one of its best basketball teams over the past quarter-century, but there's a strong message being conveyed that, quite frankly, needs to be conveyed. What happened in the past might be things of the past, but in order to build on tradition and legacies, it's important for this program to make the strides it has, really, since McCaffery first took over.

Consider that since Davis' departure in 1999, Iowa has only had one player without any association to "Dr. Tom" be drafted by an NBA team (Adam Haluska in 2007). The team being honored Saturday had eight guys drafted over the course of four years. Before the game, Davis said that was more the norm throughout the entire Big Ten, to have numerous players drafted over that type of time span.

If the Hawkeyes want to make the strides McCaffery wants to take, they need to continue honoring the past any opportunity they get. It doesn't have to necessarily be in the same manner as what took place Saturday, but it needs to continue.

Maybe it's by having 2-3 heritage games a season where past icons get paid tribute to. Maybe it's by the marketing department finding ways to market past players and coaches in advertisements and what not. Either way, it needs to happen.

Make no mistake about this. What took place inside Carver-Hawkeye Arena was special. Even though I wasn't even born until shortly after that 1986-87 season's conclusion, I knew what this day meant to those who are in the same generation as my parents, those who grew up in the state of Iowa during this time when the Hawkeyes were the talk of college basketball.

This isn't to say every good team McCaffery ever coaches at Iowa should be measured up to that 1986-87 squad. For all we know, McCaffery could coach at Iowa for 20 seasons and never make it past the Sweet 16. But keeping the memories of those like B.J. Armstrong, Kevin Gamble, Brad Lohaus, and others who played for Davis alive and well can't hurt.

The most intriguing part of Saturday's tribute though, at least to me, was seeing Bruce Pearl on hand. Pearl spent six seasons as an assistant to Davis and admittedly screwed it up. To see someone like him still be recognized despite some of his transgressions both as an assistant and as a head coach speaks volumes.

There are other iconic players associated with Iowa basketball who have made transgressions themselves that could see Pearl be recognized and feel comfortable thinking maybe they'd receive the same treatment. No one will know until the UI continues to do more things like this.

This is where the men's basketball program can really become what McCaffery envisions it being someday. This is an

opportunity that the UI shouldn't whiff on. Saturday was a start, and it will be interesting to see what happens over the course of the future.