

Backcourt play lifts Hawkeyes past Chippewas

By Brendan Stiles

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – It's not unusual to say that Iowa came into this season with three legitimate options at the point guard position. But what might have been unusual to those on hand at Carver-Hawkeye Arena on Monday was seeing all three of those options together on the court at the same time.

The Hawkeyes found a way in the second half to emerge with a 73-61 victory over Central Michigan and three of the biggest reasons why were Devyn Marble, Mike Gesell and Anthony Clemmons.

Marble played all 40 minutes Monday night, starting like he has at the 2-guard, but also seeing minutes at both the point and the 3-spot. The Southfield, Mich., native played over a quarter of the first half at the point while accompanied by sophomore Josh Oglesby in the backcourt. However, he would spend a majority of the second half playing at the 3 and alongside both Gesell and Clemmons, who was on the court for the final 15:12. Afterwards, Marble said he "really liked" being on the floor with both freshmen.

"They both handle the ball well, so it frees me to be able to move around a lot more and just be myself," Marble said after scoring a game-high 18 points. "When I play with those two guys, I really enjoy it."

Clemmons' playing time was probably the most noteworthy thing to take away Monday night. After only playing 14 minutes against Texas-Pan American in the season opener, he played a total of 21 minutes off the bench and finished the game with

nine points and four assists. He said his confidence began to grow after hitting a 3-pointer in the final seconds of the first half to put Iowa up 29-26 at halftime.

But it's worth mentioning again: Most of the minutes Clemmons played in the second half were alongside Gesell, a guy he constantly competes against in practice every day. In fact, Clemmons said it was only recently that McCaffery started experimenting with playing the two freshmen together on the same team during practices.

"We just recognize each other and know each other's games," Clemmons said. "When he's hot, I got to be able to get it to him. In practice, one time he got hot, he hit like 7-8 3s in a row.

"Once he's in that rhythm, you have to give him the ball, just like [former Iowa player] Matt Gatens."

As for Gesell, he proved to be the key to Iowa's ignition Monday. With the game tied at 34-34, he hit a go-ahead 3-pointer that actually gave the Hawkeyes a lead they wouldn't surrender at any point the rest of the way. Shortly thereafter, he had an assist on a dunk from sophomore forward Aaron White and then following that timeout was when Clemmons was inserted into the game.

Gesell finished with 15 points and a team-high five assists.

"I think I needed to make a shot to get my confidence back a little bit," Gesell said. "But it got the crowd into it a little bit, I think it got Aaron going a little bit and we just got to weather the storm.

"We started being more aggressive and it helped out a lot."

With both freshmen on the floor alongside Marble, Iowa was able to extend its lead up to 58-43 before Central Michigan went on one last run to make the Hawkeyes sweat a little more.

McCaffery said part of the reason he played most of the second half with that smaller lineup had to do with the Chippewas playing with a smaller lineup themselves, something their head coach Keno Davis (who is the son of former Iowa head coach Tom Davis) acknowledged was a result of Central Michigan not having enough depth inside.

“They took their center out and they were spreading us and driving the ball,” McCaffery said. “So we had to put a team out there that could contain penetration. We gave them five 3s in the first half. We felt like if we gave them five 3s in the second half, that would really be problematic.

“We contained penetration better, contested 3s better and then got a little more movement on offense and executed substantially better in the second half offensively.”

Next up for Iowa is a pair of home games that are part of the Cancun Challenge in which the Hawkeyes will be going down to Mexico to partake in next week. The first of those two preliminary contests comes Nov. 15 when Iowa plays Howard at Carver-Hawkeye Arena. Tip-off is scheduled for 7 p.m. and the game will be televised locally by Mediacom Connections Channel 22.