

Hawkeyes back to NIT

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

The Iowa Hawkeyes were not among the 68 teams selected for the 2013 NCAA Tournament on Sunday and will be participating in the NIT for the second straight year.

Iowa saw its bubble burst Sunday evening and hours later was assigned a No. 3 seed in the 2013 NIT Tournament with a first-round match-up against sixth-seeded Indiana State on March 20 at 6 p.m. Central. The Hawkeyes are the only Big Ten team in this year's NIT field, while seven Big Ten teams – Indiana, Ohio State, Michigan State, Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois and Minnesota – were selected for the NCAA Tournament.

Last season, there was excitement over Iowa reaching the NIT as it marked the first time in six years the Hawkeyes reached a postseason of any kind. Iowa was a No. 7 seed, but drew a home game against Dayton due to a scheduling conflict and defeated the Flyers before having its season end with a loss at Oregon in the second round.

While the mood Sunday night was far different from what it was a year ago, Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery said he was impressed with his players' response to being snubbed, adding that they would be "fired up, without question."

"Our players handled it incredibly well," McCaffery said on a teleconference with the local media Sunday night. "We're excited to be playing in the NIT and we're ready to move forward and handle that challenge."

The Sycamores come into Wednesday's contest with an 18-14 record that includes wins over Northern Iowa twice and NCAA tourney-bound teams Creighton, Ole Miss and Miami (Fla.).

Indiana State is also coached by Greg Lansing, who was an assistant at Iowa during Steve Alford's coaching tenure.

Should Iowa defeat Indiana State, the Hawkeyes would play the winner of the NIT contest between Stony Brook and Massachusetts. Because the Minutemen were given the No. 2 seed in Iowa's region, the Hawkeyes would travel to Amherst, Mass., should UMass win. If Stony Brook were to win, however, the Seawolves would visit Carver-Hawkeye Arena.

When questions arose about scheduling conflicts for the NIT – Carver-Hawkeye Arena is hosting the first and second rounds of the Women's NCAA Tournament next weekend – McCaffery insisted there wasn't an issue with Iowa hosting beyond the first round.

"We could have played the whole thing at home," McCaffery said.

The other half of Iowa's NIT regional features Virginia, who was awarded the top seed and a first-round date against Norfolk State, and the 4-5 match-up features St. John's paying a visit to St. Joseph's. Should Iowa reach the quarterfinals, the only team of those four that wouldn't have to travel to Iowa City would be Virginia. The NIT semifinals and championship are set for the first week of April at Madison Square Garden in New York City.

Iowa's first-round contest against Indiana State will be televised nationally on ESPN2. Tickets for the game have officially gone on sale.