

**January 14, 2011**



An Interview With:

## **COACH FRAN McCAFFERY**

**Q. As you looked at the tape of the game the other night and the recent games and your perimeter defense, seems like you've been a step slow in a lot of games lately. Why do you think that is and is that true?**

COACH McCAFFERY: I think it's a combination of all of that. I think one of the problems is with Bryce playing so many minutes, we're asking him to go get 25 and pressure the ball and play almost the whole game, I think that's an issue. We're trying to get him to get to the point where he can do that and be just as effective at both ends as he is at the offensive end. We're asking a lot of him. I thought the game the other night, he had 25 points, five assists, two turns, pretty good night. I thought defensively he was better than he was Sunday, so I think that's a key.

Another reason why I put Stoermer in the game, was to try to keep fresher people out there. I've been loading up Cartwright, Gatens with minutes, especially with Eric May's injury, so you put another guard in there and it gives you a little more rest for the other people and another guy with some savvy out there. There's a lot of those areas that we're trying to address.

**Q. Where is May health-wise right now?**

COACH McCAFFERY: He's not 100 percent, but he's pretty good. I think he was struggling a little before the injury, then the injury made it worse and then he didn't play, and right now he just needs to have a bust-out game and I think he'll be fine.

**Q. How is Cartwright's game and how is it different without Cully playing behind him or playing alongside him? How much more is he being asked to do?**

COACH McCAFFERY: I think he's fine. I think for our team, it would have been nice to have him be able to do both and use him in the role that we originally planned for him, which would be to play some point, play some off, do both. Go be a scorer and get us into our stuff. Now he's got to do both having the ball all the time, and that's a lot of responsibility for him, and he's doing well, I think, under the circumstances.

You just make adjustments as the season goes along when you have injuries.

**Q. Is that one of the most pleasing things about the other night is that he responded to his Purdue game?**

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, I felt like he would come back. I think he tried in the Purdue game to be more aggressive as the game went on. I think the way they come and pressure up full court, he might have been a little bit tentative at the start just to make sure we got into our stuff and he got the ball up the floor because our turnovers weren't there, our turnovers were after that. I mean, obviously turnovers were an issue in the game at the start but not because of him. So he's learning. I mean, he's becoming a much better point guard day by day.

**Q. How do you describe just the challenge of restoring confidence in your team after these last couple games?**

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, there's only one thing that's going to take care of that. We've got to have a better game. We've got to play better. We can teach and we can break the film down and we can make teaching points and we can get them out there and work them hard. They're good kids. They'll bounce back.

**Q. Are you worried at all about Eric's confidence?**

COACH McCAFFERY: His confidence is clearly struggling right now, there's no question about that. He'd be the first to tell you that. But I do believe that he believes in himself, and the one thing that I told him to address any doubt he might have is that he's my starter, he's in the starting lineup; I'm going to give him the minutes that he needs to play through it. I think when you start to struggle, if your coach loses confidence in you and benches you, blames you, whatever, then it's not going to help.

He needs to go out there -- he's a funny kind of player. If you think about the first half of the Northwestern game, he makes a great drive pull-up in and out, makes a great baseline drive left-handed, rolls off, and he has a play at the end of the half. You could argue was it a foul or not, but just go in there and dunk it and you don't have to worry about whether there's a foul. All of a sudden if he makes those three baskets, he's got at least six points at halftime and on his way to a 12- to 15-point game and maybe has a different game.

He's the kind of guy that he's a team person. He wants to do what his coach asks him to do. He wants to be a good teammate. So any time he starts to struggle, then he needs to stop worrying about that and play with a little more reckless abandon.

**Q. A week ago you guys were coming off of a really strong performance against Ohio State, felt pretty good about the way things were going, and then a week later do you change your message to try to --**

COACH McCAFFERY: The message has got to be consistent. I mean, the reality is we lost those two games to Illinois and to Ohio State. Yeah, we played better, but we've got to get to the point where we can win those games. We clearly did more things from a positive standpoint than we did in the other two.

