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An Interview With:

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY

Q. How did Mike look yesterday?

COACH McCAFFERY: He looked good. Yeah, he looked good. Probably did about 30 percent of the practice. See how he feels today.

Q. Do you think he'll start or is that still up in the air?

COACH McCAFFERY: That would still be up in the air, see how he does today and tomorrow. It's a good possibility, though.

Q. Where is his wind at, kind of conditioning-wise?

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, he didn't do a lot of up and down, so that would be hard to say. He did a lot of workouts in the pool while he was hurt, so hopefully it'll be okay.

Q. You look at Gabe's minutes have skyrocketed since Mike was out of the rotation. Is that just because of that, or is it because Gabe --

COACH McCAFFERY: I think it's a function of how he's played. He's really played well and deserves more minutes.

Q. When do you think -- earlier in the year you talked about how Gabe was afraid to make mistakes and he couldn't break through and play them. When do you think that transformation has taken place?

COACH McCAFFERY: I think he's a guy that continues to work hard. He's a guy that really concentrates in practice, puts extra time in. He studies the scouting report, watches film, and then little by little he's gotten better in terms of his

understanding of everything, and then that is -- you look at his athletic ability and his ability to guard a small guy, to run down a guy from behind and block a shot. But he's just more relaxed, he's getting more minutes. The more minutes he gets -- we always said if we just gave him more minutes he'd probably settle down. But at some point you have to settle yourself down to get those extra minutes. I think that's what he's done.

Q. Was it you or Andrew who saw him at Sunrise the first time?

COACH McCAFFERY: We were both there together.

Q. What jumped out at you when you saw him?

COACH McCAFFERY: I think the same things that you see when you watch him. How many guys run like that? Now, it was an open gym and he was dominant in open gym. He was dunking the ball, running, blocking shots, catching the ball in traffic. In open gyms you've got to be careful, the defense isn't usually what it normally is. There's nobody scheming to stop anybody, it's just kind of up and down. He was spectacular that day. We went back and watched him in a game, he was very good. He wasn't the same but was very good, and you could see that he was a guy that -- there wasn't any doubt in my mind or Andrew's that he was going to be a player.

You try to do your homework and figure out what kind of person he is, and if you talk to anybody up there, they still love him until this day. He's just a delightful person and he's an incredibly hard worker, so you couple all that together and you say, well, this kid can't miss.

Q. You mentioned before how you guys went with -- talked to him, simplified the game, gave him four different areas to work on and to emphasize. It seems like that's been

more of his niche now. Did you get the sense early on that that was just the issue with him is maybe he was overthinking things too much?

COACH McCaffery: Well, it's all new to him, and the sophistication of a scouting report at this level and how you're playing ball screens and how we're playing in transition, setting plays, zone offenses, out of bounds plays, learn the 4 and the 5 spot, if you could just let him run and jump and block shots and play motion, it would be a little easier for him. But that's not what this level is. You're going to play a team that's going to make you think, and it's a fine line. You put him in -- if he struggles, his confidence goes down. If he does well, his confidence goes up. So you've got to be careful when you use him how you use him early in his career.

To his credit, he just kept plugging away, and now you watch a guy, catch the ball in traffic and make a wrap-around pass, catch and dunk it quick, come from behind and block a shot, come from the weak side and block a shot, play in the low post, play in the high post. I mean, he's just so comfortable right now. In practice he's been terrific, as well.

But he always had that effort. The effort was always there. He was always the guy that beats everybody down the floor. He's the guy that runs back. A lot of guys beat you down the floor on offense but they don't run back on defense. He does both. And that tells you what his character is.

Q. How much better are you guys when Devyn is playing at the top of his game?

COACH McCaffery: Substantially. He's a guy that we know that on any given day is going to get 15 points or better. But he is a guy that distributes the ball to his teammates. He understands, he makes plays late, he rebounds his position with his size. He's got a good feel for where to be defensively, so he'll make steals. He's got real -- he's got savvy, and when you have a guy at his size with a good skill set and his savvy and he's playing well, you've got something special.

Q. Third team for him and Aaron, do you think that was justified and fair for what --

COACH McCaffery: You can always argue that, but you're talking about -- you look at that list and you look at the honorable mention list, phenomenal players on the honorable mention list. So they're all terrific players. I mean, who would you knock off if you said he should be on second

team, he should have been on first team. But those guys are deserving of All-Big Ten honors, no question.

Q. Was that ballot difficult once you got beyond first team?

COACH McCaffery: I don't look at it as difficult, I just vote for whoever I think deserves to be on it, and I'm sure there's differences of opinion. I had my guys different places.

Q. You've talked all year about how deep this team is. Do you think it makes you uniquely positioned for four wins in four days?

COACH McCaffery: I definitely think it helps. You know, if you're in a seven-man rotation, for example, it's going to be hard. You're going to slow down in the course of four days. The other thing is, as teams prepare for us, no matter what game you look at, sometimes there's just different guys on the floor that are producing. It's not always the same two top scorers and the same four players doing the same things.

I go back to the run we made in the Nebraska game. It was Gabe, it was Oglesby, it was Clemmons, McCabe, I think. I'm trying to remember who the five guys were that were out there, and then we put Woodbury back in, he was terrific. He was great before. But that lineup really clicked for us.

It's been like that all year long.

