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An Interview With:

COACH McCAFFERY

Q. You mentioned last night on your call-in show changing your lineup with Melsahn, when did you come to that decision and what are you looking for in terms of helping you make up your mind?

COACH McCAFFERY: A lot of times when you look at this, it's not as simple as it may appear. Obviously he's playing well. So the logical conclusion is, we'll just put him in the starting lineup. It may be the right thing for the team; it may not be, because he's playing the best basketball of the last two years coming off the bench.

But it may come to that, anyway. What we'll do is we'll evaluate over the next couple days, and you know, we may look at different lineups, because making a lineup change doesn't mean that would be the only one. Might be different. May not be. But we'll see.

Q. In the case of when you look at Melsahn and Adam, Melsahn gives great energy off the bench, are you worried about losing that energy and maybe crushing his confidence if you don't start?

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, the thing about Woodbury is -- and I go back to his last game. I was really impressed with him, because what I tried to get him to do was get him to understand how he can impact the game in different ways. It's not only as a scorer, but his energy level was great.

If anything, I had the opportunity to play him some more minutes but I went with Zach late

and in the overtime, and Gabe was playing well. That's just the kind of team we have.

Q. For the guys to start, is it a big deal for them --

COACH McCAFFERY: It doesn't seem to be.

Q. -- in your experience?

COACH McCAFFERY: I think everybody wants to start. There's something about starting and saying you're a starter, being in the starting lineup; every competitor wants to be a starter. If you're honest with yourself, because you know what your skill set is, and you know you're going to play and you know you're going to be a factor in the game.

Take a guy like Eric May, he doesn't care. As a matter of fact, he seems to be more comfortable coming off the bench, and I've been very pleased with his play this year.

So it's interesting, certain guys feel like they need to be in the starting lineup and other guys don't. But when it's all said and done, they all want to be.

Q. So in your eyes, the way Melsahn is playing compared to last year, had a tough year all the way through, and now he's improving.

COACH McCAFFERY: I think with him, it's all energy level. He's running, he's jumping, he's impacting the game with his athletic power. That's what we need him to do. Plus, he can score.

But this is year three for him in terms of figuring everything out. I mean, we hit him with a lot of stuff. We played him at the four and five his freshman and sophomore year and now he's locked into how we do our scouting and what we are trying to do on offense and what we are trying to do on defense.

He's also, I think, at the right weight for

him. He's about 228 now. He was at 212; he was at 217; he was at 225; he was at 240. And he seems to be very comfortable right there at 228; still quick enough, but powerful enough.

Q. Where is Josh's confidence right now?

COACH McCAFFERY: I don't know, he makes every shot in practice, every one. Makes them all. You know, it's a little bit different when they are guarding you the way teams have guarded him. He gets a little bit harder.

And the thing about him is, you know, I put him in, and he's not a mistake guy. He doesn't turn it over and then defensively, he's solid. He feeds the post. He had great feed the other day to Melsahn for a dunk.

But you know, I just keep saying to him, I think it's a matter of time before he has more game like he had at Northwestern.

Q. He's always been kind of a good teammate kind of guy who passed up open shots at times to make a pass, and sometimes you'd like him to take those shots. Do you ever feel like if he misses those shots, he's down on himself?

COACH McCAFFERY: He's funny, he doesn't seem to get down on himself. You know, he's not going to be the guy that just jacks. He's just not. I've been with him long enough now.

When he fed that ball down to Melsahn, it was wide open. He was open. He could have shot -- most three-point shooters would have shot the three with Melsahn off. As soon as he raised up, he hit him, that's a basketball play. He's a basketball player who happens to be a good shooter.

So a lot of times, like for him to make four or five 3s but he doesn't take a ton of shots. It's not in his nature to be a pig. You know, you try to encourage him to play with a little more reckless abandon that way. Just, fine, you're out there to fire, then fire.

But the reality is he doesn't view himself that way, and there's a fine line there because when it's all said and done, I want him to be a basketball player. He's really good at feeding the post. He can pass it extremely well. When he gets in the zone, he probably hurts the other team more with his passing than he does his shooting. He's phenomenal. So we'll just stick with him.

Q. How hard is it to win, shooting under 30 percent from three

COACH McCAFFERY: It's frustrating because the guys have really battled for us. I mean, they have battled for they. We are in a position to win all these games. Obviously, I mean, if we win some of those, we would probably be ranked. That's what I want.

When they are competing that hard for me and they are preparing the way they are preparing, and it's just a couple missed shots; if there's a bigger gap, that's one thing. But we've closed the gap, there's no question about that, and now you want to see him enjoy the fruits of all of that hard work.

And you know, Marble was a guy that would make game-winners for us last year, and I'm going to him and they are rimming out. They are good shots and I would go right back to him. You know, that's what I tell him. And, eventually, I think they will go in.

Q. Are you surprised by the struggles from three overall from the team?

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, because again, we've had a number of different guys make them in games. We've had a number of different guys consistently make them in practice.

So the fact that all of them are struggling at the same time is kind of odd. A lot of times you figure one guy has a 1-for-5 and the other guy has got a 3-for-5 and the other guy has got a 2-for-5 out here; now you're okay.

Q. Is there a contagious aspect to that sometimes?

COACH McCAFFERY: There can be. I see that more with free throw shooting than with three-point shooting, though.

Q. Mike kind of playing reserve, put the team on his back, is that hard-nose -- nothing seems to really faze him. Is that one of the things you like about him?

COACH McCAFFERY: He's always been that way. It's interesting, when he was our starting point guard, one of the reasons I didn't moved him was to get him to be more aggressive offensively, because he's always been an aggressive offensive player, but he was trying so hard to run our offense.

