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An interview with:

## **COACH McCAFFERY**

**Q. How concerned are you that two of your five starters right now are in a funk? I know it's early, but is that something you're concerned with?**

COACH McCAFFERY: I think it's always something you're concerned with when guys aren't playing as well as you know they're capable of playing. I thought Bryce took a pretty good step in the right direction the other day. I think he's playing a lot better.

Melsahn is still struggling, but I think the thing that's been encouraging for me is he's practiced well. He's really addressing the situation. He's working hard. He's trying to get in better shape.

Seemed like he was in great shape, but when you're carrying that extra weight, I think it requires a different level of conditioning that hasn't worked for him. So we're trying to peel a little bit of weight off him, and just keep working with him and helping him stay positive.

**Q. Do you think he's just got to play through it?**

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, it's a little bit intriguing to me that he had played so well so consistently for so long. If you were to evaluate our practices from the first day of practice until now, he's been our best player in practice. He had a couple off games and he struggled. So I think he's closer than maybe it looks right now.

**Q. Is this the kind of situation where Melsahn's a feel player or he's thinking his way through instead of letting his instincts take over?**

COACH McCAFFERY: He's just not moving the same way. He was quicker. He was faster. He was bouncier. I mean, he was all over the court. I do think he is thinking a little bit too much. He's trying to make too many moves. He's putting the ball on the deck more than he should.

But, again, he's practiced well, so I know that he's capable of getting back to where he needs to be.

**Q. Is it fair to say with Melsahn, it seems like if he doesn't start well, it kind of carries on?**

COACH McCAFFERY: That's been a problem for him, especially if he doesn't start well and then gets in foul trouble, and he's done that a few times. He did that in our last game.

For him, a couple things go well for him and he stays out of foul trouble, I think that will really help him.

**Q. What was the idea in adding the weight? Did you feel like he needed the speed?**

COACH McCAFFERY: I felt like he's got the frame that can hold that kind of weight. It's not fat. He's in phenomenal shape physically. He's stronger. You've got to endure a long season. You're asking to play the guy the four and the five in the Big Ten, you know, 230 is light. 215 is really light.

But he did it fairly well last year. I still think he'll be up over 220 no matter what. He's just got to learn how to play at that weight.

**Q. Do your coaches seem (Inaudible) as you prepare for games or is it getting a little tender loving care? How do you break that down or do you spend your time preparing for the next game and think they'll come out of it all?**

COACH McCAFFERY: No, no, we'll

address it. We'll address it in a number of different ways. You might address it in a private meeting. You might address it at practice in a film session. You might try to do drills. You might show individual film, have individual film sessions, just so they can see it a little bit better.

But it's addressed, and then at the same time you're getting other guys ready. If they're struggling, you've got to put other guys in there. That's what we've done. We've got a few more options in that regard than we had last year.

So in the times I think I'm not sure that really helps them as they see it, and Melsahn only played 11 minutes. He was in foul trouble a good portion of the game, but normally he would have played a lot more. Put some other guys in there. They played well, they played better, and I left them in.

So I think in that sense he's got -- he's just got to go back and become the dominant player he can be, and he's doing that in practice. That's why he stays in the starting lineup. For the most part I want to stay with him.

I stayed with him in the A&T game it got sticky in the second half and he was out there on the floor and helped us get home on that one. I really feel like in Melsahn's case, he's a lot closer than the statistics would tell you.

**Q. With Eric, his past has always been -- he's had struggles at times with confidence, then he's kind of built himself up in the off-season and then fallen apart in the season. What kind of concerns do you have about him maintaining a high confidence level?**

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, the thing that he's got to do if he's in the open court he's going to be really good. He's taking good shots and he's typically shooting a pretty good percentage from two and from three. He's not a guy that shoots bad shots. He doesn't shoot crazy shots. He shoots open threes, and he drives the ball to the basket and he shoots some pull-up jumpers when he's open.

For him, what he's got to do is keep defending and he's got to rebound. He can't be a non-rebounding three if he's not scoring. You can't have that. He's got to rebound better. So for him it's a matter of focus to get on the glass and get six or seven rebounds, lock up the guy he's guarding and if the offense is there, it's there.

