

COMMENTARY: The backcourt dynamic (premium)

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – Three games into the 2013-14 season and Fran McCaffery has a pretty unique conundrum on his hands.

It's well-established and has been for over a year now that (when healthy) Iowa's starters in its backcourt are guards Devyn Marble and Mike Gesell. Both players have shared time playing at both the point and at the off-guard spot and typically, match-ups have dictated who plays where at a given moment.

But here's where this has become even more unique. Before the season began, McCaffery was adamant that Marble would be his starting point guard, based off how he took over at that spot late last season and really flourished. Now following a 109-63 win over Maryland-Eastern Shore on Thursday that puts the Hawkeyes at 3-0, Gesell is the starting point guard both now and for the foreseeable future.

And honestly, this is probably how it should have always been. Even though both players can play both guard spots on the floor at any given moment, Thursday showcased both Gesell and Marble at their best with the former playing at the point – a spot he even said back in the summer he preferred playing if presented with the option.

Gesell said afterwards he wasn't playing aggressive enough in those first two games where he averaged just two points and two assists per contest. Thursday night, that aggression was on display and it sparked the rest of the team.

Here's the difference between Marble and Gesell – Marble is a guy who was forced into playing point guard early in his career and showed glimpses of brilliance in doing so, while Gesell was initially brought in to run the point and was a guy well on pace to lead the Hawkeyes in assists last season before he injured his foot.

Gesell is also the same player that McCaffery's first comments publicly about him after he signed with Iowa two years ago featured the phrase "When he plays in the NBA." That's not to say Marble won't get there, but if he does, he's looking at being asked to play off-guard by whichever teams show interest, whereas Gesell is more suited to play the point.

Now again, this is three games into the season and it shouldn't come as a surprise if somewhere between now and season's end, McCaffery finds himself going back to playing Marble at the point. But for now at least, he's committed to sticking with Gesell there at the start of games and if the Mike Gesell everyone inside Carver-Hawkeye Arena saw Thursday night is back there on a regular basis, that's a good decision for McCaffery to make now because it benefits both Gesell and Marble.

Not to mention that whenever junior guard Josh Oglesby does return from his current foot injury, it'll be a situation where Gesell's playing the point anytime those two happen to be on the court together.

The dynamic is unique and this dilemma is a good one for McCaffery to have. But the more Gesell is at the point for the Hawkeyes, the better off they're going to be. Not just now, but also over the long haul.