So to see him be our point guard, to play

that way offensively; now, we also had him in there with Dev and Dev was at time the point guard and he was the two anyway; so flexibility, quite frankly.

But he doesn't rattle; he doesn't rattle on the road; he doesn't rattle if you're mugging him off the ball. He'll just keep working. So I really quite honestly wasn't very surprised by that.

Q. Do you like his approach, the fact that he makes a mistake; that you would never know by his facial reactions and just plays through the play?

COACH McCAFFERY: Again, he's always been that way. And I've seen him more than anybody: For his high school team, for his AAU team, he's always been that way; just on to the next play and that's that.

He's going to try to beat you, and if you beat him, all right, well, he'll try to beat you the next time, that's all. There's really no other way to do it. You can't let it linger a little more than you should.

Q. Good moments and bad that you have to play through, do you have to remind him of that?

COACH McCAFFERY: It's funny, because in the game Sunday, if you remember, he was turning down shots, early. And we were setting him up, and I challenged him during one time-out, I said, just shoot the ball.

The way that they were playing him, I said, you know, you should get 40 tonight. That's what you should get. He didn't get 40; he got 18, but he just really started coming off ball screens and shooting a pullup. And we were doing a good job screening for him, and he was doing a good job coming into a shot.

Whereas if you come off the ball screen and delay at all, by that time, you have about a split second to make that determination, whether you're going to pull-up, shoot it or you're moving on. And if you wait, you need to move on because are going to get your shot blocked or you are going to get your shot contested and you might not make it. He was raising up and firing, and that's what I wanted him to do.

Q. Are you surprised he got an A minus on his report card?

COACH McCAFFERY: I was very disappointed in him. (sarcastic).

Q. Did he seemed bothered by it?

COACH McCAFFERY: He wasn't happy with it at all. Not used to that.

Q. How much easier is it for you when you don't have to worry about that part of a kid; you just know it's being taken care of?

COACH McCAFFERY: To be truthful, that's what we try to recruit, those kind of guys. You're not always going to get a 4.0, let's be frank; but, you now, the guys that you don't worry about when they are not in front of you, okay.

So if they are supposed to be in class, they are in class; if they are supposed to be in the weight room, they are in the weight room; and if they are not supposed to be anywhere specifically, then they are probably in the practice gym hitting fouls. Those are the kind of guys you win with, and that's what he is.

Q. Mike stopped being a point guard, being switching him around -- did he get a setback?

COACH McCAFFERY: No, he doesn't care, because for his AU team he was the two, and for his high school team, he was the one. Even when he was our starting two, he played a lot of one. So it's like, whatever you need me to do, I'll do whatever I can to help you win.

Q. When you look at the season right now, 2-5 obviously isn't where you wanted to be. Do you have to kind of coach against having the players take too much pressure on them and the schedule being a grind?

COACH McCAFFERY: It would be no different if we were 5-2. We would take the exact same approach. If we were 7-0, we would take the exact same approach. It's still a grind. Still have a ton of road games coming up. These are the dog days, when you get into February, and that's what's going to separate the teams that are going to be playing well in March and the teams that doesn't. Doesn't matter if you're 2-5 or 5-2.

Q. What's it going to take to get to the Tournament?

COACH McCAFFERY: We have to win our next game, that's what we've got to do; and then we've got to win the game after that, and the game after that.

And if we lose, we'd better play well and feel like we've made progress and learn from our

mistakes. We lost in overtime on Sunday. We made a ton of mistakes. If we don't make two of those, we win the game.

Now, Purdue made mistakes, too; they won. The bottom line is we have to cut down on our mistakes, in particular at crunch time. Now, I do think we executed better at crunch time than we did against Michigan State.

Now, we didn't make those shots but we executed, right on down to the overtime when we were down two and Marble drove the ball and got to within two feet. It was a much more makeable shot than the one he missed at the end of regulation. I would expect him to make those two shots about 99 times out of 100. He didn't make them; but we executed and we were in a position to win and we had our best player with the ball. I can live with that.

Q. How does Penn State change not having Tim Frazier?

COACH McCAFFERY: They have had some time now. You know, with injuries to key personnel, you typically want to know as early as possible to make the change.

Like, for example, with a guy like Josh Gasser, that's a big loss for Wisconsin. But they knew a long time ago, so they could go ahead and prepare before they ever played a game.

The season started, it was Timmy's team and all of a sudden he blows his Achilles out, and now the guy who has spent all that time as their two guard, he's now their point guard. And, okay, we are going to leave Marshall at the three or we're going to move him to the two, who are we going to put in there; are we going to put Colella in there.

Those decisions, they take some time to make and then to adjust to. And now they have had had some time at least, they have started some non-conference games, first seven games of the conference, and they have adjusted to that.

Now, you take a big weapon out of the lineup but you still have adjusted to that injury. They are still playing phenomenally hard defensively. On the glass, they are incredibly physical and tenacious.

And as a result of that injury, if other guys's roles have increased in importance, they are stepping up. And you know, in particular, Newbill and Marshall are the guys that stick out. But Ross Travis, Taylor, guys like that, Onyeaka, those guys. They are playing better, and they are getting more and more valuable experience.

Q. Penn State is 0-8 but they always play hard no matter what. Is that kind of based on Pat Chambers' persona?

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, he's incredibly positive and they are going to work and they are going to battle. You they are going to battle you as hard and as long as anybody else in college basketball. That's who he is and I think what he's been trying to do with that program. That's been the theme and the mantra that they follow. If the ball is on the floor, they are going down to get it. It's not going to be rolling around there for very long.

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