

February 7, 2011



An Interview With:

COACH McCAFFERY

Q. Would you agree that Bryce is becoming the leader of this team? And how has that evolved?

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, I think he's a leader in the sense that our team is comfortable when he has the ball and they feel comfortable in the decisions he makes. I still think in a lot of ways when you look at Jarryd Cole and Matt Gatens as our captains in particular, those two guys, Jarryd more so than Matt because he's more verbal than Matt, and Matt has a phenomenal work ethic. And a very professional approach to things. So those two guys are great examples for the kids.

Bryce is coming in, he's not a freshman but he's new and all of a sudden he's got the ball and he's got the ball at crunch time and I think what players have respected is the changes that he's made in his ability. He's becoming a guy that's athletic and can make plays to a guy that's athletic and can make plays but has also become cerebral in terms of his ability to understand exactly what we want and then go ahead and carry is out. But I think the thing that has impressed most people is he's just fearless. That's what we need. That's what this team needed.

Q. Based on that, on the way he went out of the role out of necessity to now being a focal point, does it change for the future? Does he emerge as your point guard for next year or beyond?

COACH McCAFFERY: We only have him for one more year. I think if he was a freshman, I think that I would be a more difficult question to answer. But going into next year, I think he's established himself clearly.

Q. What can you say about Jordan Taylor?

COACH McCAFFERY: He is really kind of an amazing player when you watch him. He's so strong, and he has an uncanny ability to make shots late in the clock and just knows exactly what they need late in the shot clock, late in the game.

But he also knows how to feed the ball to Leuer, and he just seems to have that incorrigible knack to know what his team needs at any particular point in time.

He's got tremendous feel and whether he's moving with or without the ball he's always open. If he has the ball, he has great ball skills on the floor. So I think when you look at where their team is, with all due respect to the rest of the players that they have, that are tremendous, this guy is really I think has established himself, not only in our league, but nationally.

Q. Can you talk about how you matchup with them, being they are so long and athletic?

COACH McCAFFERY: Leuer is really an interesting player when you watch him because he looks like he's playing almost in slow motion, but he's a terrific athlete. He's one of those guys that he just goes by you. And he gets open and if you think you can get up into him and he's got the quickness that you need and I think that's why he's going to be a good pro. But he's also got that inside-outside game. That he can also face up and drive. Plus you've got to be up if he's going to shoot the 3, and if you don't shoot the 3, and Nankivil, you'd just better guard him, he's shooting over 50% and he's got -- so when you have a guy that's tall with that quick of a release, if you give him any space at all, it's gone.

Q. Two months since Cully has had surgery, is he out for the season now and if he is, next year, how will his role be defined?

COACH McCaffery: That will be determined in a much later date. I'm not going to talk about that today.

I mean, I have not been given anything definitive by our medical people. And when I get it, I'll tell you. He has not played yet so he's not going to play this year but again that has not been determined. We don't have that many games left, so we'll see going into next year.

Q. Coming off two wins, what would it do for your program?

COACH McCaffery: Well, it would be -- it would be great for us to continue to play well and to beat a team that I think on a national level has already proven, not only this year, but in the past ten years, where they are. They have one of the longest NCAA Tournament streaks of anybody in the country. And with good reason.

So that is the great thing about this thing is there's always a great opportunity for everybody to make a move. And we are making a move. We just need to see if we can continue to be consistent. I think we all agree the Michigan State game was our best 40 minutes of the year, and then to go on the road and be able to come back, in that environment, that's not an easy place to play. I have taken some pretty good teams in there.

Years ago, took some teams from Notre Dame in there and you were not coming back, this team, they just beat two ranked opponents and for us to us keep our composure and comeback and make the plays at the end of the game is a big step. To see that against a ranked team, against Minnesota, they have been ranked all year, and we two chances at home.

Q. When you get a big crowd to the arena --

COACH McCaffery: Well I think it helps in a number of ways. If we can get the fans tomorrow that's going to help our energy level, it's a team you have to rebound against and a team you have to defend. They are going to run the clock and the fans they are helping us in runs, when they make them and we help them. In this case those that have come to watch this team have enjoyed what they have seen and enjoyed our players and what they have been able to accomplish. I would expect a big crowd.

Q. Do you and Bo have a history of crossing pans before?



visit our archives at asapsports.com

COACH McCaffery: Not as much as you would think because Bo, a lot of people referred Bo as a Philly guy. He's actually from Chester -- but he was on some pretty good teams. Since I played in the Catholic league, my high school never played his high school.

But I remember I know who he is and he went out to Wisconsin and he was in Platteville for all those years and he was at Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and I got to know him and respect him through all of those years.

Interestingly enough my wife got to know him because she was the MVP of his camp three years in a row at Platteville. He had one of the best camps in America, and for a lot of years, I thought he would just stay, as he was doing so well, he won at least one national championship, but then decided to get back into Division One and has done a phenomenal job at Wisconsin. I know him and have a lot of respect for him and I think if you look at what he's done on a consistent basis, that's really hard to do. I know they have got some things, with the great arena and all that, but it's hard to stay.

Q. Fundamentally things have been improving the last few games, but have things been improving in the locker room?

COACH McCaffery: I don't think certainly six weeks ago, we could beat Michigan State with Melsahn Basabe getting four points and could we beat Indiana on the road with Matt Gatens making two baskets, I think that is kind of what you're referring to.

