

Washpun meets with McCaffery, waits to sign

Written by Jim Ecker

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Fran McCaffery made a strong pitch to Wes Washpun Thursday night, but Washpun left Carver-Hawkeye Arena without giving the University of Iowa basketball coach an answer on whether he plans to join the Hawkeyes next season or not.

Washpun said he'll probably decide by Monday or Tuesday what he plans to do, and a large part depends on whether new Tennessee Coach Cuonzo Martin offers a scholarship or not.

Washpun is a 6-foot-1 point guard from Cedar Rapids Washington who averaged 18 points, 5.4 rebounds, 4.0 assists, 3.4 steals and 2.1 blocked shots this season.

He said he expects to hear from Martin in the next day or two. Martin offered him a scholarship to Missouri State, but is still evaluating his new team at Tennessee.

Paul Lusk, a former Hawkeye and the new coach at Missouri State, has offered a scholarship, and Washpun said "Missouri State is still very much in the picture." The spring signing period begins Wednesday.

Washpun said he and his parents spent more than an hour in McCaffery's office at Carver-Hawkeye Arena.

"It went pretty good," he said. "We talked about how I would fit into the system, and how he would develop me as a player, what my role would be, and a little about what he plans to do (at Iowa) and the new facility they're building. And he talked to my parents about my living situation and what it would be."

Iowa is building a new practice facility adjacent to Carver-Hawkeye Arena.

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"He said, of course, all my playing time would have to be earned," Washpun remarked, "but he'd like to use me and Bryce (Cartwright) together and also apart, to split up time like that."

Cartwright was Iowa's starting point guard this season and will be a senior during the 2011-12 campaign.

Iowa has been recruiting other point guards, but Washpun said the Hawkeyes have not received commitments from any of them so far. He also said McCaffery did not give him a deadline for making a decision.

"No, he didn't say anything like that," Washpun said. "All he said was, kind of make your decision as quick as possible. He didn't really put a deadline or anything like that on me."

Martin offered Washpun a scholarship to Missouri State on Feb. 21, whereas McCaffery did not offer a scholarship until this week.

"That's going to weigh in a lot," Washpun said. "He (Martin) believed in me and believed I could be a great player from the beginning, before anybody else did. It's definitely going to be a major factor in my decision."

Washpun said he'd never visited with McCaffery prior to Thursday night, other than to say hello at Cedar Rapids Washington games, and said he'd never spoken to McCaffery on the phone prior to this week, when McCaffery offered the scholarship.

Josh Oglesby, Washpun's friend and teammate at Washington, signed with the Hawkeyes last fall. Oglesby has campaigned on Washpun's behalf with the Hawkeyes and also has been gently trying to persuade Washpun to attend Iowa.

Washpun likes the idea of playing with Oglesby in college. "He's one of my good friends and he's been a great teammate throughout the years," he said. "But I have to make a decision

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that's going to be best for me."

Washpun also likes the idea of playing in Iowa City, just 30 minutes from home, so his family and friends can watch him play.

"That's definitely a factor as well," he said. "It's close, and I have a lot of family down here and it would be easy for my parents to come down and see me."

On the other hand, he said he's not intimidated by the possibility of moving to Tennessee or Missouri.

"I like traveling, I like going different places, I like seeing what other places have to offer," he said. "I don't really get homesick too often, but being close to home would also be nice."

Washpun said he does not plan to visit Tennessee this weekend, even if Martin offers a scholarship in the next day or two. Washpun said he doesn't think a visit is necessary.

"Coach Martin said pretty much what everyone else has said: There's nothing down there (at Tennessee) that I wouldn't like."

Tennessee has played in six straight NCAA tournaments and averaged 18,952 fans for home games this season. Iowa has not played in an NCAA tournament since 2006 and averaged 11,635 fans (tickets sold) at Carver-Hawkeye this season, McCaffery's first at the helm. Iowa finished 11-20 this year and 4-14 in the Big Ten.

Washpun is aware of the discrepancy in NCAA appearances.

"That weighs in a lot," he said. "Of course as a little kid, my dream has always been to go to the

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NCAA tournament. So I mean, when you take a program like Tennessee that's been doing it year after year, it definitely weighs in.

"But then again, you look at a program like Iowa, you have a chance to do something they haven't done in a very long time. That's also exciting."

Tennessee faces possible NCAA penalties due to violations committed by former coach Bruce Pearl, but it has not been determined if the Volunteers will be banned from postseason play.

Washpun grew up as a Hawkeye fan, but did not have a favorite player. "I kind of cheered for them all," he said.

McCaffery told Washpun how he could help the Hawkeyes.

"He definitely thinks that I can help the team press more, and I could be really dangerous on the point of the press - the zone press or even a man-to-man press - to hound their point guard and force turnovers and up the tempo of the team," Washpun said.

Washpun said he'll analyze all three rosters - Iowa, Tennessee and Missouri State (assuming Tennessee offers a scholarship) - before making a final decision.

"We're going to analyze that a lot, as far as the rosters go and my opportunity of playing time and where they think I'll have the best opportunity to compete for a spot," he said. "That will definitely be a major factor in my decision also."

The Hawkeyes need help at point guard following Cully Payne's decision to leave the program. Payne started at point guard in 2009-10 and was the starter when the 2010-11 campaign began, but he suffered a sports hernia, had to have surgery and missed most of the season.

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Washpun said he has a tough choice to make in the next few days. "It's going to be a very tough decision. Very tough indeed," he said.

He said it would be hard to decline an offer from Iowa. "Simply because I grew up a fan and all my family is around here and stuff like that," he said. "But, I have to do what's best for me, as a player and also as a student."

Washpun, 18, had academic problems prior to his senior year at Washington, scaring some programs away. That contributed to him not signing a scholarship last fall. He fixed his grades this year and says he will be eligible for competition next season as a freshman.

Washpun excelled in most phases of the game at Washington, but struggled at the free throw line this season (53 percent) and was inconsistent with his jump shot.

"I know I definitely need to do some work on my shot, from the free throw line and 3-point range," he said. "I'll be doing that. I'll be working all spring and all summer on it."