

Matt Bohannon fighting for spot at UNI

Written by Jim Ecker

Tuesday, 11 October 2011 16:12 -

CEDAR FALLS - Matt Bohannon enjoyed a fairytale ending to his high school basketball career last March.

Linn-Mar breezed through the season 26-0, captured the Class 4A state title and Bohannon was named the captain of the all-tournament team after a brilliant performance in Des Moines.

He has the press clippings and the memories, but now he's in a battle for playing time as a freshman at the University of Northern Iowa. He's gone from being a veteran to being a rookie on a team stocked with experienced guards.

Bohannon probably won't start for the Panthers this season. Beyond that, he might not even play this year. There's a chance he'll be redshirted and have to wait his turn.

"I definitely want to play, but if I don't it's not the worst thing," Bohannon said Tuesday at UNI media day. "It's a whole year to develop your body and learn the game of basketball at a different level."

Coach Ben Jacobson was non-committal about Bohannon's status, saying it will be determined in November as the Panthers get closer to the regular season. Jacobson likes Bohannon and is impressed with his ability, but it could become a numbers game.

Northern Iowa plays a three-guard offense, with a point guard and two off-guards. Bohannon is a 6-foot-4 off-guard, but the Panthers have three experienced players at those spots with Johnny Moran, Anthony James and Marc Sonnen.

Jacobson will judge how the team meshes in practice and evaluate all the guards in preseason drills. If Moran, James and Sonnen stay healthy, Bohannon may have to sit and watch.

Matt Bohannon fighting for spot at UNI

Written by Jim Ecker

Tuesday, 11 October 2011 16:12 -

Moran, James and Sonnen also could help UNI at point guard, if necessary, which might open a spot for Bohannon. Freshman Deon Mitchell and sophomore Matt Morrison are the point guards now that Kwadzo Ahelegbe has graduated, but Jacobson has not made any final decisions.

It all remains to be seen, but Jacobson definitely likes the way Bohannon plays the game.

"He's got a really good feel and understanding of what it takes to be part of a winning team," Jacobson said. "He can really shoot the ball and he's improved his ability to play off the dribble a little bit."

Jacobson stresses defense at UNI, and he said Bohannon has made steady improvement in drills and during the team's five-game trip to Brazil this past summer.

"He's working hard defensively," Jacobson said. "In the practices we've had, he's made some real improvements over the way we want to play defensively. He's made a lot of progress in a short time, so I'm guessing he'll make a lot of progress again in the next four weeks."

Make no mistake, Jacobson enjoys the way Bohannon approaches the game.

"The thing that I enjoy at practice every day, he just has a really good understanding of what it takes and what it means to be part of a winning team. That part of it I've really enjoyed," he said.

Bohannon knows where he currently stands on the team. He wants to play, but realizes he might not.

"I'm just working as hard as I can and see what happens," he said. "There are a lot of experienced players in front of me. I'm trying to take whatever I can from them and pick their brains and learn as much as I can."

Matt Bohannon fighting for spot at UNI

Written by Jim Ecker

Tuesday, 11 October 2011 16:12 -

Bohannon knows he has to keep improving and make adjustments for college basketball.

"It's a lot different than high school, that's for sure," he said. "You really can't make that many mistakes or you're not going to play here. It's definitely a learning experience, just learning the defense.

"Everyone talks about the pace. It's a lot faster pace," he said. "The game is a little faster, but it's a lot more mental more than anything. You just have to slow your mind down and realize you have to do one thing at a time. You have to work on doing the right thing."

Bohannon is the third brother in his family to play Division I college basketball. Jason Bohannon played at Wisconsin, and Zach Bohannon is currently being redshirted at Wisconsin after transferring from the Air Force Academy.

All three brothers helped Linn-Mar win state titles. Jason and Zach used to tease Matt about not having a title of his own, but that changed on a Saturday night last March at Wells Fargo Arena.

"That night was pretty sweet," he said. "I realized we won the state tournament, but it didn't really hit me until a week later. We worked so hard for it and we finally did it.

"It was definitely a great feeling to have together and something we'll share the rest of our lives."