

1/27/2014: Iowa men's basketball notebook



Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery discusses the 15th-ranked Hawkeyes' upcoming game against No. 7 Michigan State during a press conference held Monday, Jan. 27, 2014, at Carver-Hawkeye Arena in Iowa City.

By Brendan Stiles

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – Devyn Marble had gone over 10 months without thinking about it. Then came Sunday when the senior guard relived the night of March 14, 2013, for the first time since it occurred.

“It” refers to the Hawkeyes’ 59-56 loss to Michigan State that evening during the quarterfinals of last year’s Big Ten Tournament. In that contest, Iowa had a 33-20 lead at halftime, only to completely lose its composure and unravel in the second half between the Spartans’ physical style of play and the whistles that were both being and not being blown by the officials.

As the 15th-ranked Hawkeyes prepare to play No. 7 Michigan State again Tuesday, the frustration of that night quickly resurfaced for Marble and his teammates as they all went through Sunday's film session.

"It was a different kind of 'upset,'" Marble said as he reflected on his emotions from Sunday watching film. "You can look back and reflect without anger. It wasn't like how it was the night it happened.

"It was upsetting, but it was also something that we could sit there, actually watch and learn from."

Junior forward Aaron White was very blunt about what entered his mind as he watched that tape.

"That sucked," White said. "I played terrible and we all played not as well as we showed. Just small plays, looking back on it, that were so dumb and pivotal to the turning point of that game.

"We were up double digits in the second half and we gave it up."

Senior forward Zach McCabe also didn't mince words about it either. He said that particular defeat is serving as Iowa's motivation for Tuesday's rematch with the Spartans, which will be televised nationally at 6 p.m. Central on ESPN as part of its "Super Tuesday" doubleheader.

"That was tough to watch again, even though it was last year," McCabe said. "It just showed how many mistakes we made and how close we were to winning the game.

"That motivates us getting ready for this game. We don't want to taste that loss like we did last year."

Seeking a different ending

The Hawkeyes can't change what occurred in Chicago last March,

but they do have an opportunity to end a six-game losing streak to Michigan State on Tuesday.

Oddly enough, McCaffery's one win over Michigan State as Iowa's head coach came in his first crack at the Spartans during the 2010-11 season, an 82-62 Hawkeye victory that Marble called "miraculous" when he reflected back on it Monday.

The current six-game winning streak Michigan State possesses against Iowa includes meetings in each of the last three Big Ten Tournaments, plus another game at Carver-Hawkeye Arena last season where Iowa – without Marble – coughed up another late lead and saw the Spartans steal a game from it in the final minutes.

As for what Iowa has to do Tuesday in order to avoid a repeat of past losses to the Spartans, McCaffery said it was simply a matter of avoiding turnovers. He wasn't alone on that thought, either.

"I'd say that's a pretty big component," sophomore guard Mike Gesell said. "Michigan State does a tremendous job of ratcheting up their intensity when they need a stop. That's something that we need to respond to.

"I think last year, in both of the times that we played them, we weren't able to match that and it led to some mistakes down the stretch."

McCaffery and his players all realize what's at stake for Iowa here. At 5-2 in Big Ten play, the Hawkeyes can ill-afford to fall three games back of No. 10 Michigan in the loss column of the Big Ten standings, especially as they enter the crux of their own league schedule with three of their next four at home against top 25 opponents.

"It would be harder, but not impossible," McCaffery said.

Spartans decimated, but still a force

To call Tuesday a golden opportunity for Iowa would be an understatement. When Michigan State visits Carver-Hawkeye Arena, it will do so without the services of both Adreian Payne and Branden Dawson.

The injured duo makes up two of the Big Ten's top four leading rebounders. Payne is also the Spartans' second-leading scorer after Gary Harris, who currently leads the conference in scoring at 18.8 points per game.

On Monday, McCaffery called Payne and Dawson "two of the better players" in the conference and said the absences of both will heavily impact the Spartans. But he also praised Michigan State head coach Tom Izzo for the way he has handled the injuries that have hampered his team all season. McCaffery specifically mentioned how Izzo expanding his bench has resulted in some of the Spartans' less-heralded players to produce at a rate in which they are all being positive contributors. Among the names he cited Monday include Kenny Kaminski, Matt Costello and Travis Trice.

"So now they've had so many injuries, those guys are ready to play," McCaffery said. "It may benefit them in the long run to have been able to have the opportunity to expand their bench the way they have."

As for the key pieces who will play Tuesday for Michigan State, there's Harris and senior guard Keith Appling, who averages 15.4 points per game and is tied for second in the Big Ten in assists per game.

When asked about guarding Appling one-on-one, Gesell couldn't help but crack a smile Monday, saying it would be "a fun personal match-up."

"I'm a competitive guy and any time I get to go against one of the best point guards out there, it's fun for me," Gesell

said. "I love this game and want to play against the best competition there is."

One thing Iowa isn't expecting to be different about Michigan State, however, is the physicality it plays with at both ends of the floor. McCabe called it "a quality" Izzo brings to his team and he sees it still in this year's version of the Spartans, even with the injuries they're dealing with.

"We know that we're not going to get many calls and stuff like that when it comes to going to the basket and being physical," McCabe said. "We know it's going to be a physical game. We know what they bring to the table and we also know what we need to do to come out with a 'W.'"

Clemmons attempts staying positive

As the season progresses, the challenge of playing 11 players every night has become even more challenging for McCaffery than it already was. His rotation has basically dwindled down to 10 players with freshman guard Peter Jok barely seeing the court during Big Ten play and even that might be a generous number.

Since junior guard Josh Oglesby returned to the Hawkeyes' lineup on Dec. 22, Jok isn't the only player to see his minutes get cut. The numbers game has also severely impacted the amount of playing time for sophomore guard Anthony Clemmons, who hasn't played double-figure minutes once since the calendar turned to 2014.

"That's a tough thing for me because I know the one thing that would help him is to play him more and sort of let him play through some of his mistakes," McCaffery said. "But the way Josh Oglesby has been playing, that has been hard to justify."

Clemmons spoke Monday about his minutes getting reduced and as one would expect, he expressed disappointment as one might expect. He also understands the situation and believes he

knows what is keeping him from seeing more time on the court.

"It's a hard thing," Clemmons said. "I've talked to my parents, I've talked to my high school coaches and it's just a mental thing. I know what I have to do and I know what I'm capable of doing.

"It's all about me coming out and performing and being the player that I know I can be."

Clemmons called himself "the most unselfish player on the team," saying it's in his nature to be that way both on and off the floor. Perhaps the one thing that's keeping him from becoming even more frustrated is the 16-4 overall record and 5-2 Big Ten record the Hawkeyes possess entering Tuesday's game against Michigan State.

"If we're winning, then that's all I can ask for because that's why I came here," Clemmons said. "I want to win and it'd be different if we were losing. It would just be a whole different thing. But as we're winning, I'm going to just take it step by step and slowly, I'll progress and get back to impacting games."

When that moment comes that Clemmons can impact games for Iowa remains to be seen. It could come against Michigan State or it may not come at all. Nevertheless, Clemmons believes he'll be ready if and when that opportunity to redemption should present itself.

"I've had a few good practices lately and I've been talking to our assistant coaches," Clemmons said. "I've just got to have an aggressive mindset. There were times where Mike was pushing me, but I wasn't pushing him. I've talked to Mike, too.

"I just got to get back to being myself and just going out there to attack."