But if you think about the last game and how Campbell was one way, and IPFW was another way. Campbell was phenomenally

athletic, so in that sense, those guys were hard to go around. IPFW everybody's in the lane, so where are you driving to?

So he's got to adjust to that, and go get it off the glass. Get a steal and a run out. When he starts to struggle, he stops getting steals and he stops rebounding. That only makes it worse for him. He knows that. We talked to him about that, and hopefully he'll get better at it.

**Q. You mentioned the other night after the game the defensive end and about the other team's best player had problems when you were focusing in on them. Are there any other areas you're concerned about?**

COACH McCAFFERY: I think guarding the ball. We haven't been real good. Whoever is guarding the ball has not been -- and that's collective. They're driving to the point where help recovery is required whether in man or zone. If you keep doing that, they're breaking the defense down. That's what they're doing. Eventually you'll get a good shot, eventually you'll be distorted and give up second shots.

So we've got to lock in better to containing the basketball in either defense. Probably our best defense so far has been pressure. Not so much we're causing a tremendous amount of turnovers, we have, but it gets us to the point where we're at half court and you don't have to play defense for as long. It gets us moving, and it gets a lot of people involved.

It's been good. It's created some offense with our defense, and we need that as well. So hopefully at the half court level we'll get better. We've worked on it. Our ball screen defense is not what it needs to be.

Again, and that's not a recent trend. It's been up and down. I think it's a function of who is in the game, how many ball screens are we guarding and that type of thing. So we've got to get better at that. That's two guys working together and the rest of the team following suit.

Containing the ball, ball screen defense are two big areas of concern.

**Q. How concerned are you about the overall confidence of the team?**

COACH McCAFFERY: I don't think it's put them in a funk. I think what you're seeing is we've played -- I think we played Creighton who is really a terrific team. I don't think anybody would argue

that. The only thing anybody thought, certainly we didn't think we'd get beaten as badly as we did, so that may affect your confidence a little bit.

But bottom line is we lost to a good team. Then I started watching Campbell, like I said the other night, and five minutes in, you're like okay, this team is for real. This is not a team that you look at and say they're the same as Chicago State. Chicago State has some talented players, but they're 0-6.

Campbell is a team that has experienced guys. Chicago State has nine new players. Campbell has guys back. They had guys that were sitting out. They were ready with bodies. You could tell physically they were mature. They're a tough team to beat, an IPFW style of play. They're going to be in the paint. They're going to run and execute their stuff. They have a great player.

So I just don't know that we're at the point yet as a group that we can say okay we're going to show up and drill whoever's on our screen. We're not there yet. Okay, does that affect your confidence level? Well, perhaps. But we've got really good teams left on our schedule, and a lot of them are away from here. So we just have to legitimately continue to try to get better individually.

You look at the fact that I've got three freshmen that are playing. Well, at times they look great because they're really good players, but at times they look like freshmen. They're all legitimate freshmen. They're not 21-year-old freshmen like you see sometimes now.

So eventually they'll be really good players, but they're also going to be fragile at times. We still have a lot of sophomores that can be fragile at times.

But I do think you look at our team, and I think Zach has played really well. I'm impressed with Zach. Melsahn is struggling, of course, Marble started slow out of the gate, but he's been great. I think we have a team right now where at least certain individuals pick us up when other individuals are struggling.

It's kind of a different team. Last year we had Basabe, Gatens, Cartwright, and Jared Cole who kind of did his thing. But after that, it was players that just fit in. Now, Brommer is maybe the difference in the game. Brommer is a guy that's in there in crunch time. He wasn't in there in crunch time last year. McCabe was in there in crunch time. He wasn't in there in crunch time last year all the time, and so was Marble.

I might have Marble in there and not Cartwright at some point in time. You look at it, we

have nine players averaging 7 points or more. A different kind of team than we had last year.

So it's good, because it's more difficult to prepare for us and they won't know who is going to catch fire tonight.

