

# 3/2/2012: Iowa men's basketball notebook



Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery discusses the Hawkeyes' upcoming game against Northwestern with the local media during his press conference on Friday, March 2, 2012, at Carver-Hawkeye Arena in Iowa City.

By Brendan Stiles

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – The stakes for the Iowa Hawkeyes are simple on Saturday. Defeat Northwestern in its regular season finale and Iowa will secure its first winning season in five years, a .500 record in Big Ten play and the No. 7 seed in next week's Big Ten Tournament, facing either Minnesota or Nebraska in the first round. Lose to the Wildcats, and the Hawkeyes would be the tournament's No. 8 seed and play Illinois in the first round.

Add to the equation that Northwestern remains on the cusp of its first ever appearance in the NCAA tournament, and plenty will be on the line for both teams Saturday inside Carver-Hawkeye Arena.

"A .500 record in the league puts you in a completely different situation in terms of postseason opportunity," Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery said. "A lot of times coaches don't like to talk about things specifically like that, but everybody else is, so we might as well do it. I mean, let's not pretend it's not there. It's right there for them if they want it."

"I know that we'll play with great effort. What we have to do is play with better execution than we did when we played them last time."

The Wildcats won the first meeting between the two teams, 83-64, back on Feb. 9 in Evanston, Ill. In that game, Iowa's defense left plenty to be desired as Northwestern knocked down 13 3-pointers and shot 27-of-48 overall. But the struggles against the Wildcats' 1-3-1 zone played as big a role, if not bigger. While the Hawkeyes shot 23-of-45 from the floor, they also turned the ball over 18 times, leading to 20 Northwestern points.

This time around, a greater emphasis has been placed on attacking the 1-3-1 zone, as Iowa knows that's the way it'll need to win the rematch. Senior guard Bryce Cartwright said specifically that getting the ball to corner and moving at a faster pace would be key, as the Hawkeyes struggled in both areas the last time around.

"We just have to move the ball quicker," Cartwright said. "When we were watching the film, we were seeing a lot of opportunities that were there that we didn't take advantage of. We've got to look to exploit it."

### **Hawkeyes thinking postseason**

While most of the conversation nationwide Saturday will be focused on Northwestern's quest for its first NCAA tourney appearance, there's a growing belief inside the Iowa locker room that with wins Saturday and next week in Indianapolis,

the Hawkeyes would be worthy themselves of being among the field of 68.

Iowa currently possesses a 16-14 record, which includes an 8-9 mark in Big Ten play. While the RPI remains low, the catalyst for any March Madness dialogue taking place is the four quality wins the Hawkeyes have in conference over Wisconsin (twice), Michigan and Indiana, all of whom are currently ranked top 20 by the AP and were ranked at the time Iowa beat each of them.

"We've got a lot of good wins and not a lot of people have been doing that in the country as far as ranked wins, so that's my reasoning," Cartwright said. "I think we still have a lot of work to do. We got to keep winning."

Conversely, the Hawkeyes also have a couple of losses that have hampered their RPI, most notably home losses to Campbell back on Nov. 23 and Nebraska on Jan. 26.

Both McCaffery and his players know they'd be on the outside looking in right now, but believe that could change between now and Selection Sunday, which is March 11.

"If we make a little run here at the end, then we'll be one of the hotter teams and playing at a point where I think we deserve to be in," McCaffery said.

If an NCAA tournament bid doesn't come to fruition for Iowa, McCaffery said Friday he would accept any invitations from the NIT or CBI if either tournament wanted to have the Hawkeyes participating. He also said he feels good about Iowa's chances of playing in any sort of postseason this month.

"We'll see what happens next week," McCaffery said.

### **Making the case for Gatens**

The Big Ten announces its end-of-season accolades Monday, among them being first-team all-conference. With Gatens

receiving strong consideration from voters, McCaffery wasted no time making the pitch for his team captain when the topic was brought up during Friday's press conference.

"To me, it doesn't really matter what I say or what anybody else says," McCaffery said. "It matters what he has done and he has consistently performed at a level that I think makes him a first-team all-Big Ten player."

Entering Saturday's showdown with Northwestern, Gatens ranked fifth in the league in scoring during Big Ten play, averaging 17 points per game. He also ranks third during league play in 3-point field goal percentage, shooting 49.5 percent from behind the arc.

"If they vote me to that, then I appreciate it," Gatens said. "I would much rather play in some postseason games than worry about that."

### **Seniors to be honored in pregame ceremony**

Prior to tip-off of Saturday's game, Iowa will conduct its Senior Day ceremony to recognize its four senior players – Gatens, Cartwright and forwards Andrew Brommer and Devon Archie.

For Gatens, it's an afternoon the Iowa City native has long anticipated, having grown up around the program and committing to Iowa during his freshman year at Iowa City High School.

"It will be special," Gatens said. "It's incredible how fast it goes. I haven't put too much thought into it yet, but I'm sure it will hit me pretty hard once it gets here and they call your name for the last time."

Gatens was one of four freshmen in Iowa's 2008 recruiting class. From that group, only he and Brommer remain.

Brommer had a chance Friday to reflect back on his decision to stick around when McCaffery was first hired in 2010. He

stressed the importance sticking to his commitment had on him and that McCaffery sold him on staying from the moment they first met.

“I liked him from the start,” Brommer said. “He just has that aura about him, and I just gravitated towards him.

“He has made me a better player.”

As for McCaffery, he wants to make sure all four seniors get the recognition he believes they deserve, but without losing sight of the implications surrounding Saturday’s game.

“It’s going to be four or five minutes to properly recognize terrific individuals, but my focus is on the game,” McCaffery said. “I don’t want it to be a distraction.

“It’s just a unique atmosphere. It’s an important game. It’s an important game for both teams and you don’t want to lose track of that.”