I was concerned about the Purdue game because I felt like up until that point in the season, clearly the best team we played on the road. It was a sub-par Wake Forest team that we faced based on what they've had in the last ten years. You know, Drake, good team, not Purdue. They're not the eighth ranked team in the country. So that was a step up in class on the road.

The other good teams we had played had been at home and some of the good teams we had played had been in the Virgin Islands. So we did not pass that test. But that's a step in the process of what you have to be able to do to win consistently in this league, and that's ultimately what we want to do. Sure, you look at steps and say, okay, boy, we had a pretty good game against Ohio State. We didn't win it. We weren't in a position to win that game.

So now we take a step back. We've got to take some steps forward now. We've got another shot at a ranked team. They're ranked 25th. They just beat the eighth ranked team so they'll probably move up. So it's an opportunity for us to go on the road and try to correct some of the mistakes that we made and try to improve collectively, but I keep saying improve individually because that's going to help.

Eric has got to play better, and he will. Marble has got to play better, and he will. Seems like if you look at our team, every game -- in the Purdue game I thought Brommer and Archie were terrific. They weren't in the last game and Cartwright wasn't. Gatens has been pretty consistent. But it's every game that -- Basabe is great and then he's okay, and then Cartwright is great and then he's not so good. We need to get four or five guys playing consistently well and then we can plug those other guys in. That's how you do it.

**Q. What impresses you the most about Minnesota?**

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, there's a lot of things, not the least of which is their athleticism. That jumps right out at you. When you watch that team play and you see them rebounding above the rim, you see the shot blockers that they have go down the lane. I mean, they're just wiping it off the glass. And then you see Nolan pushing it. He's got some serious giddy-up and he can go.

And I keep saying that, seems like I say this about every team, but that's why we have so many ranked teams in our league. They have pieces. You can get up and pressure Nolan, but if you do and you hop off of Hoffarber, he's going to kill you. You've got a shooter, you've got a point guard, you've got a high flier, you've got two big guys and then you've got a beast. And then you've got freshmen that come off the bench who can play. You know, they're not just coming in and

making mistakes, they're coming in and contributing and their time will come.

I mean, they've got presently two seniors and three juniors in the starting lineup. That's usually a recipe for a good team.

**Q. They seem to be a lot like Ohio State.**

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, that was a real good game when those two teams played each other. I have a lot of respect for how Ohio State played them. They played phenomenally hard at home and played great defense to get them by three, and that's the No. 1 ranked team in the country right now, Ohio State. So that tells you about Minnesota a little bit. Everybody said, boy, Minnesota is a little slow out of the gate. Not really. They lost at Ohio State, at Michigan State, and I forget, at somewhere else. And then now they beat the eighth ranked team at home. We're playing them there, tough place to play, another great opportunity for us.

**Q. What do you do to counter that? Do you have to kind of pick your poison, take away the inside?**

COACH McCAFFERY: I try not to pick my poison. I try to address everything and that's my philosophy. Other coaches will say, okay, we'll let him get his and we'll lock this up. You know, that can be dangerous. You know, we go back to the Ohio State game, they were worried about three-point shooting and Sullinger goes off, and that's an issue with this team. You get up on Hofferber and Nolan has more space. You know, you double-down on those big guys and then they kick it out and they've got some guys that can make threes.

But I think with a team that pushes it like they do with a tremendously quick point guard, you've got to get back. You just have to get back. And you've got to find him, Hofferber. Twice in last night's game they just threw it down, he shot the ball seemingly from 26 feet. I think Purdue I'm sure had the same game plan in mind; we've got to get back, we've got to find Hofferber and you kind of think you have him, and he just raises up and goes.

The thing I like about him, he's not a stand-still shooter. He's a player. He can go off the dribble, shot fake drive, he goes either way. He's crafty. Sometimes you have those spot-up jump shooters around really talented players and they're a handful, but this guy has got more stuff.