Rick pointed out the other day, the most important possession of the game I ran a play for Oglesby. Okay. So I think that's a good thing for him. It's a good thing for us.

So what we have to do is we've established a low post defensive presence with Brommer, and now we've got to establish a low-post offensive presence with both he and Basabe and I think that will make us a much more complete team.

**Q. Clemson lost two big scorers from last year's team, yet they've been to four straight tournaments. Did that carry over? Each team has that attitude and that chip on their shoulder?**

COACH McCAFFERY: The interesting thing to me is as I studied this team, you look at Booker and Jennings, in particular, and they didn't play much lately. They played 11 minutes a game last year, if you look at their stats. These two guys can really play. They're 6'8", and 6'9". They have a complete skill set. They can put it on the deck. They can shoot threes. They can post up. They can finish with either hand and they're phenomenally athletic.

So they had two guys waiting in the wings that were bona fide, big time scoring threats. Young's a senior. He can really go. So now you take those three guys along with Tanner Smith who is a really good basketball player. You look at his numbers across the board. Phenomenal rebounder as a small forward. I think he's second on the team. Leading defensive rebounder on the team. But he steals the ball. He's got 21 assists. There is a guy that can really help.

Then you put the freshman in there with those other four players, and they can kind of do what they do, and they can grow and develop. But you've got four players that are really good.

I think that's what I like about this team. They've got the freshmen who are really talented, very athletic, play hard. But you've got the four upperclassmen that are kind of doing what they're supposed to be doing and I think that's why they've got a good club.

**Q. You say you mentioned the two 6'7" and 6'8" guys, and Melsahn getting out of this funk. It would be a good time because they're going to challenge.**

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, this is where we really need him. I mean, these two guys are all A-caliber players in terms of talent and skill level, and they're bigger than he is.

**Q. Coach, you mentioned Marble a few moments ago. He seems to be giving you a good lift off the bench recently. How important is that and what kind of improvement have you seen?**

COACH McCAFFERY: The thing that I think is really been good for him is he and Cartwright together. He plays off the ball. The first couple games he was his back-up. Played a little bit, of course, played a lot of points in the Creighton game when Bryce was struggling with his health.

So I think you look at it and say I've got to play him off the ball some. He's just too good as a scorer. He's a slasher. He scores on the baseline. He hits runners. He makes more steals. He's a rebounder wing player. He's long. It seems to get him going.

You said he gets us going, but playing over there kind of gets him going, and I think that's important for him.

**Q. Is Archie going to be able to go?**

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, Archie looks good. He was hurting big time. I didn't even remember the play in the Campbell game. I guess he went for a loose ball or went for a steal and landed on his wrist. Showed up for practice on Thanksgiving and was swollen pretty good. They taped him up and we held him out.

He did a little bit the day before the IPFW game, and I wasn't going to put him in, but he had a good workout yesterday, so he should be okay unless he tweaks it again, which hopefully he won't.

**Q. Bryce made a spin move in that last game. We saw a lot of it last year. Is that just one of the things you say he's getting closer than he did and you think he's headed in the right direction?**

COACH McCAFFERY: The thing about Bryce, he's got to engineer a victory. He's got to get us into our stuff. He's got to push the break. He's got to be a factor in our press. He's got to

load people up. He has sort of done that, but not at the same level that he did it last year.

A little bit was, I think, he was thinking about scoring, and then he had this health issue, and then I think he knew he wasn't playing as well as he could be playing, and I think it affected his confidence a little bit. He got a little bit -- I don't know if gun shy is the right word. But he wasn't his normal aggressive self. What we've tried to encourage him to do is be more aggressive, be an attack player. That's who you are.

If there are times when we slow it down and call sets and want to direct the ball to places, do that. But at the same time, everything we run has space that allows him to go and to break the play off and to go make a play if they're overplaying a certain player, which they do to Matt a lot or in certain situations.

So I think he's getting more comfortable now with that, and the fact that I want him to make those plays and let him go. Then he made a couple shots and I think he feels better about that. I think he was most likely himself on Saturday. He was definitely in a funk for about ten or 12 days.

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