

# Hawkeyes advance to Cancun Challenge championship

By Brendan Stiles

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The Iowa Hawkeyes jumped ahead and wouldn't look back Tuesday night, as they defeated Western Kentucky 63-55 in the semifinal round of the Cancun Challenge, taking place at the Moon Palace Resort in Cancun, Mexico. With the victory, Iowa is now 5-0 for the first time in four seasons and will meet Wichita State – who defeated DePaul earlier in the evening – for the Cancun Challenge championship on Wednesday.

The Hawkeyes were led by freshman guard Mike Gesell, who hit three 3-pointers in the early going and finished with a game-high 19 points on 7-of-10 shooting from the floor. Gesell scored nine of Iowa's first 17 points on the night.

"I knew I had to stay aggressive," Gesell said in a postgame interview with the Hawkeye Radio Network. "I didn't shoot well the last game [against Gardner-Webb] and I just found a few extra shots up in practice and I knew I had to just stay confident."

Also providing heavy contributions on the evening were the Hawkeyes' trio of juniors – Zach McCabe, Melsahn Basabe and Devyn Marble. Although McCabe fouled out of the contest, he finished with nine points and five rebounds while playing 21 minutes.

Basabe elevated his play in the second half and went on to post a stat line of 11 points, five rebounds and four blocked shots against the Hilltoppers. Marble ended up with 10 points, but a bulk of those came in the closing minutes as he hit a floater and sunk a pair of free throws to seal the Iowa win.

"He was trying almost to be a little too perfect at times," Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery said during a postgame interview with the Hawkeye Radio Network. "He had a few too many turnovers. But he was really good when we needed him to be."

The Hawkeyes won thanks in large part to holding Western Kentucky to 20-of-60 shooting, including 5-of-21 from behind the 3-point arc. However, Iowa also managed to win in spite of committing 18 turnovers, 10 of which came in the first half.

"We turned the ball over too much and that's the thing that's disappointing," McCaffery said. "Eighteen turnovers is too many. We've got to improve in that area, but I'm thrilled with our depth."

Wednesday's game between Iowa and Wichita State is slated to start at 8:30 p.m. Central and will be televised once again from the Moon Palace Resort by CBS Sports Network.