

Iowa to face Tennessee in First Four

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – For the first time in eight seasons, the Iowa Hawkeyes are dancing. But they will do so in an unorthodox manner.

Iowa will play in the First Four against Tennessee on March 19 at UD Arena in Dayton, Ohio. Tip-off is scheduled for 8 p.m. Central, following a game between Cal-Poly and Texas Southern happening beforehand and the game between the Hawkeyes and Volunteers will be televised nationally on TruTV.

This marks the Hawkeyes' first appearance in the NCAA Tournament since earning a No. 3 seed in 2006, when it suffered a heartbreaking 64-63 first round loss to 14th-seeded Northwestern State. This also marks the first time Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery will coach in the tourney since 2009-10, his final season at Siena before taking over the Hawkeyes.

"It has been a long journey," McCaffery said Sunday night shortly after the entire team gathered inside its Carver-Hawkeye Arena locker room to watch the Selection Show on CBS. "The fan base has been phenomenal in supporting us every step of the way. You know, you started to see it coming in Year One, then in Year Two, we made a little bit of noise.

"Last year, we were sitting right on that bubble and a little disappointed and now we're in. It's a great accomplishment. I'm thrilled for our seniors and just really excited about the opportunity."

McCaffery also said to reporters Sunday that he intends to

travel with the team to Dayton on Monday, with the intent of heading back to Iowa City Wednesday morning for his son Patrick's operation to remove a thyroid tumor and then returning to Dayton in time for the game.

As for the game itself, McCaffery said he refuses to use the moniker "play-in game" to describe his team's match-up with Tennessee, even though Iowa ended up in this position by losing six of its last seven games and entering this game 20-12. His players appear to be following suit, saying it didn't matter to them that their name appeared alongside another team.

"I'm happy to still be playing in the tournament and however they decided it, that's fine with me," senior guard Devyn Marble said. "We struggled down this little pass in the season. Obviously, that's what they felt we deserved, so we just got to play and do what we do."

The Hawkeyes have a little familiarity with Tennessee despite not having played the Volunteers this season. Both teams participated in the Battle 4 Atlantis last November and Tennessee's loss to UTEP in the first round of that tourney prevented a regular season match-up. McCaffery said assistant coach Kirk Speraw – who had the initial scout for Tennessee had Iowa played it – had already watched a ton of tape on the Volunteers prior.

Tennessee comes into this match-up with a 21-12 record after losing in the semifinals of the SEC Tournament over the weekend to No. 1 Florida.

"I think the coaches were very well-prepared knowing that we'd play UTEP or Tennessee and obviously, UTEP won," senior forward Zach McCabe said. "We watched Tennessee. They're a great team. They're very athletic.

"It's obviously not going to be easy."

Should Iowa defeat Tennessee, the Hawkeyes would secure the No. 11 seed in the Midwest Regional and a second round match-up with sixth-seeded Massachusetts would await them on March 21 at PNC Arena in Raleigh, N.C. The winner of that contest would then face either third-seeded Duke or 14th-seeded Mercer on March 23 for the right to play at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis, Ind., next week.

NCAA MIDWEST REGIONAL:

1-seed: Wichita State

2-seed: Michigan

3-seed: Duke

4-seed: Louisville

5-seed: Saint Louis

6-seed: Massachusetts

7-seed: Texas

8-seed: Kentucky

9-seed: Kansas State

10-seed: Arizona State

11-seed: Iowa vs. Tennessee

12-seed: North Carolina State vs. Xavier

13-seed: Manhattan

14-seed: Mercer

15-seed: Wofford

16-seed: Cal-Poly vs. Texas Southern

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further coverage of the Hawkeyes playing in the 2014 NCAA Tournament.