

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



Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery discusses the Hawkeyes' upcoming game against Northern Iowa during his press conference held Wednesday, Dec. 12, 2012, at Carver-Hawkeye Arena in Iowa City.

By Brendan Stiles

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – For each the past 24 seasons, Iowa has annually played Northern Iowa, doing so either inside Carver-Hawkeye Arena or making the hour-long trek up I-380 to Cedar Falls.

On Saturday, the Hawkeyes and Panthers meet again. Except this time around, they'll meet on a neutral court for the first time ever.

Iowa's game against UNI will be the first of two contests comprising the inaugural Big Four Classic being held inside Des Moines' Wells Fargo Arena (the other featuring Iowa State against Drake). The previous 13 meetings between the two have

come on a Tuesday night before both schools had final exams, with the bulk of those taking place just before Iowa played Iowa State.

This time around, UNI is the Hawkeyes' first opponent post-finals, and this match-up comes just over a week after Iowa knocked off Iowa State 80-71 at Carver-Hawkeye Arena back on Dec. 7.

"The morale of the team has been very high," freshman guard Mike Gesell said. "You know, we're obviously excited about that win. It was a big win against a very good team. But we've got to just put that behind us now."

Like Iowa, UNI is also coming off a huge victory itself, having just defeated George Mason on the road over this past weekend. Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery described the Panthers as a team that featured "a lot of weapons" and one that could provide trouble when determining a proper defensive scheme.

"They're substantially more athletic than I think anybody gives them credit for," McCaffery said.

### **Memorable and unmemorable moments in Des Moines**

Wells Fargo Arena has provided those within the basketball program with plenty of memories – both good and bad.

Those who grew up in Iowa like senior forward Eric May, junior forward Zach McCabe and freshman center Adam Woodbury have recollections of playing state tournament games there. In May's case specifically, it's where he took the biggest shot of his entire basketball career, nailing a 37-footer in the final seconds to lift Dubuque Wahlert High School to a state championship his senior year.

"I think I'll get reminded of that every time I come in there," May said. "Hopefully I can make a new memory – hopefully not that dramatic – on Saturday."

Then there are ugly memories that go beyond the high-school level. Last year, Iowa played Creighton at Wells Fargo Arena as part of the Dale Howard Classic. It ended up being one of the Hawkeyes' worst performances of the entire season as the Bluejays hit a barrage of 3-pointers to sink Iowa, 80-53.

When asked if there was anything about playing at Wells Fargo Arena before that might be of benefit to his team on Saturday, all McCaffery did was refer back to being drubbed by Creighton.

"The one thing I do remember is that we did have a substantial amount of Hawk fans at the game. That was great to see," McCaffery said. "It was unfortunate that we didn't play better when they showed up. I think that's something that can always be a little upsetting when you want your fans to see you play well.

"They didn't that day and hopefully they will Saturday."

### **Revisiting last year's meltdown**

When Iowa met UNI last year at the McLeod Center, the Panthers were victorious by an 80-60 score. It wasn't until the second half though when the Hawkeyes lost control, as three technical fouls were called – one called on McCabe, and the other two on McCaffery, leading to his only ejection from a game in three seasons as Iowa's coach.

To McCaffery's credit, he voluntarily brought up last season's debacle when asked about whether his team was beyond playing games like the one it played against Creighton, especially with his current team coming off its biggest win to date.

"You know, we could get into we were upset and this and that," McCaffery said. "But if you just break down how we played, we didn't play well enough to win that game. They played better."

McCabe said everything about that loss – from the technical

foul he picked up, to the sheer fact Iowa lost that game by 20 points – has remained fresh in his mind and has not only motivated him this week, but the entire team.

“We need to be the tougher team,” McCabe said. “UNI has that mentality that they’re going to be tougher than us. We’ve been a tougher team lately. We just need to continue to do that.”