



Posted on Wed, Nov. 25, 2009

## Hannah's return brings things into focus

KANSAS CITY, Mo. —Gregg Marshall is sporting a fancy new pair of specs; and Tuesday night at the Sprint Center, he liked what he saw.

A night after failing to rise to the occasion in a game against Big East beast Pittsburgh, Wichita State hammered the Big 10's Iowa 74-57.

It was just a consolation game in the CBE Classic, but the consolation to the Shockers is that they can again believe they're a player and that expectations for a breakthrough season are not out of the question.

The return of point guard Clevin Hannah, who missed WSU's first three games while serving a suspension, was a boon. He had six assists and one turnover in 27 minutes, just what the bespectacled Marshall ordered.

"I couldn't see the ticker at the bottom of the television screen on ESPN the last couple of weeks," said the third-year Shocker coach. "It was just getting worse and worse so my wife said I had these really nice glasses, and I should be wearing them. I see better at a distance now, and the referees need all the help they can get."

Before Missouri Valley Conference officials get their backs up, Marshall was joking. I think. I'm almost sure.

Everyone with the Shockers was in a better mood after Tuesday's crisp win, which included a breakout game from 7-foot sophomore center Garrett Stutz. He was all over the place, scoring 16 of his 18 points in the first half.

He even made a dive for a loose ball in front of the Wichita State bench in the first half that endeared him to everyone in black and gold. Except for the Hawkeyes, who also wear black and gold and are doing those colors no favors.

What you're going to read in the next few sentences is not to detract from the Shockers' win. It was impressive, and it should pave the way for a successful season. Forget about finishing third or fourth in the Missouri Valley Conference, I think Wichita State can win the league.

However, don't go overboard because of this win over a name program from a one of the country's best conferences because Iowa is not much of a team. The Hawkeyes are in for some Big 10 beat-downs because of their severe lack of athleticism and talent.

Iowa's coach, Todd Lickliter, helped build an impressive program at Butler. But three years into his Iowa stint, things are not getting better. The Hawkeyes (1-4) have lost at home to Texas-San Antonio and Duquesne.

Lickliter looked helpless on the bench; and at halftime, kept his Hawkeyes in the locker room for only a few minutes before sending them back to the court to warm up for nearly eight minutes.

Strange.

Iowa did play better in the second half, but only marginally so. After trailing 44-30 at the half, Iowa got to within seven points four times but never closer.

Hannah's steady leadership was a big help to the Shockers, who cut their turnovers from 24 against Pittsburgh to only nine.

He and sophomore guard Toure Murry have great backcourt chemistry; Murry scored 18 points and looks like a player who is going to make shots more consistently than he did last season.

The story, though, was Stutz, who was playing in his hometown. He was a non-factor against a more-athletic Pittsburgh team but found his stride early against the Hawkeyes and their 6-foot-9 freshman center Brennan Cougill.

Stutz stepped outside to make a pair of three-pointers and was impossible for Cougill to stop near the basket. He and junior guard Graham Hatch combined for 29 first-half points on 11 of 13 shooting.

Stutz's teammates and coach were thrilled for him, especially because he had such a big game in his hometown.

"He's a really capable guy," Hannah said. "He's going to put up some big numbers before he's finished. His shooting tonight wasn't a fluke. Garrett can step out and shoot with any big man in the... world."

OK, I thought Hannah was going to say Stutz could shoot with any big man in the Valley. Or maybe the Midwest. At most, the United States.

But the world?

"He can step out and stroke it with any 5-man in the world," Hannah repeated.

The thing now, though, is that some Wichita State fans are going to expect Stutz to play like he did against Iowa in every game. I don't think he's ready to do that yet. Against quicker interior players and stronger defenders, Stutz will have issues.

Stutz, though, made big strides against Iowa and has the potential to become one of the Valley's best big men. I'm not sure about the world yet.

The Shockers did so many things they weren't able to accomplish against Pittsburgh. There was better balance in the scoring attack. They took better care of the basketball. They erupted for 44 first-half points and played smart with a second-half lead.

It was a good night, one that should serve WSU well when it plays at Cleveland State on Saturday afternoon.

"We grew as a basketball team tonight," Marshall said.

Stutz, the tallest Shocker of them all, grew the most.

Eagle sports columnist Bob Lutz co-hosts "Sports Daily" from 9-11 a.m. weekdays on KFH, 1240-AM and 98.7-FM. Reach him at 316-268-6597 or blutz@wichitaeagle.com.

© 2009 Wichita Eagle and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved. <http://www.kansas.com>