

# COMMENTARY: Freshmen guards make difference (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

IOWA CITY, Iowa – When Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery managed to land both Mike Gesell and Anthony Clemmons in his 2012 recruiting class, he told them both that they would be brought in as point guards, that they would go head-to-head in practice and that there might be occasions where they're on the floor together.

The first true opportunity for McCaffery to play both freshmen point guards at once might have come earlier in the season than planned. But nevertheless, both Gesell and Clemmons together provided a dynamic Monday night that could pay huge dividends in the long run for Iowa.

These two players played major roles in the Hawkeyes leaving Carver-Hawkeye Arena with a 73-61 win over Central Michigan, mainly because of what they did in the second half. In the first half, neither was that effective, to the point that junior guard Devyn Marble played nearly six minutes of the first half at the point guard spot while both freshmen were on the bench.

But then came that second half. With the game tied at 34-34, Gesell knocked down a go-ahead 3-pointer and followed that with an assist on an Aaron White dunk moments later to put Iowa ahead by five points. As it turned out, the Chippewas were never able to catch up to the Hawkeyes from that point forward. In fact, Iowa built up a lead of as many as 15 points while the momentum was in its favor and Gesell was the biggest reason why.

Now here's where it got interesting. The Hawkeyes held that 39-34 advantage at the U-16 timeout, which came with 15:12 remaining. McCaffery inserted Clemmons into the lineup, but kept Gesell out there (as well as Marble, who played all 40 minutes of Monday's game). The two freshmen rotated between the 1-guard and 2-guard spots at both ends. Neither player tired out and both proved to be very effective against a Central Michigan squad that its head coach Keno Davis acknowledged afterwards is undersized.

Iowa had to play most of the evening with a small lineup, but the strategy paid off. Aside from a quick two-minute breather, Gesell almost played the entire second half. When Clemmons came into the game at that 15:12 mark, he stayed in for its remaining duration and wound up playing 21 minutes off the bench Monday night.

Clemmons didn't necessarily light it up scoring, but he did provide four assists. Gesell, meanwhile, had 15 points and five assists playing 32 minutes. These two guys alone accounted for over a quarter of Iowa's minutes, 24 points and nine assists. If Iowa continues to get that type of production from these two players on a consistent basis this season, the Hawkeyes become a dangerous team.

Marble said after the game he liked being on the court with both freshmen at the same time and moving over to the 3-spot as a result. It has already been established that Marble's better on the wing than he is at the point. Now have all three of these guys on the court at once, and you have a backcourt that will continue to push and be aggressive. Not to mention they benefit guys like Aaron White, Melsahn Basabe, Adam Woodbury and Eric May.

There will be times that McCaffery will have to go with a bigger lineup and can't really afford to play these guys together. But he now knows it can be and probably will be effective down the road when Iowa does have to utilize a

smaller lineup going forward.