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A PIECE OF HISTORY
BIG 12 CHAMPIONSHIP
ISU 74  BAYLOR 65

Sunday, March 16, 2014
Kelby Wingert/Iowa State Daily
Iowa State defeats Baylor 74-65, claiming first Big 12 Championship title since 2000

KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- Melvin Ejim waited four years. For Georges Niang, it's been two years. For DeAndre Kane, five. For ISU coach Fred Hoiberg — he's waited about 23.

Regardless of the number of years, it's been a long time since anyone on this ISU basketball team has cut down a net, and that after a 74-65 win against Baylor in the Big 12 Championship game March 15.

Tuesday brought in players that have been a part of winning programs to this team,” Ejim said. “Guys who competed at many different levels and all of us came together for one goal and we were able to make it happen.”

For a few of ISU freshmen, it was only a year. In the Wisconsin high school state title game, Matt Thomas cut down a net playing for Onalaska. Monte Morris won the state title at Flint Beecher in Michigan, but this is the first time the freshman has cut down a net in his life.

“We didn’t even cut down the nets,” Morris screamed over the ISU fight song. “This is my first time doing it. This feeling right here is amazing, I wouldn’t trade it for nothing.”

Hoiberg barely remembers any part of the last time he cut down a net.

“It was high school, my senior year,” Hoiberg said, preparing to cut down this one with his twin boys. “We beat Waterloo East in the state finals. We beat Kansas City in the championship, we were number one in the state of Iowa.

“Our team worked hard and we stayed together. Our focus was on us and our own game.”

Ejim cut his down after the Brewster Academy cut down nets in their National Championship game in New England. The same goes for Niang, except his title came in AAU playing for Boston Amateur Basketball Club.

DeAndre Kane cracked a rare smile remembering back to when he was 18 years old playing in Pittsburg while he was surrounded by his brothers in Kansas City in championship hats.

“It’s been forever, it was at state. Now we’re cutting down the nets in Kansas City with my brothers at Iowa State. I couldn’t be more happy. I wanted to win and coach gave me a second chance, he believed in me.

“My teammates believed in me, we all bought into the system and now we’re champions.”

After starting 0-of-13, Iowa State was befuddled by Baylor’s 1-1-3 zone that had helped them win 10 of its last 11 games coming into Saturday night’s championship game, and the ISU offense was in need of a spark.

That’s where Long came in. Without his 4-of-6 3-point shooting to perfectly match his Canadian counterpart in Brady Heslip, Long wouldn’t have been able to kiss the Big 12 Championship trophy or cut down his first net since playing for CIA Bounce in Canada when he was 16.

“I had to match Brady,” Long shouted as he broke in a Big 12 Championship hat and pulled it tight onto his head. “I believed in my guys. We stayed confident, we believe in each other and that’s all it’s about, we believed we could pull through.”

From that 0-of-13 start that stemmed into a 1-of-13 start, Iowa State finished the game shooting 55 percent from the field. Add the second-half deficit to the loss 20 minutes the Cyclones played against Kansas March 14 and the second-half offensive for Iowa State proved in 19 points on 40 of 64 shooting at a 71 percent clip.

“[That’s the way to shoot 55 percent for the game, it was a testament to these guys and how we didn’t lose our composure,” Hoiberg said. “Again great job by our guys playing very well and pulling down the nets.”

And finally after three grueling games, ISU’s four-year starter, who’s exited the Big 12 Tournament with a loss each year, put a Big 12 Championship cap onto his head and pulled on a t-shirt with the same logo.

He finally got to cut down his piece of the net.

“These guys stepped up,” Ejim said. “Our guys played amazing. Hat to big shots, D’Andre was killing, Dustin’s an animal. Everyone on this team stepped up today and this whole week and we’ve done an amazing job.

“It’s been amazing to come out and win this — we’re ready to cut down the nets.”

By Dean Berhow-Goll
@iowastatedaily.com
KANSAS CITY, Mo. — With a contract stuffed inside his briefcase, Jamie Pollard drove north to Minnesota four years ago to meet with Fred Hoiberg.

The two sat across from each other at Hoiberg’s dining room table; the former ISU star’s children were off with his wife, Carol, getting ice cream. Hours had passed when Pollard paused to pull out the papers and laid them on the table.

