

11/6/2013: Iowa men's basketball notebook



Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery discusses the Hawkeyes' season-opener against UNC-Wilmington during his press conference held Wednesday, Nov. 6, 2013, at Carver-Hawkeye Arena in Iowa City.

By Brendan Stiles

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – The 2013-14 season hasn't even begun for the Iowa Hawkeyes, yet there has already been cause for concern inside the program about complacency.

Following Iowa's exhibition game Nov. 3 against Augustana College, head coach Fran McCaffery made mention of his team needing a wake-up call, which he believe it received from Augustana's physicality. Shortly after McCaffery left the room, junior forward Aaron White entered and expressed concern himself. Senior forward Zach McCabe also expressed similar remarks when he spoke.

As the Hawkeyes prepare for their season-opener Nov. 8 against

UNC-Wilmington, the biggest challenge doesn't seem as much physical as it is mental. For the short term, it appears McCaffery's message to the team got across to players.

Junior center Gabe Olaseni said among the areas of emphasis in practice this week have been defensive drills and working on execution of half-court offense.

"I think the complacency factor definitely trickled in during the game," Olaseni said. "It wasn't all bad like Coach said, but there were certain points where we should have expanded the lead. There were simple mistakes we made and some guys' heads weren't in the game.

"It's just a learning experience. I'm glad it didn't happen on Friday when it counts."

During his press conference Wednesday, McCaffery was told of White's postgame remarks and said he appreciated his junior forward speaking both to the team inside the locker room and then making those feelings public.

"He knows what to say and what to do," McCaffery said. "You can do a lot of speaking in the locker room, but it better come from somebody who knows what they're talking about and has the credibility to say it, and he does."

As for Iowa's opponent, UNC-Wilmington is a team coming off a 10-win season, but McCaffery referenced that record being deceptive. The Seahawks are coached by Buzz Peterson, a former North Carolina player (and roommate of Michael Jordan's) that later went on to coach at Appalachian State – where he coached in the Southern Conference against McCaffery and his UNC-Greensboro program – and then at Tennessee, where he was let go in 2005 and replaced by former Iowa assistant Bruce Pearl.

"They've got tremendous quickness on the perimeter, in particular," McCaffery said. "They've got very similar depth to what we have. They're going to go at least 10-deep.

"It's a team that presents a lot of challenges. This is not an easy opening game, by any means."

Uthoff finally making long-awaited debut

Friday's game marks the official debut for sophomore forward Jarrod Uthoff. Not just as a Hawkeye, but as a Division-I basketball player.

Uthoff originally signed a letter of intent to play at Wisconsin and later opted to redshirt as a freshman in 2011-12. He then asked for a release from his scholarship. Weeks after he was finally released from that scholarship, Uthoff opted to return to his home state and join the Hawkeyes under the condition he had to join the team as a walk-on. In addition, he had to redshirt again in 2012-13, forfeiting a season of eligibility and he wasn't allowed to travel with the team for any games away from Carver-Hawkeye Arena.

Now after paying his dues for the past year, Uthoff is now on scholarship with three remaining seasons of eligibility and will be among the first two or three reserves McCaffery subs in during the first half of Iowa's game Friday against UNC-Wilmington.

In the exhibition, Uthoff played 21 minutes off the bench, primarily at the 3 and 4 spots on the court. When Iowa went with a smaller rotation that featured him and White, Uthoff said he played at the 4 and White was over at the 5 spot. Uthoff said he's willing to play wherever but is most comfortable right now playing the 3.

The one thing McCaffery said he finds himself continually teaching Uthoff during practice and in games like last Sunday is to not worry about being perfect every time up and down the floor, but rather trust his instincts.

"He has got really good instincts on how to play and he can really score," McCaffery said. "Just take what's there and

that's easier said than done sometimes when you haven't played a regular game."

While he might not be starting Friday, Uthoff has already left impressions on fans between what he did this past summer in the Prime Time League and even long before that when he was still playing at Jefferson High School in Cedar Rapids. When asked about the outside expectations some are placing on him right away, those expectations are something Uthoff seems welcoming toward.

"That's a good thing, because it just encourages me to do whatever I can on the court and encourage me to get better," Uthoff said.

Woodbury's progress on display

One of the most encouraging takeaways from Iowa's exhibition against Augustana last weekend was the development of sophomore center Adam Woodbury. In 18 minutes of playing time, Woodbury was arguably the most impressive Hawkeye on the court after compiling a double-double of 10 points and 11 rebounds, a performance McCaffery described afterwards as "terrific."

Much was made during the offseason about how Woodbury was bulking up in terms of upper-body strength. The 7-1 center weighed in at 235 pounds as a freshman last season and now is listed at 245 pounds.

Olaseni finds himself competing toe-to-toe with Woodbury everyday in practice. The one trait Olaseni said he sees more of in Woodbury now versus last year is confidence.

"I think confidence is key in any young player and I've just seen the ability for him to finish at the rim a lot more," Olaseni said. "He's more athletic than he was last year. He's shooting the jumper much better and his free throws have improved as well, so I'm excited for him."

But it's not just the work Woodbury put in inside the weight room that sticks out to McCaffery. The fourth-year head coach made light Wednesday of Woodbury's consistency in practice and how that has enabled the Sioux City native to become even more a factor now entering his sophomore season.

"He has been spectacular," McCaffery said. "He has been rebounding, running, outlet-ing, moving his feet. He has been physical and he has really been passing the ball well. We were able to run the offense through him and he has been scoring a lot better."

Looking at Friday's match-up against UNC-Wilmington, the Seahawks start two forwards both listed at 6-9. They feature a redshirt freshman center listed at 7-0, but he didn't have any stats in either of their two exhibitions. Between the lack of size in the post and Woodbury becoming a more confident, his importance to the Hawkeyes this season should be on display again Friday like it was over this past weekend.

"He's more comfortable out there, which is what you expect," McCaffery said.

Clemmons update

Sophomore point guard Anthony Clemmons is on schedule to return to the Hawkeye rotation in time for the opener against UNC-Wilmington, McCaffery said during his press conference Wednesday.

Clemmons injured his ankle during a Nov. 1 practice that forced him to sit for Iowa's exhibition game last weekend against Augustana. McCaffery had previously said following the exhibition that Clemmons would return barring further injury.