

COMMENTARY: Gesell evolving in leadership role (premium)

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STATE COLLEGE, Pa. – As the No. 16 Iowa Hawkeyes continue to progress through the conference portion of 2013-14, a leader is developing in front of everyone's eyes.

Mike Gesell came to Iowa with high expectations. The first time Fran McCaffery was allowed to even talk publicly about him, he made a comment about "when" Gesell plays in the NBA. He and fellow sophomore Adam Woodbury were viewed as two of the most significant recruits McCaffery had brought to Iowa.

The best players on this team are Devyn Marble and Aaron White. But it's becoming more clear now that Gesell is the key to the ignition and will continue to be going forward and his showing in the Hawkeyes' 82-70 win over Penn State on Saturday was another example of his evolution as a leader.

Gesell has spent weeks talking about how his mindset is to come out and be aggressive every time he sees the court. But there was a noticeable difference inside Bryce Jordan Center on Saturday. There were instances, particularly in the second half, where Gesell demanded the ball be in his hands while Iowa ran its half-court offense.

One such time came inside the four-minute mark of the second half where he got open, clapped his hands yelling for the ball and proceeded to drain the biggest shot of the game – a 3-pointer that extended a 7-point lead to 10 points with 3:02 left.

Then came afterwards as he spoke to the media and made the

following comment in the tunnel of Bryce Jordan Center.

"I feel like we're a much better team when personally, I'm being aggressive, because it opens up a lot of things for Dev and Whitey obviously and especially our bigs," Gesell said. "When I'm getting out and pushing the ball in transition is when we're at our best."

Last week in a win over Michigan, Gesell had 10 points, eight assists, four steals, three rebounds and one turnover. He was also +25 during the minutes he played. Just last week, after what was perhaps the most complete game of his Iowa career, his comments were more about the team playing a complete game.

Now let's go back to Saturday after Iowa beat Penn State. That comment above wasn't one of a selfish player, but of a confident player who basically said what others had said about him before.

It doesn't matter what the moment is because Gesell has shown he isn't afraid of that spotlight. Even when he missed free throws at Iowa State or missed a game-tying lay-up against Michigan State, he has taken chances. He also made critical shots in road games against Northwestern and Illinois to help Iowa win those games.

A lot of the talk about Gesell has been with his production at the point, which has been stellar. His assist-to-turnover ratio led the Big Ten entering Saturday's game and against Penn State, he had seven assists to just two turnovers in addition to his 13 points. But of those 13 points, 12 of them came off of four 3-pointers (including the one mentioned earlier).

McCaffery mentioned after Saturday's game how Gesell has matured into the leader he is slowly but surely becoming. All those long-term expectations placed upon him when he first got to Iowa are starting to be met and it's really shown over the past month.

However this season unfolds, there's reason for Iowa to feel confident and there's reason for fans to be optimistic about the future. A lot of that stems from the recent play of No. 10.