

Morgan Paige excited to play Hawkeyes

Written by Jim Ecker

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A talented basketball player named Paige has an important game in Iowa Wednesday night.

Morgan, not Marcus.



Linn-Mar junior Marcus Paige has been in the news a lot this season, leading the top-ranked Lions through an undefeated campaign and committing to North Carolina, but his big sister will take center stage Wednesday when Wisconsin visits Iowa for a Big Ten game in Iowa City.

Morgan, a 5-foot-9 freshman, is averaging 3.4 points for the Badgers, who are just one game out of first place in the Big Ten standings. She started 10 games earlier in the season due to injuries, but is a top reserve at this point.

Linn-Mar does not play Wednesday, and Morgan expects to see a lot of familiar faces in the stands at Carver-Hawkeye Arena.

"I can't even tell you how excited I am," she said. "All my friends and family will be at that game. I'm just really excited."

Morgan starred at Marion High School where her mother, Sherryl Gaffney-Paige, was the girls basketball coach until stepping aside after the 2009-10 campaign. She holds the career and single-game scoring records at Marion, was all-state for four years and helped the Indians reach the Class 3A state semifinals in 2008.

She considered joining the Hawkeyes, but said the UI coaching staff wasn't ready to offer her a scholarship in the spring of 2009. She visited Wisconsin and fell in love.

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"When I came up here on my unofficial visit I knew this is where I wanted to be," she said. "Iowa was always on my top list of schools. My family has always been like, 'If you could be a Hawkeye, that would be awesome.'"

She'll play against the Hawkeyes instead.

Paige and Iowa sophomore Jaime Printy, a Linn-Mar graduate, played for the Cedar Rapids Panthers on the AAU circuit and had a friendly competition in high school.

"We never beat them, but it was always like the best game," said Paige. "Marion and Linn-Mar were rivals. That game was always fun."

They'll battle again Wednesday, this time as Big Ten guards.

This isn't just a homecoming for Paige. It's an important game for Wisconsin, which has a 9-3 record in Big Ten games and is battling Michigan State (10-2) and Penn State (10-3) for the conference lead. Iowa sits 7-6 in the league.

Paige said she loves playing in the Big Ten.

"It's really exciting," she said. "We travel, and then you end up in an arena that you saw on TV growing up as a kid. And you're like, 'I get to do this for four more years!' It's unreal."

"You get on the court and there are TV cameras in the corners and there's media conferences. It's just a completely different world."

The University of Wisconsin is a relatively short drive from Marion on Hwy 151, and Paige said

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her parents and brother have been able to watch her play in Madison.

Marcus Paige announced Jan. 8 that he'll play college basketball at North Carolina, but he apparently reached that decision without seeking any great insight from his older sister.

"I would say that he did, but he really did it on his own," said Morgan. "He was very reserved in talking about it.

"I'm so excited for him," she said. "It's amazing to think that my little brother is going to North Carolina.

"It's unreal to think that he's going to one of the great schools. He's always wanted to go there. I'm so excited for him."

Morgan is two years older than Marcus, but her baby brother surpassed her on the basketball court a long time ago.

"Oh my goodness," she said. "He beat me probably when he was in the fifth grade, and I could not keep up. It was depressing, kind of."

Morgan, an excellent student who carried a 4.0 GPA in high school, wants to enter the medical field someday, perhaps as a doctor. That's in the future.

Her immediate plans are for a happy homecoming in Iowa City Wednesday night.

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