



ALUMNI PROFILE



Matt Gatens coaches his players on the sideline in a game against UMBC. This is Matt's second year as assistant coach of the Hawkeyes. PHOTO BY JACK ROGERS

City High state champion Matt Gatens returns to coach the Hawkeyes

By Jack Rogers and Ahmed Basheir

From a young age, sports have always run through the Gatens household. Matt Gatens' father Mike Gatens was an All-American Basketball player at Iowa City West High before continuing to play at Iowa. Matt's mother, Julie Gatens, was a cheerleader during her tenure at Iowa. Matt, on the other hand, went attended high school at the cross-town rival, City High, of his father's alma mater where he led the team to a state championship and won Gatorade Player of the Year in 2008, an award that recognizes the nation's most outstanding high school student athletes, and was named Iowa's "Mr. Basketball."

"We had a really fun team and a good group of guys, great coaching staff and we really came together and went on a great run and it was just really fun winning you know, for the community of City High and the school and everything. Obviously, I'll never forget a special moment in my life like that and all our teammates were just a lot of fun. But just a lot of great memories playing there and having some great coaches and great teammates and great support from the community," Gatens said.

After his tenure at City High, Gatens went on to complete his childhood dream of playing basketball at the University of Iowa. During his tenure at Iowa, Gatens scored a total of 1,635 points over his four years at Iowa, ranking him tenth all-time in school history for career points. Most of those points came from behind the arc as he had 239 three-pointers in his Iowa career, ranking third in school history. Gatens was also just the second player in Iowa history to record 1,600 points, 450 rebounds, 250 steals, and 125 steals over the course of his career.

"My father had gone here and played, my mom was a cheerleader, and both my other sisters played sports as well here so it's kind of something I always wanted to do from a young age and was thankful for the opportunity. To play in front of family and friends, for a team I grew up following so much and cheering for so much, it was definitely special to get to play for your hometown. Coach Alford was the coach at the time who offered me a scholarship and gave me the opportunity to play here and we didn't waste much time," Gatens said.

Throughout Gatens' long playing career, he had the opportunity to play amongst and against many great players in high school and college. Many of those players went on to play in the NBA and have great success.

"I was at LeBron's camp as a high schooler and he ac-



Matt Gatens' role as an assistant coach for the Iowa Hawkeyes includes scouting teams they have on their schedule, recruit new players for the team, and develop players they have on the team. PHOTOS BY JACK ROGERS



tually checked in on one of our games and we guarded each other for a few minutes. So that was one of my favorite memories but, in an actual game, really good players in my era [were] Kevin Turner from Ohio State, [and] Draymond Green was at Michigan State so we played a lot against him. Guys like that kind of come to mind," Gatens said.

After his time at Iowa, Gatens then went on to play professionally overseas. He played in Ukraine, Turkey, Spain, and France. In his three seasons, Gatens averaged 13 points per game, four rebounds per game, and two assists per game per 36 minutes.

"Just learning how to navigate life in another culture and country of different people in different languages, everything you know, exploring new foods, different cultures, different ideas teaches you a lot. It was just a lot of patience and going with the flow with things and thankfully I had my [girlfriend] who then became my wife. She was with me over there all four years I traveled around Europe and played for different teams. But it was a time in my life I really appreciate and it was fun, just a lot of fun life moments happened overseas," Gatens said.

Gatens finished off his playing career in the United States after suffering an ACL tear in only his second game playing for Iowa Energy in the NBA development league in 2016. Gatens joined the Auburn basketball staff as a graduate assistant in 2017. After helping the Tigers win an SEC Championship, he joined the Drake Bulldogs as a director of operations under Head Coach Darian DeVries. Gatens helped the Bulldogs to 95 total wins between 2019 and 2022. He also helped them to a Missouri Valley Conference Regular Season Title in 2019 and an NCAA Tournament appearance in 2021. Currently, Gatens is in his second year as the Assistant Coach of the Iowa Hawkeyes Men's Basketball Team. Gatens guided the Hawks to a 19-win season and an NCAA Tournament appearance in his first season.

"When you become a coach, you start to think about everybody else so much more than when you're a player. When you're a player you're thinking about 'okay, how can I get better today and get my body in the best shape' or you go take care of an injury or work on my jump shot, you know, whatever it may be. You're just constantly thinking about improving yourself. Now when you're a coach, it's everybody else. 'How can I help anybody else get better today whether it's one player or all of them?' Then just looking at the game in a little different way you know, from instead of looking at it just from my position, okay, now you're looking at it from the position of all five guys plus what are the guys on the bench going through and thinking about during the game. Just thinking so much more about others instead of yourself," Gatens said.

Over his coaching career, he's helped many young talents including Kris Murray who was the 23rd overall pick in the 2023 NBA Draft. During Murray's time at Iowa he received third-team All-American, first-team All-Big Ten, was a finalist for the Karl Malone Award, a semifinalist for the Naismith Award and Wooden Award. Murray now plays for the Portland Trailblazers in the NBA. Hawkeye Filip Rebraca was third-team All-Big Ten, Bryce Brown was an All-SEC selection, and Jared Harper was also an All-SEC selection and now plays for the New Orleans Pelicans.

"You know he's a bright young coach. I mean he's pretty good at everything. He can scout, he can recruit, he can do skill development workouts, I mean there's really nothing he can't do. Very knowledgeable, very mature in his approach, [and is] going to be a star in the business," Iowa Men's Basketball Head Coach Fran McCaffery said.