

PTL playoffs preview: 7/18/2013 (Semifinals)

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Here's a rundown of what Iowa basketball fans can expect Thursday evening as the Prime Time League semifinals are set to take place inside the Roberts Gym at the North Liberty Community Center. The winners of Thursday's contest will meet July 21 in the PTL Championship Game:

No. 1 L.L. Pelling/Hawkeye Report (6-0) vs. No. 5 Greater Iowa Financial Group/Vinton Merchants (2-5), 6 p.m.

The first semifinal of the night will showcase four Iowa players as top-seeded Pelling/Report, led by senior forward Zach McCabe and junior center Gabe Olaseni, squares off with fifth-seeded Financial/Merchants, who features the guard duo of senior Devyn Marble and junior Josh Oglesby.

Financial/Merchants reached this game by winning its first round contest last weekend over No. 4 Comfort Care/Gatens, 90-85. In that game, it was the play of Marble that stood out as he finished with 26 points on 8-of-21 shooting and scored the bulk of Financial/Merchants' points in the closing minutes to secure the win. Meanwhile, Oglesby will look to improve off an 8-point performance last weekend, but he also had six assists (as did Marble) to help the Financial/Merchants cause.

These teams have faced each other twice this summer, with Pelling/Report coming out victorious on both occasions. In fact, Pelling/Report enters this game well-rested after clinching the No. 1 seed back on July 11 with a 120-94 win over Financial/Merchants. In that contest last week, Olaseni had what was statistically his best game of the entire summer

finishing with 30 points on 14-of-16 shooting and also hauling in 17 rebounds. McCabe compiled nearly identical double-doubles in the two meetings, as he scored 22 points in both games against Financial/Merchants and had efforts of 11 and 12 rebounds, respectively.

The most recent contest between these teams was only the second game back for Oglesby after missing the first two weeks of PTL action due to a broken pinky finger. Marble missed two games this summer, but played in both contests against Pelling/Report, with the first one taking place days before he went to Colorado Springs, Colo., for his World University Games tryout for Team USA.

No. 2 BlendCard (5-1) vs. No. 3 Jill Armstrong of Skogman Realty (4-3), 7:30 p.m.

The second semifinal of the night will feature a trio of Hawkeye scholarship players and an intriguing point guard battle between sophomores Mike Gesell (Armstrong) and Anthony Clemmons (BlendCard). While second-seeded BlendCard is coming off a bye, third-seeded Armstrong enters this game off a 96-88 first-round win over No. 6 Culver's/McCurry's last weekend where Gesell finished with 32 points on 12-of-23 shooting, plus eight assists and eight rebounds.

These two teams met once previously this summer back on June 23 in a game BlendCard won 115-100. In that game, both point guards shined for their respective teams. Clemmons came away with 25 points, seven rebounds and seven assists, while Gesell had a double-double of 21 points and 15 assists. But the player who proved to be the difference-maker in that game last month was sophomore forward Jarrod Uthoff, who shot 11-of-16 and finished with a game-high 29 points to lead the way for BlendCard.

Thursday's game will be the last PTL appearance for Uthoff this summer regardless of the final outcome. Uthoff is

traveling to Estonia later this week to participate in a tourney with the East Coast All-Stars and would not be of service for BlendCard should it reach this weekend's championship game.

One other Armstrong player to keep an eye on in this contest is Okey Ukah. The sophomore walk-on had 16 points and 12 rebounds against Culver's/McCurry's last weekend and posted a double-double of 17 points and 10 rebounds in that aforementioned contest against BlendCard in June. There will likely be instances throughout the game where he'll be going one-on-one with Uthoff.

****Be sure to visit HawkeyeDrive.com following Thursday's action at the North Liberty Community Center for ongoing coverage of the Prime Time League this summer.****