

10/31/2012: Iowa men's basketball notebook



Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery discusses the Hawkeyes' upcoming exhibition game against Quincy during his press conference held Wednesday, Oct. 31, 2012, at Carver-Hawkeye Arena in Iowa City.

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – As the Iowa Hawkeyes prepare for their lone exhibition game this weekend against Quincy, one of the hot-button issues surrounding the team is who comprises head coach Fran McCaffery's starting five for both Sunday and beyond.

Iowa's game notes released earlier in the week didn't list five starters. At his first press conference of the season Wednesday afternoon, McCaffery said he was still tinkering around with a starting lineup, but added that whoever starts – barring injuries – will remain starters for the foreseeable future.

One scenario looking more and more likely by the day is that

the Hawkeyes' starting lineup consists of the following: Freshman guard Mike Gesell at the point, junior Devyn Marble playing at the 2-guard, senior forward Eric May starting at the other wing, and a post featuring sophomore Aaron White at the 4 and 7-1 center Adam Woodbury.

Should this be the lineup that takes the court Sunday afternoon against Quincy, the most compelling name would be May, who has opened each of the past two seasons as a starter, only to find himself regularly coming off the bench once the Hawkeyes would be deep into conference play.

McCaffery heaped an enormous amount of praise on his team captain Wednesday.

"He has played well enough to be in the starting lineup. I've been very, very happy with Eric May," McCaffery said. "He's kind of doing everything you would expect him to do when he's healthy. But he's doing more off the dribble, shooting the ball well, really showing great leadership, playing like a senior."

While the starting lineup remains to be seen, McCaffery did confirm two other tidbits Wednesday regarding rotation. First, he said Iowa would go at least 10-deep and possibly even 11-deep. He also said the earliest any redshirts would be designated would be after this weekend.

"We can play first-year guys Sunday and still redshirt them, not second-year or third-year guys," McCaffery said. "I don't plan on redshirting anybody other than a freshman, unless of course they got injured. Hopefully that won't happen."

One player McCaffery said was still behind and wouldn't be part of a likely 10-man rotation now is freshman guard Patrick Ingram, who wasn't with the team this summer. Nevertheless, depth along the bench is something that hasn't been a luxury to the Hawkeyes until now under McCaffery, who is in his third season as Iowa's head coach.

“That’s tough to do at this level, to play 10 or 11,” White said. “But it’s great to have that option. If certain guys are struggling, he has got 5-6 guys down the bench that he can confidently put into the game that could change the alteration of the game.

“It’s a good change that we didn’t have last year.”

Closed scrimmage showing progress

Last weekend, Iowa held a closed scrimmage at Carver-Hawkeye Arena against No. 16 Creighton. Because it was closed, nothing specific about the scrimmage (i.e. statistics) can be made public. But McCaffery and his players were allowed to make general comments about it and did so on Wednesday.

McCaffery said his team’s defense was “substantially better” against Creighton – who features preseason All-American guard Doug McDermott – during the scrimmage than it was last November when the Bluejays shot Iowa out of Wells Fargo Arena in Des Moines by 23 points.

One player McCaffery described as being “fearless” during the scrimmage was Woodbury, who had the task of guarding Creighton center Gregory Echenique in the paint.

“Let’s face it. Last year, Echenique had his way with us. Absolutely had his way, could do whatever he wanted to do,” McCaffery said. “He certainly played well [in the scrimmage], but he had to work a lot harder. We had a low-post presence in that game.

“That’s going to be very important for us as we move forward.”

Woodbury called matching up one-on-one against Echenique “a learning experience” and added that with each practice, he has slowly become more confident in his abilities at the collegiate level.

“I try to look at every opponent as an equal to me and I just

try to play as hard as possible, not give too many inches to him and just play physical, not let him push me around," Woodbury said.

White becoming more versatile

As White began to play more minutes last season as a freshman and started posting more consistent numbers game by game, he found his niche playing inside. Whether he was playing the 4, or even the 5 on some occasions, White showed over time he was Big Ten caliber player.

Now with the Hawkeyes having more depth than before, one thing White has spent more time on this offseason is practicing at the 3-spot and will find himself playing more at the 3 over the course of the season.

The one concern McCaffery said he has about playing White at the 3 is when someone he guards attempts to take him off the dribble. He mentioned how during the scrimmage against Creighton, White struggled early on playing the 3 but got into more of a groove playing at the spot in the second half.

White said the scrimmage was his first experience playing another team at the 3.

"I felt really comfortable and Coach felt comfortable putting me there," White said. "I look forward to growing into that position, or at the 4, or wherever he needs me."

May, who made the transition from 2-guard to the 3-spot when McCaffery first arrived back in 2010, said transitioning from position to position is smooth in McCaffery's system because regardless of where someone's playing, they have to know all the sets and where everyone else needs to be before even stepping onto the court.

"Aaron's doing a great job on grooving into the 3-position and knowing where to be on the court, moving from set screens to

coming off screens,” May said. “For myself, the 2-position and 3-position are very similar in this offense.”

Keeping Oglesby aggressive

All throughout last season, McCaffery talked about how Josh Oglesby has a “green light” to shoot 3-pointers anytime he has an open look from beyond the arc.

The sophomore guard still has that green light, and without the services of Matt Gatens on this team, Oglesby is being depended on even more now to take those open looks whenever he gets them.

“He’s never going to be that guy that just starts jacking. I respect that about him,” McCaffery said. “But very few players at this level have the ability to make 7-8 3s in a row in any kind of environment and he has that. He has got a gift there. We got to get it out of him.”

McCaffery joked about how during one of Iowa’s practices earlier this month, Oglesby was getting his face “ripped off” by the coaching staff for turning down open 3s, only to then knock down eight straight 3-pointers after getting the message that day.

Oglesby said building up self-confidence is something he works on regularly and admitted was once a struggle, in part because he had always viewed himself and been regarded by others as an unselfish player.

“Last year, when I missed my first couple of shots, I always got down on myself,” Oglesby said. “You can’t have that. Especially in the Big Ten, when you’re a shooter. You just got to keep shooting.

“I’ve gotten a lot better so far in practice and I think it has helped me a lot.”