“When he put that piece of paper on the table,” Hoiberg said, “I knew it was real.”

After four consecutive losing seasons and five straight years without an NCAA tournament berth, Hoiberg signed the dotted line to return to his alma mater and the place he had become a star.

Hoiberg — an Ames native, four-year ISU starter and 10-year NBA veteran — had a lot to live up to.

“We talked a little bit about his legacy and the risk of putting his legacy at risk,” said Pollard, ISU athletics director. “He didn’t expect to fail, so he wasn’t worried about that.”

On March 15, when the confetti had stopped falling after Iowa State’s 74-65 Big 12 championship victory against Baylor and after each player had taken his turn, Hoiberg stepped up to the ladder placed under the hoop and the tears began to flow. He helped his two twins, Sam and Charlie, climb and then did so himself.

As Hoiberg stood atop the ladder, cutting the final strand of net away from the rim, he did so with Iowa State having won its first Big 12 title since 2000 and with its third-straight NCAA tournament berth in hand.

“A lot has changed at Iowa State in four years,” Hoiberg said. “I wanted to get better. I was confident that we could get some players in there that could help us get it. I knew that we could do that.”

Hoiberg first wanted to coach at Iowa State when the job opened in 2006. Instead, the Cyclones hired Greg McDermott.

“At that point in time, I just felt like every great basketball player thinks they can coach, and most can’t,” Pollard said. “That’s what I thought at that time. I think Fred took that to heart.”

Hoiberg became more active with his alma mater, and when McDermott left in 2010 for Creighton, Pollard didn’t waver for a second. He drove straight to Minnesota with the contract printed.

Hoiberg’s first order of business was to lock up a player named Melvin Ejim, who could either keep his previous commitment to Iowa State or look elsewhere. Hoiberg made a visit to Ejim’s prep school in New Hampshire.

“Man, he wanted to win a Big 12 championship,” Ejim said of Hoiberg’s message. “We did that today. We were close. We just needed a little bit more to really go. ’It’s all live’n’son and we were able to do it.’”

Hoiberg’s vision has culminated into national recognition and 10 top-25 victories this season on route to making history by winning the Big 12 Championship.

The vision is what had Hoiberg with his two sons — who had rushed out of the house to eat ice cream during his interview four years after — at the bottom of that ladder.

“I was awesome,” Charlie said. “I just can’t believe that we actually won it.”

“It was really cool,” Sam added.

More than an hour after Iowa State won the Big 12 title, while a worker swept away the final signs that anything had taken place, Hoiberg finished one final question with a small group of reporters on the court.

He pointed to his twin sons, who stood patiently off to the side.

“Ready, boys?” Hoiberg asked them.

Off the court the three walked, Hoiberg’s legacy well intact.
Senior guard DeAndre Kane celebrates the win against Baylor in the final round of the 2014 Phillips 66 Big 12 Championship in Kansas City, Mo. The Cyclones defeated Baylor 74-65 in their first appearance in the final round since 2000.

Sophomore forward Georges Niang holds a senior guard, DeAndre Kane.

Junior forward Dustin Hogue goes up for a shot against Baylor in the final round of the 2014 Phillips 66 Big 12 Championship in Kansas City, Mo. The Cyclones defeated Baylor 74-65 in their first appearance in the final round since 2000. Hogue had 12 points for Iowa State.

ISU coach Fred Hoiberg holds up the net after Iowa State won the 2014 Phillips 66 Big 12 Championship in Kansas City, Mo. The Cyclones defeated Baylor 74-65 in their first final round appearance since 2000.
Fans hold up signs calling the Sprint Center “Hilton South” during the Phillips 66 Big 12 Championship game against Baylor in Kansas City, Mo., on March 15. The Cyclones defeated the Bears 74-65 in their first final-round appearance since 2000.

Iowa State fans showed support to sophomore forward Georges Niang, who was injured in Friday’s game against Kansas, by wearing bandages above their right eyes at the Phillips 66 Big 12 Championship finals against Baylor. The Cyclones defeated the Bears 74-65 in their first final-game appearance since 2000.

Sophomore guard Naz Long holds up the Phillips 66 Big 12 Champions poster after Iowa State won its first conference championship title since 2000. The Cyclones defeated Baylor 74-65 in the final game in Kansas City, Mo.
Cyclones defeated the Wildcats 91-85. Niang had 18 points for Iowa State in 28 minutes of play.

