

Hawkeyes hammer Howard

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – There was nothing pretty about it, but the Iowa Hawkeyes are 3-0.

Iowa won its first of two Cancun Challenge preliminaries Thursday night, defeating Howard 66-36 at Carver-Hawkeye Arena. The Hawkeyes got the victory to move to 3-0, but they did so despite an anemic 4-of-21 shooting performance from behind the arc.

With the Bison coming out in a 2-3 zone, the Hawkeyes were looking for shots from the perimeter. Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery said afterwards it was simply a matter of good looks just not falling throughout the night.

“It wasn’t poor shot selection,” McCaffery said. “I mean, the only thing you could’ve said was there were times we shot it quick. Everybody was open. I’m very comfortable with the shots we took.”

Leading the way for the Hawkeyes were the two players one would expect to carry the load on a night such as Thursday. Junior guard Devyn Marble was the best shooter on the floor, compiling 22 points on 9-of-15 shooting. He also happened to be the only Hawkeye who made multiple 3-pointers on the evening, including one that hit the top of the backboard before rolling in.

Marble set the tone early on, scoring 11 of Iowa’s first 13 points. Unlike the Hawkeyes’ 12-point win earlier in the week against Central Michigan, Marble was only needed for 29 minutes Thursday as opposed to playing all 40 minutes.

“I wanted to come out aggressive and get off to a fast start,”

Marble said. "We didn't want to let this team get any confidence early on. That's why we pressed them hard. So that was the main reason. I just happened to be knocking shots down."

With Iowa ahead 36-16 at the half, the start of the second half was when the Hawkeyes' other bright spot emerged in the form of sophomore forward Aaron White. Following a first half where he only had four points (two of which came from the free-throw line), White had six of the first eight points of the second half and ended up finishing with a 16-point, 8-rebound performance that featured 10-of-11 shooting from the charity stripe.

Ironically, his one missed free-throw attempt came after freshman guard Mike Gesell found White for an alley-oop dunk that energized the 10,704 spectators in attendance.

"It's great to have two guys like us that night in and night out, you can consistently get what you expect from us," White said about the performances both he and Marble had Thursday. "That's big for our team and I think we're doing a pretty good job of trying to lead the younger guys with our actions and how we're playing aggressive and tough."

One of the other positive takeaways Iowa can take away from this game was its play defensively, which has continued to improve immensely from last season. Not only were the Bison held to 36 points, but they shot 14-of-52 from the floor and almost had as many turnovers (13) as shots made.

"The coaching staff keeps on emphasizing that we might have bad shooting nights like tonight and the thing that can't waver or lean in any certain direction is our defensive intensity," said sophomore center Gabe Olaseni, who didn't score but had three rebounds and a team-high two blocked shots. "We started out a little slow at the start of the second half, but we picked it up."

The Hawkeyes now have a quick turnaround before playing their other Cancun Challenge preliminary, which comes Saturday night against Gardner-Webb. Iowa should expect a much stiffer challenge from the Bulldogs. Gardner-Webb enters this next game coming off a 71-59 victory at DePaul on Thursday in a game that's also part of the Cancun Challenge.

Tip-off is set for 7 p.m. Central and the game will be televised locally on Mediacom Connections Channel 22, as well as online at BTN.com.