Q. It seems like guys on this team really accept their roles, like Anthony starting for 13 then he goes back to the bench but it doesn't really impact --

COACH McCaffery: No, and the other thing I think is you watch the guys on the bench when that particular group was making the run, they were going crazy rooting for each other. There's no, like, wow, I should be out there or when is he going to put me back in. Our guys are rolling, hey, that's great for us. If we're in there, they'll be hooting and hollering for me.

Q. What's the next step for Gabe going into the next season? What do you want to see him do better, on the offensive end as much as anything or rebounding or what?

COACH McCaffery: No, I think for him it's going to be a function of just doing more of what he's been doing lately. He's going to be a

shot blocker and he can score. He's not going to be a big mistake guy. He's not going to over-dribble or things of that nature. He's got a good jump shot, he's got a medium range jump shot, foul line and in. He's not going to be a three-point shooter. But he's not a guy who's going to try to do more than he's capable of doing.

Q. This type of tournament setting, how much of your practice and preparation is dedicated to teams just beyond the next opponent?

COACH McCAFFERY: Very little. Yeah, very little.

Q. In Big Ten play I think your average margin of victory is around 11 points, but you throw out the Michigan one it's like five. How much do you think those numbers get discussed in the final evaluation, or is it tilted too heavily maybe towards RPI?

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, I think that's a legitimate question. I've never really studied it like that. But I think that's why they're using different components now, and I think it's important to do that because the different formulas look at different things. Kenpom takes exactly what you're saying into consideration, RPI does not as much. So there's just four different numerical things that the committee looks at, Sagarin, kenpom, BPI and then RPI, and I think it's important not to get too focused on one of them because they all look at different things.

So I think that's a good point you make.

Q. Do you think there's too much fixation on RPI when in fact you competed within a couple of possessions in almost every game?

COACH McCAFFERY: I strongly believe that that is something you should look at. I think that's a more consistent approach in terms of trying to evaluate a team over the long haul, whereas if you beat a team by 18 and lose to another team by 18, okay, you have a great win and you have a terrible loss. We don't have any bad losses, really. We have some really good wins, and we've been consistent.

So I think from that standpoint, I'm very happy with what we've done and very comfortable knowing that we're under serious consideration for one of those bids.

Q. When you hear about your depth and everything, how much is team chemistry, just the fact that all your guys seem to get along? How key is that with this team?

COACH McCAFFERY: It's vital. When you think about -- I don't care what team, what sport, if you have any issues at all, and it could be one guy, it's going to derail your attempt to make any kind of progress. We have none of those issues.

I say this, and I don't know if anybody really pays much attention to it, but it's really a fun group to be around. It's enjoyable to come to work every day to work with these guys. They want to get better. They listen. They accept constructive criticism. They just continue to persevere through any kind of adversity. They encourage one another, and they're -- when you see them sort of away from the basketball side of it, they really enjoy each other. If we go to a restaurant or if we're just on the bus or in an airport, they really get along. That's what you want.

Q. Do you get some teams that aren't like that and then you have to kind of work with that through the year?

COACH McCAFFERY: I've been fortunate. Most of my teams have been like that, but I've had some teams that had issues that had to be addressed. Sometimes it's just remove one guy from the equation. I had one of those. And it was amazing what happened after that happened. You feel bad because you want to help that individual sort of figure it out and sort of, as they say, get with the program, but that wasn't going to happen, and it wasn't fair to the rest of the guys, so he had to go, and then we took off.

Fortunately I don't have that issue here.

Q. Northwestern has evolved since Swopshire went down?

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, they're a little bit different in the sense that they just wanted to play really well with -- he was playing well, and then Demps, Abrahamson in particular have really stepped up for them. They're a little bit smaller, but they go a little -- they run a few more different things. I think Olah has also increased his offensive production and I think his overall approach.

When we played them the first time, he wasn't really even looking at the basket that much,

and now they're going to him, he's attacking. He's been impressive to me. I mean, those three guys in particular -- everybody else, Sobolewski, Hearn, those two guys are terrific, Marcotullio, they've always been good. But it's really been Demps, Abrahamson and Olah to me that have stepped up their games in Swopshire's absence.

Q. Looking at Mike, however much he plays this weekend, what element does it bring to the team to add him back to the mix?

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, it helps in a lot of ways. It gives you another point guard, another ball handler. It gives you another shot maker. It gives you another guy who's got experience, and it just makes us that much deeper, that much better.

Q. Your players probably hear some of the bubble talk and everything. Do you have to say anything to them? People are saying, hey, you've got to win one game, two games, three games?

COACH McCAFFERY: I don't know if you've got to say anything. I haven't really said anything about it. You know, and I say to myself maybe I should because of what you just said. They're hearing it, maybe I should address it. But I haven't really talked at length about it.

To me we have to win on Thursday night. That's what we have to do. You can talk about all that other stuff. We've got to win on Thursday night.

Q. How much do you talk about your two wins against Northwestern versus taking some things from Northwestern's other games?

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, we have to show them those games so we see what worked for us, what they tried to do to us, what we tried to do to them, all those kinds of things, and then we have to show them the recent games, for example, Michigan State, Ohio State when they played really well. Penn State was a different kind of game, you know, the -- so they really understand, okay, it's one thing to say Abrahamson is playing better. Well, how? What's he doing? What's Demps doing? Olah, he got hurt in our game and he didn't shoot much. What do you mean he's more aggressive? Where is he getting the ball? We show them all that kind of stuff, and it'll be plain to them that they're a different team, and I think in many ways maybe a more difficult team to guard.

Q. Is there a real danger to looking ahead?

COACH McCAFFERY: Always, but I don't think we will.

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