

February 23, 2012



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Wisconsin – 66

An interview with:

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY

THE MODERATOR: Questions for coach.

Q. Got another solid outing there from Matt.

COACH McCAFFERY: Was really solid, wasn't it? One of the most incredible things I've ever seen, right from the beginning. The first two he made, I mean, he got it off so quick. I mean, they were on him. He made seven in the last game, they were on him. They do a great job with scouting. He just pulled the trigger. Once he got going, he was on fire, yeah.

Q. Have you ever seen a stretch like this from any player last two games?

COACH McCAFFERY: No, never.

Q. He's always been a big scorer. Even in practice, have you ever seen Matt get in a zone like that?

COACH McCAFFERY: In practice he has done that, yes, he has. I have seen it before.

The thing about it is he puts the time in. He's getting extra shots off. Off days he's getting 500 up all summer long. When we got into this facility, we have the shooting gun, he's in here all the time.

Q. Where does this two-game stretch for Matt rank in your mind from all the greats you coached?

COACH McCAFFERY: Most of those guys were front court guys. Troy Murphy. Pat Garrity, he was a jump-shooting four. Alphonso Ellis had a stretch. We played USC in L.A., then LaSalle in Philly, then Carolina in the Garden. We drilled all three of them. We just rode him. Off of those three games, he became the fifth pick in the draft.

I think Matt is making a name for himself to be somebody to be considered to be drafted, certainly making a push for all-league. Should be in the three-point contest at the Final Four, I think he deserves that.

Q. Was there no bad shot?

COACH McCAFFERY: No, we were just going to him. Yeah, he has the green light anyway, to be honest with you. I don't think I've ever told him, Hey, that was a bad shot. I don't ever want to put that into a shooter's head.

Q. What goes into the final shot as far as his movement before he gets the ball?

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, I mean, he obviously works hard. We were setting him up. In the beginning, he was getting it on his own. Once they really started locking into him, we had to start setting him up, run some picking action for him. He's really good at that. He knows when to wait, when to go, when to set his man up, how to set his man up. He's terrific.

Q. Indiana, after that Wisconsin, you take it to them. Now that you're nearing the end of year two, how satisfying is it to see the guys come out and play that way?

COACH McCAFFERY: There's nothing better. Whenever we would have a loss and we would seemingly be frustrated with how we played... The reality is, these kids are working hard for me. They have bought in from day one and given me everything they had.

Ultimately, if you see me get frustrated with the officials or with them, I just want it for them. To be able to see them kind of enjoy all this hard work, to see the students rush the floor, the fourth ranked team we've beaten this year, it just goes to show you what they're capable of doing. Who knows where we're headed right now.

Q. What does it say about your team when you face an opponent like Wisconsin on two occasions and both times you come away with victories?

COACH McCAFFERY: That's a very difficult team to beat. Their style of play. They turn the ball over 13 times, that's the most they turn it over this year. They don't turn it over. They out-rebound us. We out-rebounded them up there.

Normally you have more turnovers than them and they out-rebound you. They usually start with that. Those are two hard things to overcome. Now you got to shoot a little better percentage, make some more threes, some more free-throws. Normally they make more threes than you.

We made more threes, the others were pretty even. I thought we really fought. I thought Melsahn's blocks in the second half were huge for us.

Q. How important was the start of the second half?

COACH McCAFFERY: I think that was important. We talked about that. Everybody in that situation wants for that to be the case. We knew it was our ball. That was helpful. That helped. That gave us a little bit of a cushion.

Q. Talk about Matt making a push for All-League. Do you think he's one of the more underrated guys in the Big Ten?

COACH McCAFFERY: I'd like to think now he's going to start to get the kind of accolades he deserves. Because of him the team is doing better. They're going to start talking about us more, and it's going to be because of him.

I said it after the Penn State game. The thing that was frustrating for me was we weren't able to ride his performance in the second half to victory like we did in the last two games. We were down double-digits. He hits five in a row, we're right there. We're going to have to be ready on Sunday.

Q. Is the next step for this group dictating the pace?



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COACH McCAFFERY: Well, part of that was we kept running. A big play in the game was when we had a break, thought White was going to dunk the ball. It doesn't go in. Then Brust goes down and hit a three. That was a huge momentum play. It was going to go 6-8 as opposed to 6-3. That was like a five-point play.

At that point we made another run back at them. At that point we were going to run a little clock. It was a little frustrating because we had about six or seven possessions where we didn't score. But what we did do was we executed fairly well and we ran clock and we got a shot, were able to get our defense set up to make sure we were still able to win.

Q. As a coach, struggling with a young team, it must be gratifying to see that work.

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, there's no question. They're going to make mistakes. They're going to forget. But the reality is, for the most part, they executed the game plan to perfection and they fought for me. That's ultimately what you want.

They're kids. They're going to make mistakes. But they were on the glass. They were fighting for loose balls. They were trapping guys. They were rotating. They were contesting.

You can't let this team come in here and make 10, 11 threes which is normally what they do. The games they lost, they make five, six threes. They actually made five or six.

Q. (Indiscernible)?

COACH McCAFFERY: I think it also shows the development of Devyn Marble. Bryce gave us some quality minutes, had three assists. It's fair to say he was just out there on guts. He couldn't keep anybody in front of him, he couldn't move his feet the way he would like to. He was able to get a sweat, get out there and play. Maybe in two days he'll be ready or closer to a hundred percent.

Q. The last few minutes where you didn't score, did the running clock disrupt the rhythm?

COACH McCAFFERY: Absolutely. That's something you're concerned about. The last thing we were going to do there was come down and quick-shoot the ball. We were going motion to a set. Might have been better going set to motion.

The problem when you run set to motion, sometimes you shoot the ball quick. When Matt is cooking, that's fine. But he missed a couple. I think he was a little bit tired. We were letting him run it a little bit, then we would go to him.

What we probably should have done in retrospect was drive the ball a little bit more, get to the free-throw line, let Marble go a little bit, give him some space. We tried to go inside twice. Once to Mel, got tied up. The other time I think Aaron got fouled.

Q. Disappointment after the Penn State game. It's a long season. How does this team not wallow in that and move on?

COACH McCAFFERY: They've done a great job of that all year long. We had some tough losses. There have been a couple nights we just didn't play well. Everybody was sideways. You're coming in the locker room, you're disappointed, you're disappointed in yourself, we're disappointed as coaches, you're trying to figure it out.

But that's what the journey's all about. You got to fight through it. You got to keep coming. They know that I'm going to stay positive. Even if I rip 'em during a timeout, I'm going to stay positive with them, I'm going to keep teaching and get better.

When we break the film down, it might not be pleasant to watch, it's the team and the coaching staff, they're not getting embarrassed. It's a learning situation.

What you're seeing is a young team get better and learn from their mistakes and hopefully now can we go on the road and play with the kind of confidence we're playing with right now.

Q. Basabe, this is what you expected from him?

COACH McCAFFERY: The thing about Melsahn, with him it's all about energy level. When he's running and jumping and blocking and dunking, we're a better team, he's a better player. Our team plays faster, the team plays with more energy. I'm really happy for him because he never gave up on himself or his teammates.

Q. Matt's clock is ticking. Seems that urgency has rubbed off on his teammates.

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, it was interesting. When he was the last one in off the floor, they ran to him and lifted him up off the floor. As happy as I'm sure he is, they were more happy for him. To me it showed an incredible level of

respect for a guy, how hard he's worked, his professionalism, his captaincy, how he leads.

That's the way it should be.

Thank you.

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