

## Darius Stokes follows dad's footsteps to Iowa

Written by Jim Ecker

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IOWA CITY — Darius Stokes had to tell his father he didn't want to play basketball for him at Kirkwood Community College this year, because he had a better offer from the Iowa Hawkeyes.

His dad was delighted.

Darius' father, of course, is former Hawkeye star Greg Stokes, who is currently an assistant coach at Kirkwood. But in this case, blood — and the Hawkeyes — were the easy winners.

"I'm really, really proud," Greg Stokes said Sunday after watching Darius play for Iowa in an exhibition game at Carver-Hawkeye Arena. "To see him run out there on the floor with the Iowa jersey on, it's just phenomenal. I love it."

Darius Stokes is a 6-foot-7, 190-pound freshman from the successful high school basketball program at Linn-Mar. He had only modest stats for the Lions as a senior — 5.7 points, 3 rebounds and 1 block per game — and was going to join his father at Kirkwood until Fran McCaffery replaced Todd Lickliter as Iowa's head coach.

"That's what I was planning on doing before Coach McCaffery saw me play at one of our open gyms at Linn-Mar," Darius said. "He asked me to come down (to Iowa City) and offered me a preferred walk-on. Before that I was planning to go the JUCO route and hopefully D-I after that."

"Coach McCaffery asked me, 'Do you need time to make your decision?' And I'm like, 'No, I'll make it right now. I want to be a Hawkeye.'"

That ended his Kirkwood career, before it even began.

"I would rather play Big Ten," he said. "That's the highest level you can be at. I'd rather play this over JUCO any day. This is an opportunity that came to me and I couldn't pass it up."

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Greg Stokes agreed entirely, even though Darius has work to do.

"He knows he's not there yet (as a player), but he's got some great players around him, pushing him every day in practice," Greg Stokes said. "So with that competition that he's going against every day, hopefully he'll improve and do what he needs to do."

Stokes played nine minutes Sunday in the exhibition against Illinois-Springfield. He collected three fouls in four minutes, but settled down and finished with five points and two rebounds.

"Yeah, that was just bad defense by me," he said of the quick fouls. "I just wasn't in the right spot. It will take a little getting used to, but I'll be all right."

Stokes probably will be redshirted, but McCaffery likes what he's seen.

"Darius has been a pleasant surprise," McCaffery remarked. "We kind of looked at him as a guy who was going to help us in practice, and he's been all of that. But he's a tremendous athlete, he's got a tremendous feel for how to play, he knows how to play in the action game, and he's an energy guy so he can be a terrific rebounder."

"Offensively, he knows that he's limited on the perimeter, but he can score going to the basket with his athletic ability," McCaffery said. "You might not see him again the rest of the year on the court, because we may redshirt him. We'll see. We'll play him if we have to, but we may just use him in practice and save that year of eligibility for him."

Greg Stokes had a front-row seat for Sunday's game, sitting with other proud parents, directly across from the UI bench.

"Yeah, I saw him over there," Darius said. "He didn't say much."

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The smiles and applause said it all.

Greg Stokes is the third-leading scorer and eighth-leading rebounder in school history, three times an all-Big Ten selection during his career (1981-85) and an NBA draft pick.

"He was excited for me. He's proud," Darius said. "He's always been a Hawkeye. He's happy for me."

The University of Iowa battled .500 with the Stokes family this year. The UI men's basketball team got Darius, but the UI women's basketball team lost Kiah to the University of Connecticut. Kiah, a senior at Linn-Mar, announced last week that she picked UConn over the Hawks.

Darius said he couldn't talk his sister into joining him in Iowa City.

"I tried, but she was going to make that decision on her own," he said. "I didn't want to press her, either. She had to make the best decision for herself."

That's exactly what Darius did.

"It was fun. It was a lot of fun," he said after getting his first taste as a Hawkeye. "I'm excited."