We had Eric May have -- we beat Indiana on the road with Matt Gatens making two baskets. I think that's what you're referring to. We have more people stepping up. Eric May has been fabulous the last two games. He was fabulous the two games prior to that. He had two games where he didn't -- but you start to see him becoming more consistent and starting to affect the game. When you look at Saturday's game, from his steal, and his block, the most important plays in the game, stealing and blocking shots, that's how you put it together.

You think about the two dunks he made, that's what everybody remembers and they were big because we scored right on top of them and that's how we want to play and so they were good for us and good for him. But for us to win, Basabe has a monster game and Eric May has two -- when

Gatens is off, and that's what this has to be.

Q. Has Basabe exceeded your expectations?

COACH McCAFFERY: You know, I thought he could do this. I thought he could do this. What we have to do is get him to the point where he doesn't have those four-point, three-rebound games. Part of the reason was foul trouble, he got two quick ones and I sat him for 15 minutes in the first half and then the second half, Cole was playing so well, he got his third and I played Zach a little bit at the four. Zach was playing well at the end of the half.

So if we can get him to have those games, you know, 10-6, now you're talking about a legitimate Big Ten All-Star and what I've been impressed with is his work ethic and when he has a bad game he studies the film, he's trying to get better and trying to figure it out. I think that's the hardest thing for a young kid as he's developing to understand, all right, why did I have an off game. You have a great game and you think, well I had a good game and made some shots. But you have an off-game, was it something that I didn't do to myself, could I have done something differently and he's constantly trying to figure out that kind of stuff.

What's been impressive is I think when he's had a bad game, we just comeback, typically had a great game and I tell you what Saturday, he was awesome.

Q. Didn't seem to have any problems maintaining his confidence, whether somebody dunking on him or when he had the whole crowd against him?

COACH McCAFFERY: Doesn't rattle. He's a very mature young man, comfortable in his own skin and knows what he wants us to do and he's typically not going to run his mouth. He's also from New York, and he's not afraid.

Q. Three of the last games, you've made free throws --

COACH McCAFFERY: It's critical. You look at Wisconsin, they are where they are, they don't miss. When you make free throws it helps you extend a lead and helps keep a run from getting away from you. You know, we have been getting into the bonus -- at the end of the game, that's what you want to do, you want to win, you have to make your free throws, and earlier in the year you think back to a number of games where

we struggled from the line; Iowa State game, the Long Beach State game, a couple of losses where we were within a couple of possessions -- which is terrific. That's what it's all about.

Q. Seems like your players rallied and got motivated when Jarryd stopped them from that second dunk attempt, is it true what I saw on TV?

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, I think, that was -- I think you're right. I think that was a big play. I think it was a function of, the kid makes a great dunk and I think it was how he acted after that. You know, he -- he's a kid. Was pumped up. I don't begrudge him that. But when you're the opponent, you take exception to it, and that was a clean block by Jarryd Cole and I believe that's what he was pointing out.

I'll tell you what the bench was up as much as the guys on the floor; they were up screaming. What ends up happening, at the beginning of the year, you just kind of, you want to make sure everybody is on the bench but as you get further into the season, you have fewer opportunities.

Q. Just a little bit about Andrew and how important he is so what you're trying to do?

COACH McCAFFERY: Which Andrew? Sorry? Andrew (Francis) is one of the brightest young coaches in the country in my opinion, because I think people look at him and they think, you know, Fran brought him out here to help him recruit. And I did. But Andrew can coach different positions and can break film down and can put scouting reports together and he's incredibly cerebral and he's knowledgeable and has a great demeanor with the players and he's going to be a terrific head coach.

But at the same time, I need him recruiting and he's working hard.

Q. Does that speak more on Saturday to see them come out with that kind of victory?

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, once the games starts but it's probably not as crazy as you think it is. What we are talking about, when the game starts and sometimes you have to put a game plan that you put together and didn't work and now you have to start over again.

Most of the time we are reminding them, what is the situation, and what are we talking

about, are we going to change defenses, do we think they are going to change defenses. Well if I tell them they are going to change defenses, on almost every possession, in the first half but we already knew that. So it's not like you need the whole world there coaching, coaching, coaching. It's nice when you have coaches who relate so well to the players and it's very helpful to take somebody out and they are upset about it, you know, and I took Andrew Brommer out, he didn't say anything but he wasn't happy about it. I wasn't taking Andrew Brommer out; I was putting Jarryd Cole back in. Two different things. And sometimes, somebody just says, hey, you were fine, where you didn't block out, Jarryd Cole was going back in because Jarryd Cole is playing great and he's been playing well. He's the guy.

He's the starter and Andrew, he's great. He's got a terrific attitude. So from that standpoint, it's great when they are there, and they can be very helpful.

Q. Have you and Bo discussed anything with the recruiting situation on the side, cleared the air, that sort of thing?

COACH McCAFFERY: No. I mean, I don't think there's any real need to. It was addressed at the Big Ten meetings more so from a rules perspective what should be allowed. But when Ben left, he left with our blessing and it wasn't like we were fighting to keep him and it became some fierce recruiting battle:he didn't want to be here. We were more than comfortable letting him go and it was, okay, if he goes to Wisconsin, would that be fine with us.

Q. Would you still have recruited another guard?

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, we would have brought -- Rick asked me this question on Saturday. We would have brought Bryce in anyway because Ben is not a point guard. And if you think about it, with Cully getting hurt, had we not brought in Bryce, we would be in big trouble right now.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports