

**March 10, 2015**



An Interview With:

## **COACH McCAFFERY**

**Q. What does it say, with three teams that are probably not going to make the NCAA Tournament but have a chance to make a run; how is it a state with such a small population base, no major city to lean on, can sustain three programs that are nationally relevant?**

COACH McCAFFERY: I think all three institutions have really impressive fan bases. I think that helps. When you have an opportunity to play in front of people and it matters; certainly, that goes a long way.

**Q. People have talked about Aaron White's cerebral play. Has he always been a cerebral player, or has he developed that game as much as other parts of his game?**

COACH McCAFFERY: I think he's always been that way. I think you add the experience factor; the more times he goes through it, the more times he has to play against the quality teams in our league and figure out how to be successful while watching film and all that, that helps. But he already had that mind before he got here.

**Q. What is your approach, things are going so well, or is this the type of team that doesn't really need reminders?**

COACH McCAFFERY: We're not changing very much. We'll watch film, we'll practice hard and we won't practice long. This time of year, we don't. You know, try to stay locked in.

**Q. Is there anything different? What's the feel like versus one year ago when the team went out in the first round?**

COACH McCAFFERY: I don't see a whole lot of difference. I mean, that team was pretty

locked in, too. We didn't defend like this team has been defending. We relied a little bit more on our offense, and I think that's probably why we lost some close games down the stretch.

But that team was pretty professional, too.

**Q. Would you say ball movement on offense, especially the half court, is much improved from a year ago?**

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, I think so. I think our understanding of when to go and when to grind it has really improved. I think that's important for any offense.

**Q. Has it improved during the year? Early in the year --**

COACH McCAFFERY: We were shooting a little early, and we got in trouble a little bit at Madison Square Garden. We got in trouble with it in a couple of our losses. Certainly, the Iowa State game, the Wisconsin game, we were quick-shooting the ball. Once we fell behind, we started quick-shooting it. So I think our patience clearly has gotten better.

**Q. Anthony Clemmons has had a huge role in your team this year, as he's had in the past, but he's really taken a lot of steps forward, and his assets are obvious from a defensive perspective and moving the ball. Is this something you've seen growth in this year or is it just something that you expected him to mature into over time?**

COACH McCAFFERY: I thought he had the ability to be as good as he's been when we recruited him. Certainly, he proved that right away.

His role was different last year. It was harder for him. You talk about a lot of those things, you just mentioned the kind of intangible things, but he's shooting the ball well, too, getting to the free throw line.

So he's been a scorer when we needed

him to be. He's made big shots. So I think that has impacted him and I think it's impacted our team, as well.

**Q. Seeing Gabe win Sixth Man of the Year, how gratifying is that? You recruited him when he was not highly recruited and saw the potential and seeing the potential turn into it --**

COACH McCAFFERY: And see how hard he worked to become the Sixth Man of the Year and how it was important to him. Very few people want to be Sixth Man of the Year, to be honest. They want to be starting.

But his impact is every bit, if not more important coming off the bench to our team. The reasons why we had a good team is his willingness to do that and to be consistently effective and productive. So when you see a guy accept that role and kind of cherish that role and then excel in that role, it's pretty impressive.

**Q. Is he just scratching the surface as a basketball player, do you think?**

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, it will be interesting to see where his pro career ends up. He's going to be playing for a long time: You know, does he play in the NBA, does he have a long and productive European career; it could go either way. But he's going to be playing for a while and he's just going to keep getting better.

**Q. What are some key things -- you've made conference tournaments, are there common things --**

COACH McCAFFERY: You want to be fresh. But you want to be together, which we are, and playing confidently. And you're going to have to have some guys make shots.

When it's all said and done, people have to step up and make shots under pressure both in terms of the situation, but also who is defending them and you're playing somebody you're playing for the third time. Maybe you've played against that guy 12 times.

So it's an opportunity to do something special, everybody recognizes that on a big stage, and the important thing is to stay together and remember what enabled us to be successful in the first place and not get out of character.

**Q. Regardless of which team you play, they are going to have a dynamic scorer, a couple of them. You mix your defenses well and sometimes in the same possession, so**

**doesn't necessarily mean one guy is going to defend one guy throughout the game. But with Clemmons in there, how important is he when he do go man to go up, whether it's a Newbill or Shields --**

COACH McCAFFERY: He's important because he guard's the guys you just mentioned, even though he's given up quite a bit of size to all three of them. He's tough enough, quick enough, smart enough, but we have other guys that defend like that: Josh; Mike's really become a high-level defender; Pete's defense has really improved.