Sophomore forward Georges Niang shoots against Kansas State during the Big 12 Championships in Kansas City March 13. The scoring trio out, Hogue took over, "said ISU coach Fred Hoiberg. "His secret is out now."

"He's actually been practicing that shot all season," Hogue said. "The Cyclones are known to his teammates long before the Big 12 Network or ESPN. "We got the stops down the stretch against Kansas State. "Thankfully, we're in the championship position," Long said. "Lousy as myself and Moore [Moore] and anybody else, we know we've got to pick it up because Deleware is one of the best players on our team. He said, 'Look, we're going to have to come out and play.' "When he went out there, we went, 'oh, alright, he's got the win.'"

"He doesn't get the credit he deserves," Hubert said. "When he's locked in, we're a pretty tough team to beat."

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Niang went back to the locker room to get five stitches for a cut above his right eye.

Sophomore forward Georges Niang pumps his fist to the crowd after being injured during the second half of the answer, and it got one.

it a 16-0 run pushing the lead to 83-69.

“Take a deep breath. ”

said junior forward Dustin Hogue. “Him.

time since 2000.

the Big 12 championship game for the first

which helped Iowa State secure a 94-83 vic

and hit a 3 from the top less than two minutes

the lane with the Jayhawks missing

shouted at an official.

'No Ts' — was assessed a technical when he

locker room white board before the game,

Fred Hoiberg — who wrote on the team’s

run to take the lead.

After Kansas finished its run, Iowa State

Iowa State jumped ahead by as many as

Cyclones sealed the game with free throws

for run, until Niang flew to the floor and the

myself.

ISU coach Fred Hoiberg got

— that didn’t bank in this time —

missed a desperate 3-point attempt

City.

Monte Morris dribbled the ball to

mid-court and threw it up in the air.

“I think we played like the bet

Iowa State into its first Big 12

Kane and Morris’ young careers,

To Hoiberg, who was sure, “I thought our intensity

them.

“Coach preaches, ‘How are you going to

millions.

In the final stanza, Niang fin

IN THE LOCKER ROOM

The sophomore guard eventually rose

Georges Niang felt the warm sensation

Niang scored eight-straight points for

“Coach told us that you’re the one who has to

Hoiberg calms the huddle, Edozie fills in and Long celebrates

After Dean, Reshawn Goll

ISU coach Fred Hoiberg got
down on one knee and stood into

“Look at me,” said Hoiberg.

Hoiberg had just crowned the second technical of the game, and

that’s incredible, and it gave us a lead and we

“Here we are at the Big 12 tournament

“Those are some of the best fans I’ve ever

While Niang’s stitches forced him to

The key was Niang, who after going 4-of-

“Coach preaches, ‘How are you going to

Niang went back to the locker room to get five stitches for a cut above his right eye.

Their hands were up, and their faces were

“Take a deep breath. ”

Niang scored eight-straight points for

“Iowa State teams have done. ”

The whole Cyclone Nation, they
dserves it. We’ve got to give some love to the people.”

They deserve it, Long said. "Kane and I were

ISU men fight to victory, move to Big 12 title game

Niang went back to the locker room to get five stitches for a cut above his right eye.

The sophomore forward eventually rose

Georges Niang pumps his fist for the crowd after being injured during the second half of the game against Kansas in the Big 12 Championship semifinal March 14 at the Sprint Center in Kansas City, Mo. The Cyclones defeated the Jayhawks 94-83, advancing to the final round for the first time since 2000. Kansas had 20 points in the first half, including five 3-pointers.

Senior guard DeAndre Kane attempts a 3-pointer against Kansas in the Big 12 Championship semifinals March 14 at the Sprint Center in Kansas City, Mo. The Cyclones defeated the Jayhawks 94-83, advancing to the Final Four for the first time since 2000. Kansas had 20 points in the first half, including five 3-pointers.

Kelby Wingert/Iowa State Daily

Senior guard Naz Long holds up his jersey after the win against Kansas in the Big 12 Championship semifinals March 14 at the Sprint Center in Kansas City, Mo. The Cyclones defeated the Jayhawks 94-83, advancing to the Final Four for the first time since 2000. Kansas had 20 points in the first half, including five 3-pointers.

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