

6/27/2013: PTL Notebook – Olaseni making a name for himself

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

NORTH LIBERTY, Iowa – One-third of the way through this summer's edition of the Prime Time League and there might not be a more impressive Iowa Hawkeye right now than junior center Gabe Olaseni.

At the defensive end, he continues to stymie his competition like he had during the latter half of his sophomore campaign. Case in point was his PTL contest on Thursday where he spent most of the night going toe-to-toe with sophomore counterpart Adam Woodbury, who Olaseni said he has a “yin and yang” type of chemistry with whenever they compete against one another. While Woodbury finished with 23 points, he was just 7-of-21 inside the 3-point arc thanks in large part to Olaseni's presence defensively.

“We play against each other every day and we know what each other brings. He's a tough match-up,” Woodbury said. “It's always good to go against guys like that.”

Then there are the strides Olaseni continues to make offensively, which he said earlier this summer was a point of emphasis being pushed by Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery and his coaching staff. In three PTL games this summer, the England native has scored in double-figures every time out and his offensive efficiency has been for the most part productive.

“He has had opportunities inside and he's just taking them,”

said senior forward Zach McCabe, who is among Olaseni's PTL teammates this summer. "That's what he has been doing all summer and he's just improving every day. I see him in the gym every day and he's just working on his game all the time."

His aggressive nature Iowa fans came to know him for last season at the defensive end of the floor has now begun to show at the offensive end as well, whether it's driving to the hoop and working on his hook shot (something he said he has been doing a lot this offseason) or just crashing the boards and looking for an offensive rebound. Another one of Olaseni's Hawkeye teammates – sophomore guard Mike Gesell – described him as "one of the hardest workers on the team."

Olaseni said his touch is what has improved the most since returning from a foot injury that was discovered shortly after the 2012-13 season concluded.

"When I was injured with my foot injury, I shot like 500 hooks a day," Olaseni said. "I couldn't really explode so I was doing touching stuff around the basket."

"Also, my pick-and-pop game is pretty good. When a guy doesn't want to play me, I have the ability to hit that jump shot now."

Olaseni knows he began to make a name for himself as he began to blossom last winter. His team goals are the same as his teammates, but that's not to say he doesn't have personal goals either for this upcoming year.

"Whenever I'm in the game, I want people to say, 'He's going to change it for the better,'" Olaseni said. "I want the crowd to start going crazy. I want people to realize when I'm in the game, it's going to positively help the team, whether I get three offensive boards or two run-out dunks. I want the whole stadium to recognize that I'm going to make a positive impact."

L.L. Pelling/Hawkeye Report 96, Comfort Care Medicare/Mike Gatens Real Estate 91

As for Olaseni's PTL squad, it finds itself at 3-0 this summer after squeezing out a 96-91 win Thursday over Comfort Care/Gatens, who now sits at 1-2. This was a game where Pelling/Report looked dominant most of the way, jumping out to a 12-2 lead right away and not really looking back, even when Comfort Care/Gatens would inch close.

Both Olaseni and McCabe finished with double-doubles that consisted of 17 points. Olaseni shot 8-of-11 from the floor and also hauled in 11 rebounds, while McCabe finished with 10 boards to go along with his scoring, which came on 7-of-11 shooting on the night.

"We're just playing good team ball," McCabe said. "We got shooters who can hang on the outside and can drive and obviously, Gabe is playing really well right now. Everyone is just playing really good."

Comfort Care/Gatens was led in scoring by freshman guard Peter Jok, who came away with 25 points Thursday after shooting 9-of-20 from the floor. Woodbury came away with 23 points, which included a 3-pointer as time expired, but finished the game 8-of-23 shooting. He also had 12 rebounds. Redshirt freshman forward Kyle Meyer had his best outing of the summer thus far, tallying a double-double of 15 points and 15 rebounds.

Jill Armstrong of Skogman Realty 107, Greater Iowa Financial Group/Vinton Merchants 87

An underlying theme Thursday was one team holding a huge lead and not looking back, and this game between Armstrong and Financial/Merchants was no exception. Despite only leading by five points at halftime, Armstrong made a strong push in the second half to exert itself and coast to a 107-87 win and

improve to 2-1 this summer while Financial/Merchants remains winless at 0-3.

As it has all summer long, Armstrong was led again by Gesell. The league's second overall pick nearly tallied a third double-double this summer by coming away with 23 points on 9-of-23 shooting and eight assists. Providing extra motivation for Gesell on Thursday was having his parents on hand at the North Liberty Community Center showing their support.

"It's always nice seeing them," Gesell said. "I'm a big family guy, so I'm happy when they're down here and it's just fun getting to hang out with them."

Meanwhile, Financial/Merchants was again without the services of both senior guard Devyn Marble and junior guard Josh Oglesby. Marble just recently returned from Colorado Springs, Colo., after not making the initial cut during a training camp held by Team USA this week for next month's World University Games. Oglesby has missed every all three PTL games so far this summer due to a finger injury.

BlendCard 127, Culver's/McCurry's 103

Much like Pelling/Report, BlendCard continues to impress this summer and its 127-103 win over Culver's/McCurry's on Thursday proved to be no different.

A lead that was as small as five points late in the first half ultimately ballooned into a double-digit lead by halftime and at one point reached 27 points as BlendCard had a 119-92 edge late in the second half. Leading the charge again for BlendCard was the sophomore duo of guard Anthony Clemmons and forward Jarrod Uthoff. Clemmons finished two rebounds shy of a triple-double after finishing with 29 points on 9-of-14 shooting (including 6-of-9 from behind the 3-point line), 12 assists and eight boards.

"He's a very unselfish player," Uthoff said after finishing with 15 points and eight rebounds himself. "He makes a lot of plays out there and I really enjoy playing with him."

As for Culver's/McCurry's, it was without both juniors Aaron White and Darius Stokes for the second straight game. White is still in Colorado Springs after making the initial cut and seeks to make the final cut for the World University Games, which would mean a trip to Russia next month and Culver's/McCurry's not having him the rest of the summer. Meanwhile, Stokes continues to recover from a sprained ankle suffered last week.

**PTL play resumes Sunday afternoon at the North Liberty Community Center, starting at 3 p.m. Central when Culver's/McCurry's takes on Comfort Care/Gatens. Two games will follow at 4:30 p.m. – BlendCard vs. Financial/Merchants and Pelling/Report vs. Armstrong. Be sure to visit HawkeyeDrive.com for ongoing coverage of the PTL this summer.*

PLAYER INTERVIEWS:

Gabe Olaseni:

Jarrold Uthoff: