

# 2/21/2012: Iowa men's basketball notebook



Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery discusses the Hawkeyes' upcoming game against No. 16 Wisconsin with the local media during his press conference on Tuesday, Feb. 21, 2012, at Carver-Hawkeye Arena in Iowa City.

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

IOWA CITY, Iowa – As the Iowa Hawkeyes prepare for their Thursday evening bout with No. 16 Wisconsin, the message inside Carver-Hawkeye Arena revolves around consistency.

The Hawkeyes enter this contest already possessing a 72-65 win over the Badgers back on Dec. 31 in Madison, and have won four of their last five games at home. But head coach Fran McCaffery sees consistency being a reason for Wisconsin's success under Bo Ryan, and something he wants his players to continue building in the final weeks of the regular season.

Since Iowa left the Kohl Center with that New Year's Eve

victory, the Badgers reeled off a six-game winning streak during the month of January and find themselves sitting alone in fourth place at 9-5 in the conference play. Wisconsin also comes in having won five of its previous seven Big Ten road games, with the two losses coming to Michigan and Michigan State.

McCaffery said he hasn't noticed any glaring differences in the Badgers from back in December until now, but the improvement of one particular player – guard Ryan Evans – stood out. Evans only played 15 minutes and scored five points in the first meeting. He has since scored in double-figures for Wisconsin in eight of its last 10 games, including each of the last six games.

“Evans has really raised his game, the level of his game,” McCaffery said. “Really been impressive to me as I watch recent film of their team. The rest of the guys are still doing what they've been doing. That's why they're always where they are.

“They're phenomenally consistent in everything they do.”

Two of the key contributors to the Hawkeyes' success that afternoon in Madison were senior guard Bryce Cartwright and freshman forward Aaron White. With both coming off the bench, Cartwright had 17 points and five assists, while White emerged with a team-high 18 points.

While it wasn't a coming-out party White, he acknowledged Tuesday that his performance against the Badgers was the catalyst for his continued consistency through Big Ten play.

“I just felt comfortable because I let everything else go,” White said reflecting back on that game. “I just played the game I love, the game I've been playing for my whole life. It just felt natural.

“I wasn't thinking. I was reacting. Especially in that second

half, where we made a couple of runs. I made some shots, I hit that big 3 in the corner. I just gained confidence from that game.”

## **“Matty Fresh”**

Senior guard Matt Gatens had a performance for the ages in Iowa’s 78-66 win over then-No. 18 Indiana on Feb. 19. The Iowa City native connected on seven 3-point field goal attempts and finished with a career-high 30 points in the victory. His outing followed a five-point loss to Penn State where Gatens scored 19 of his game-high 21 points in the second half and led the Hawkeyes in a near comeback.

“We have a young team, so a lot of it falls on him,” McCaffery said. “We gave away half our lead [against Indiana] and he made the biggest 3 of the game, then he made four more after that.

“He has kind of been doing that consistently all year.”

Gatens’ efforts in both games weren’t enough to garner Big Ten Player of the Week honors (Michigan State’s Draymond Green received the accolade Feb. 20 after averaging 20 points, 10 rebounds and six assists in wins over Wisconsin and Purdue). But he did manage to raise plenty of eyebrows.

Upon reaching the career-high 30 points against Indiana, Gatens was [the third-highest trending topic worldwide](#) on Twitter Sunday night. Not only that, but a new nickname – “Matty Fresh” – was born.

The brainchild of BTN play-by-play man Gus Johnson during last Sunday’s game, “Matty Fresh” has taken on a life of its own across the UI campus. But it’s not just UI students using the nickname around him.

“My girlfriend keeps calling me it, so it’s a little annoying. I don’t know if it’s good or bad,” Gatens said as he cracked a

smile and started laughing.

As far as the recent notoriety goes, Gatens downplayed the attention he has received the last couple of days. He mentioned it being neat to hear from distant relatives who got to watch him on television, but said his attention immediately shifted to Thursday's game against Wisconsin as he exited Carver-Hawkeye Arena.

Coincidentally, Iowa's game against Wisconsin also marks the UI's promotion of Gatens' bobble head, as he is the last remaining senior to have the honor. Previous bobble head nights have already been done for Cartwright, Andrew Brommer and Devon Archie this season.

"It's all right," Gatens said about his bobble head, which he got his first glimpse of Monday. "I don't know about the hair.

"They haven't given me any yet. I think my mom's probably going to go crazy trying to get some."

## **Injury updates**

McCaffery said Cartwright's return Thursday would be questionable, while there's "a possibility" junior forward Eric May could be back. Cartwright has missed the last two games due to an ankle sprain suffered in practice back on Feb. 11, while May continues to deal with back issues that prevented him from playing against Indiana last weekend.

"I think he would make a big impact in the game, but I'm not sure he's going to be able to play," McCaffery said regarding Cartwright's status. "That's where we are."

Cartwright said Tuesday his right ankle has continued to improve and that he was still taking things day-by-day. Pool workouts, balancing exercises and strength and conditioning have been among the forms of rehabilitation he has gone through daily since the injury occurred.

“You don’t want to rush these things,” Cartwright said. “You want to be healthy, but at the same time, help your team. If it’s not helping the team, it’s hurting the team. I don’t want to hurt the team.”

Meanwhile, May’s situation is one where McCaffery said he doesn’t want to rush him back into the rotation.

“He was really trying,” McCaffery said in reference to May not playing against Indiana. “He knows we need him. He knows we need him for some of the time. But he was not nearly what he’s capable of being.

“It wasn’t helping us, wasn’t helping his confidence level, wasn’t helping him at all.”

### **Getting a chance**

Last season, Darius Stokes made the decision to redshirt after walking on. As he sat on the bench and processed everything that took place on the court, the takeaway message for him was making the most of his opportunity.

On Sunday, the redshirt freshman forward found himself receiving his first significant playing time in the Hawkeyes’ win over Indiana. Stokes has seen the court this season, but mainly in situations where the game’s outcome was in hand one way or the other.

Against the Hoosiers, Darius – the son of former Iowa legend Greg Stokes – was brought in off the bench along with Brommer and freshman Gabe Olaseni to provide the Hawkeyes with a rotation that McCaffery looked to have a presence defensively given the height and length those three present.

“At first, I was a little nervous,” Stokes said. “But once I got in there, I calmed down a little bit. I was just trying to bring energy and be active defensively and rebounding. That’s all I tried to do.”

Stokes was inserted back in during the second half and scored on an attempt in the paint that brought an eruption not only from the crowd on hand inside Carver-Hawkeye Arena, but off the bench from his teammates as well.

“We have a great group of guys and great chemistry,” Stokes said. “We all root for each other.”

### **Free admission for students Thursday**

For the second time this month, the UI has announced that students will receive free admission to Thursday’s game between Iowa and Wisconsin. The previous game where students were let in free took place Feb. 1, a game the Hawkeyes won 63-59 over Minnesota.

Following that win over the Golden Gophers, White expressed [via Twitter](#) how he wanted to see students receive free admission for Iowa’s remaining home games. Needless to say, he was pleased upon hearing the news from the UI on Monday.

“I sent out that tweet because it really does make a huge difference,” White said. “When they come and they pack the place and they’re loud, it makes the biggest difference for us.”

McCaffery made clear Tuesday that this promotion was merely that – a promotion that wouldn’t become a regular thing. But he echoed White’s remarks about the difference it makes when the student section is full.

Tip-off between the Hawkeyes and Badgers is scheduled for 8 p.m. Central and the game will be televised nationally on ESPN2.