

12/6/2012: Iowa men's basketball notebook



Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery discusses the Hawkeyes' upcoming game against Iowa State during a press conference held Thursday, Dec. 6, 2012, at Carver-Hawkeye Arena in Iowa City.

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – For all the downplaying being done about how Iowa's game against Iowa State Friday night is "just another game," make no mistake. The anticipation around Carver-Hawkeye Arena is high.

The Hawkeyes are 7-2, but both losses have come against the best competition they've seen to date in No. 24 Wichita State and Virginia Tech. Meanwhile, Iowa State enters with a 6-2 record, with both of its losses coming to Cincinnati and UNLV, both of whom are currently ranked in the AP top 25.

Either way, the winner of this year's Cy-Hawk battle will have that marquee victory on its résumé. Considering how Iowa has

lost each of its last three meetings to its intrastate foe, a win for head coach Fran McCaffery and his program would be monumental.

McCaffery downplayed the whole rivalry aspect to Friday's showdown, but acknowledged it would be an indicator of where the Hawkeyes are as they get closer to Big Ten play.

"It's a tremendous challenge, especially for our younger players," McCaffery said during his press conference Thursday. "It will be a great barometer. If we play well, that would be terrific. But if not, then we learn and we move forward."

Like McCaffery, the players also downplayed the rivalry. They realize that the atmosphere expected at Carver-Hawkeye Arena for this game will be unparalleled to anything else they've seen thus far. But junior guard Devyn Marble specifically stressed the importance for him and his teammates to all maintain composure, even with plenty at stake.

"You don't want to make it bigger than it already is," Marble said. "I think with a lot of guys play in a game like this, you start to see quicker shots and more erratic play. You want to be as calm and as normal as possible."

"You don't want to play with a lack of energy, but you don't want to play with so much energy that you're having a hard time thinking and forgetting the game plan and stuff like that."

Clemmons vs. Lucious

One player is a fifth-year senior who transferred to Iowa State from Michigan State after being part of two Spartan teams to reach the Final Four under Tom Izzo. The other player is a true freshman for Iowa who grew up close to the Michigan State campus in Lansing.

Friday night, the key match-up might be at point guard, where

Iowa's Anthony Clemmons draws the assignment in what will be his third career start against Korie Lucious, who has regained his swagger playing for Fred Hoiberg over in Ames.

"It's pretty funny that I'm going against him," Clemmons said after drawing reference to watching Lucious play in person when he was at Michigan State. "I never knew I would be, but that's a real crafty guy. He's real quick. He's very small. A great, capable shooter."

After redshirting last season following his transfer, Lucious has started all eight of the Cyclones' games this season at the point, averaging 9.4 points and 5.3 assists per contest. As for Clemmons, his most recent performance featured eight assists and zero turnovers in what was an 87-63 win for Iowa over South Dakota on Dec. 4.

Clemmons starting the point has allowed fellow freshman guard Mike Gesell to move over to the 2-spot after starting at point guard in the Hawkeyes' first seven contests of the season. With that said however, Gesell will still see minutes at the point Friday night and like Clemmons, knows full well the importance of keeping someone like Lucious in check.

"We got to go out there and just try to outwork him," Gesell said. "We got to really get into him early, try to get him going sideways early. Once he gets his game going, once he hits a few of those pull-up 3s that he likes to shoot, it's tough to stop him."

Rebounding could be the difference

Lately, Iowa has fared better in the rebounding category. After a three-game stretch away from home where they gave up a total of 40 offensive rebounds, the Hawkeyes have out-rebounded their last two opponents 88-54 and have only given up 18 offensive boards.

Iowa State enters Friday's contest as the nation's leading

rebounding team with an average of 45.6 boards per game, so while rebounding has gotten better for the Hawkeyes, McCaffery understands the role it will play for his squad against the Cyclones.

“They tend to limit you to one and get more than one,” McCaffery said. “It’s only logical to look at it and say we got to rebound.”

One reason why freshman center Adam Woodbury believes Iowa State has been effective on the glass this season has to do with its physicality inside, something he called the Cyclones’ M.O.

“They’re real physical,” Woodbury said. “But I think we’re physical, too. We’re going to match-up with them and we’ll see who wins that battle.”