But then sometimes you end up switching on those guys, and a guy like Jarrod or Aaron White has to guard those guys, and that can be problematic for some teams when you say, okay, four man has to go guard the two or the one, but those guys can do that, too.

**Q. As someone who has recruited pretty heavily within the State of Iowa since you got here, is the talent level at the high school here maybe a little better than people might think from the outside?**

COACH McCAFFERY: No question. Absolutely.

**Q. Speaking of recruiting, how big was it for you to get back into Chicago? I know you said you'll go -- you have two coming in. Is that something you can build on?**

COACH McCAFFERY: I think you want to be able to go everywhere. Obviously Chicago, because of the proximity and because it's a big city with a lot of talent, it's critical. It's important. You're right.

But we wouldn't go take a kid out of Chicago in lieu of taking a kid from Des Moines if we thought the kid from Des Moines was better.

**Q. You talk about your improved defense. Seems like both the man and the zone have been effective. Is that rare for a team to make progress and able be effective with both?**

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, yeah, it's not easy, but I don't know if you would say if it's rare. As a coach, you would hope that you can do that. I mean, if you're committed to doing both -- I mean, some coaches are committed, they are zone coaches or man coaches. Some press more than others.

We are committed to kind of doing what we do, and you want to be good at all of it. We press; we've had success with the press; we've had success with the zone; we've had success with the man-to-man. When it's all said and done, you have got to rebound. Because if you're giving up second shots, doesn't matter how good your first line of defense is because they are going to make a good percentage of those second shots.

**Q. How much time will you spend in practice on both Nebraska and Penn State?**

COACH McCAFFERY: We'll have our eye on those teams. We're working on ourselves predominately. I think that's what you have to do. What are we going to do need to do offensively; what are we going to need to do defensively to be sharp; what kind of stuff are we going to have to guard -- don't have any walk-throughs or anything like that, run-throughs.

**Q. If you get in a situation where you're playing with no days off, do you just... if you play Purdue, will it be, here is the scouting report on Purdue and we walk through it, walk through it in a hotel room --**

COACH McCAFFERY: Pretty much. Sometimes you get a chance to get over to the arena and walk through, but a lot of times you don't. Logistically, it doesn't work.

**Q. How do you keep Dom Uhl's spirits up, playing behind a couple really good players. He's get something quality minutes --**

COACH McCAFFERY: I talked to him about that. A lot of times, I've taken him out of the game, and he hasn't really done anything to deserve to come out of the game. I'm just putting a better player, a more ready player back in the game and I hope he understands that.

Jarrod and Aaron are playing as well as anybody in our league right now and I need to have them on the floor. He's been great and I'm thrilled with his progress, and I keep telling him that. I think it's the only thing you can do. You can't assume he understands that. You've got to tell him.

**Q. Teams have made conference, championship runs; do they typically come in hot or cold or is there a common thread there?**

COACH McCAFFERY: It's been both ways. I remember the last day of the season in '88, we lost by a hundred, and then won three games,

played great. So I think there's a lot more put into that than there probably should be.

That said, you kind of want to be legitimate in terms of, we feel like we're playing well. We feel like we're doing the things necessary to win. You could be playing really well, lose on a tip-in at the buzzer in double overtime in conference tournament play. It's just the way it is.

**Q. The one and two seeds have won almost all the Big Ten Tournaments. There's been very, very few lower seeds. What makes it more difficult, other than the fact that you're going to have to play one more game than some of the other teams?**

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, if you're the one and two seed, you're probably pretty good. You've got good players and all league players. That's going to improve your chances; doesn't guarantee anything. I think probably those teams now it better than anybody.

**Q. Your older players have said a lot of good things about a couple of your red-shirt guy, Ellingson and Baer, a walk-on, done a lot of nice things in practice --**

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, you take those two guys with Denning and Okey Ukah, Charlie Rose. Those guys have to be smart and they have to be willing to learn the offense and then go out and try to simulate: You're Shavon Shields, you're D.J. Newbill, this is where you're going to get your shots and this is how they play, and take pride in that and try to get us ready, and play with a great level of intensity in practice and execution.

And whether it be how they play the zone, how they play ball screens or how they execute offensively in ball screens and who is doing what; and they do a fabulous job. So those two guys -- any of the three.

**Q. Gabe and Adam said they both learn from each other just playing against each other every day. From your perspective, how can guys like those two that don't necessarily play the same way all the time, how can they learn from each other?**

COACH McCAFFERY: At some point, you're going to play against somebody in our league that plays like Gabe or Woody. So it's important from that standpoint.

But sometimes when you're big, you go against smaller guys in practice. Doesn't really get you ready. But in this case, they are both going at it hard. They are going to essentially see somebody that size when we play, so I think that's important.

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