

2/8/2013: Iowa men's basketball notebook



Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery discusses the Hawkeyes' upcoming game against Northwestern during his press conference held Friday, Feb. 8, 2013, at Carver-Hawkeye Arena in Iowa City.

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HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – Two weeks ago, the questions about shooting struggles and confidence swirled around the play of Iowa sophomore guard Josh Oglesby. Friday afternoon, similar questions were being asked of both head coach Fran McCaffery and other Hawkeye players about another guard – junior Devyn Marble.

The month of February has started in a forgetful manner for Marble. On Feb. 3 at Minnesota, Marble was held scoreless and made a critical turnover in the final minute, just before the Golden Gophers hit a game-winning 3-pointer. Afterwards, McCaffery described Marble's play as "tentative."

Then two nights ago at Wisconsin, the 6-6 guard scored two points on 1-of-10 shooting and had defensive lapse down the stretch that got him benched for the rest of regulation. But despite Marble's recent woes, McCaffery showed no hesitation Friday saying Marble would remain in the Hawkeyes' starting lineup for Saturday's game against Northwestern.

McCaffery went on to say that Marble, to him anyway, looked more aggressive against the Badgers and has continued to be that way during practice. He also said the point he has tried to hammer home with Marble, like he had and continues to with Oglesby, is shoot any time an open shot is available.

"A lot of times, you think kids overthink. Sometimes, they do," McCaffery said. "The one thing they accept is logic. If you can logically show them, that, I think, will have better ramifications down the road than trying to overthink it."

Marble said this slump is something he hasn't gone through at any point of his basketball career. As he showed up to speak with reporters Friday at Carver-Hawkeye Arena, Marble came in all smiles, trying to maintain a positive outlook on things. He mentioned putting in extra work, trying to regain the arc on his shots, which he said has looked flat lately. What he wouldn't do though, was use recent injuries to his ankle and toe as an excuse for why he hasn't played as capable as he has shown before.

"I don't want to just say it's that because I don't know, we don't really know," Marble said. "You could maybe say that was a problem because I wasn't able to shoot in the time I missed, just trying to stay off of it."

"You could say that, but I'm not really worried about what happened. We're just trying to get back to what was working."

The encouragement Marble said he has gotten from others, including McCaffery, has proved helpful to him. As for Oglesby, he has scored 17 points in each of Iowa's last two

games against the Golden Gophers and Badgers. Like McCaffery, Oglesby sees it as only a matter of time with Marble.

“Dev’s a great basketball player,” Oglesby said. “I just had to stay confident and the coaches kept going to me. They’re going to keep going to Dev. He’ll bounce back.”

Reason, or dumb luck

Iowa’s 74-70 double overtime loss Feb. 6 at Wisconsin marked the fourth time during Big Ten play where the Hawkeyes squandered a lead in the final two minutes of regulation. Instead of possibly being 7-3 and one game back of first place in the conference standings, Iowa is 3-7 in large part due to these close defeats.

That such an occurrence has happened four times in the last month – and more specifically, twice just this week alone – has led to questions about whether the Hawkeyes are now just victims of bad luck as opposed to doing things that cause them to unravel late in games.

McCaffery said he isn’t of the notion that Iowa has been unlucky, but did say he figured the breaks that haven’t gone the Hawkeyes’ way would even out by now.

“There’s no question we’re breaking down every aspect of every situation late game,” McCaffery said. “Your only hope, especially when we’re playing so many young guys, if they’re in that situation again, they’ll remember and see it and maybe make a better play.”

In the two losses this week to both Minnesota and Wisconsin, both teams made 3-pointers in the final minute that were contested by freshman guards. Mike Gesell contested the 3-pointer by Minnesota’s Austin Hollins that gave the Golden Gophers a 60-59 lead with 11.6 seconds left. Anthony Clemmons contested the game-tying bucket by Wisconsin’s Traevon Jackson that hit the front of the rim and the backboard before falling

in fro the Badgers.

“You just have to stay positive in those situations,” junior forward Zach McCabe said. “Obviously, it’s very tough for us, just looking over it all the time.”

Both situations also provided opportunities for Iowa to steal road victories, but the Hawkeyes were doomed by a turnover in the closing seconds against Minnesota and a 3-point attempt by Oglesby against Wisconsin that rattled in and out to send the game to overtime.

“We just got to find a way to close out games,” Marble said. “It just has to become a mentality to be sick of losing games that close in games that we should win. So we just have to get over that hump of winning close games.”

May’s stamina

As his senior season begins to wind down, forward Eric May has found his role on this team. Not only that, but he has also become consistent enough to the point McCaffery is playing him in long stretches of late-game situations.

In the Hawkeyes’ 76-67 win over Penn State back on Jan. 31 (the last time Iowa played at home), May made his first appearance of the second half with 12:01 on the clock and played the rest of that game. Against Wisconsin, May wound up playing over 35 minutes off the bench, including the last 14 minutes of the second half and all but 32 seconds total of the two overtime periods.

Through 10 Big Ten games, the Dubuque native has played the most minutes of any Hawkeye reserve player and only three other players on the entire team – Marble, freshman guard Mike Gesell and sophomore forward Aaron White – have seen more playing time in league play than May has.

“I feel good and feel like I’m in great shape,” May said. “I

want to be out there and be a part of that. I just want to make this season special and do what I can.”

Part of the reason May has gotten these minutes has been due to limiting turnovers. McCaffery said May used to let mistakes he made linger when he was younger, but now has “an assassin-like mentality.”

“He’s just a winning player,” McCaffery said. “He helps us in so many different ways. He has embraced that role and he has excelled at it.”

Looking to sweep Northwestern

If Iowa is to win its next game Saturday afternoon at home against Northwestern, it would only mark the second time over the past decade where the Hawkeyes have won multiple games over the Wildcats in a given season. The last time Iowa swept the season series from Northwestern was Todd Lickliter’s first season as head coach (2007-08) and before that, the last sweep came during the 2002-03 season.

Back on Jan. 13, the Hawkeyes snapped a five-game losing streak to the Wildcats by trouncing them at Welsh-Ryan Arena, 70-50. In that game, Iowa held Northwestern to 15 points in the first half, a defensive performance McCaffery still believes is as good as his team has provided this year.

“We’re going to need another effort like that,” McCaffery said in reference to Saturday’s game. “This is a team that can score. They’ve got enough experience and enough weapons to beat anybody in our league.”

It was also a contest where the scoring began to pick up for Iowa, mainly in the forms of White and Oglesby. White finished with a game-high 17 points that day, while Oglesby started draining 3-pointers in the second half and ended up with 14 points himself to help guide the Hawkeyes.

These two teams have nearly gone in opposite directions since though. Northwestern enters Saturday's matinee one game ahead of Iowa in the Big Ten standings at 4-6 and has reeled off wins over Illinois, Minnesota and most recently, Purdue. Meanwhile, the Hawkeyes have won their last two games inside Carver-Hawkeye Arena, but have also dropped four road games by single-digits.

Iowa has the luxury of playing a reasonable schedule (at least on paper) that includes five of its last eight games before the Big Ten Tournament taking place at home. Knowing this, the Hawkeyes realize being able to hold serve at home is crucial if they want to keep their currently very minuscule NCAA tournament hopes alive.

"I really want to get these games and I want to get to the NCAA tournament. I mean, that's the ultimate goal," said May, who is Iowa's lone senior. "We've got to take care of business at home, that's for sure.

"There's still a lot of games to be played. If anything, we've shown that we can play with every team in the Big Ten and beat every team in the Big Ten."