

# COMMENTARY: Starting Basabe pays off (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

IOWA CITY, Iowa – The move was one Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery contemplated for the past week and finally pulled the trigger on Thursday night.

Almost one year to the date that Melsahn Basabe was removed the starting lineup and had to begin embracing a role off the Hawkeye bench, the junior forward came full circle Thursday night against Penn State, earning his first start of the season after becoming a model of consistency as a reserve this season.

Basabe would make his coaches and teammates proud inside Carver-Hawkeye Arena, guiding Iowa to a 76-67 win over Penn State by recording a double-double of 10 points and 10 rebounds.

The move wasn't a complete shock, as McCaffery had said earlier this week how Basabe had earned the opportunity to start again. What was somewhat surprising was who he started in place of. Instead of starting in place of freshman center Adam Woodbury, it was in place of another freshman – guard Anthony Clemmons.

As a result, Iowa found itself bumping freshman guard Mike Gesell back to the point, junior Devyn Marble back to the 2-guard, and sophomore forward Aaron White moved back to the 3-spot, which he opened the season at before Clemmons became a starter in place of junior forward Zach McCabe.

This move paid off Thursday and has potential to be a huge

pay-off long term now as well. The reason why is because of the consistency Basabe has played with all season, and it was done without completely damaging the psyche of Woodbury.

Talking to these guys after the game, it became clear. Clemmons described it as "a stress reliever" to be coming off the bench again. It's not that he didn't want to start, but aside from maybe the game Iowa won over Wisconsin back on Jan. 19, Clemmons really hasn't played that well since the Hawkeyes got manhandled at Michigan earlier this month.

Meanwhile, some of the criticism directed at Woodbury has been unwarranted. His role isn't to be a scoring big man. Prior to Thursday's game, McCaffery made two things clear: First, he had not been disappointed by Woodbury to the point that he would want to bench him. Secondly, his expectations for Woodbury are for him to impact the game doing things like passing the ball to open guys on the wing or hauling in rebounds.

Woodbury had four points Thursday night. He also tallied six rebounds and three blocked shots. He also made some nice dishes throughout the 20 minutes he was on the floor. The Sioux City native made his impact.

And then there's Basabe. The question surrounding him was whether he'd still remain motivated after being named a starter. He backed up his coach's confidence in him and at this point in time, there's no reason to think this won't continue. Basabe's maturation process has been sincere. The only thing about him frankly that hasn't changed is his detailed responses to questions he gets asked.

Basabe is back on track to becoming the kind of player many thought he would become after watching him as a freshman. That's huge going forward, especially with Iowa playing teams with big lineups here in the next week such as No. 23 Minnesota and Wisconsin. The Hawkeyes can somewhat go toe-to-

toe with these teams, both of whom they have to play on the road.

It might not have gone down the way it was being anticipated, but nevertheless, the button was pressed and Basabe has matured enough to the point where he can be trusted again. This is significant for a team that needs leadership and needs to find ways to be productive when shots aren't falling if it's going to win games like the one it won Thursday.