So they've got a lot of pieces. You've got a guy that's averaging over 10 rebounds a game, and you look at his offensive rebounding numbers, it's staggering offensive rebounding numbers, Mbakwe. Seems like every time there's a missed free throw he gets it, by his own team. So he just keeps coming. He's got some long arms, and he had two seven-footers alongside of him. So that's a whole lot of size that we're going to have to deal with.

So we'll try to deal with all of that at the same time and minimize all of their strengths. That's how we'll try to do it.

**Q. You've kind of questioned the team's effort the last two games which you haven't done all season. How problematic is that to you?**

COACH McCAFFERY: More problematic that it happened the other night than it happened -- okay, Sunday was what I thought should have been a wake-up call, and we didn't wake up. I think some of it is a function of the fact that we played two really good teams, played two really good teams who outplayed us. Losses in and of themselves would not have been unpredicted by some, but we shouldn't be losing by that many points in my opinion. I think we're better than that.

Now, I haven't coached against too many teams that made 14 threes, but at the same time, when you look at the film, we were not where we should have been, okay, and some of it was early. They made ten in the first half. It's hard to win when you give a team ten threes in the first half.

So the focus and concentration necessary to beat a good team that shoots the ball like that wasn't there. So we have to get that corrected. And then we've got to do other things to win, but that's got to be step one.

**Q. I'm sure you've had situations like this before?**

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, my entire career. You have a bad performance, you have some guys questioning themselves, you're playing really good teams, you're playing teams that have a little bit more size, a little more quickness. So what you have to do then is you've got to -- that's why we go back to the word compete. You've got to fight that much harder. All the 50/50 balls we have to get. We've got to block out better. You just can't turn and go get the ball. You've got to

really focus on who's on the floor, what do they do, because let's face it, sometimes you have a lineup on the floor that's got all the shooters and sometimes you have a lineup on the floor that's only got one of the shooters when they make subs, so we've got to adjust. And it's that focus and concentration to play as hard as we possibly can every possession.

Right now that's our only chance, and we have done that -- I should say we had done that up until the last two ballgames in my opinion. And we had some good runs in both games. But clearly not enough. We lost by 20 in both games, so we've got to do a better job of competing on every possession, understanding the importance of every possession, staying in our stance defensively every possession, not most of them, not a lot of them. And then, I lost him, and I had a chance to make a decision, I won the one side, there's a rotation, we don't get there, I've got a shooter here and a non-shooter here, well, let's lock up the shooter. You know, treating them all the same. And being able to recognize that on the spot, those are the kinds of things we've got to do a better job on.

**Q. Do you look back at all with anything that happened with this team last year or do you pretty much put everything that happened last year --**

COACH McCaffery: I don't really look at last year. I think -- I've thought about it. I've thought about what happened last year, okay. For example, there was a play the other day in the Northwestern game where Jarryd Cole helped. Basabe was slow on a rotation on a high ball screen, Cole helps off a three-point shooter, he's guarding Shurna, and he stays too long and he closes out. And he closes out in a way that you could guard most people in the country but not John Shurna, and he whacks a three right in his face. And you say, okay, how were they taught in the past to whack out on a three-point shooter? How did previous staff teach close outs?

In my mind there's Shurna, I'm going to go chase him off the three and I'm going to get there and make sure he doesn't make a three. Jarryd was clearly closing out to keep the guy in front of him. So you know -- and we actually talked about that. How were you taught? Are you confused? Do you need to rethink how we're going to go against a team like Northwestern that has multiple three-point shooters where they've got you spread out, they're running all the Princeton stuff and

you've got to get to shooters. You've got to be recovering, you've got to be closing out. You've got to close out with a high hand. You've got to get there quicker. You've got to anticipate sooner.

It's not okay to just recover and keep that guy in front of you. You know, and Gatens actually said, well, that's how we did it before. We closed out and kept the guy in front of us. Well, that's okay if you're playing a driving team, but if you're playing a team that's going to shoot threes then you've got to get up in them a little bit better. So we talked about that, and hopefully we'll do a better job of it.

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