

December 18, 2014



An interview with:

FRAN McCAFFERY

Q. The Big Four Classic was extended for two more years through 2017. What are your thoughts on that?

COACH McCAFFERY: To me it's the next game on the schedule. In regards to whether we play that or not, I'm not part of that decision. I like the fact that it's sold out. I do think from that standpoint it's a great thing for college basketball fans in this state. I think they're enjoying watching all four teams come to one place. But as far as I look at it, it's just the next game on the schedule, and it's always going to be a good team. This year in particular, one of the best teams on our schedule.

Q. What stands out about this UNI team? Is it the depth and defense?

COACH McCAFFERY: It's like what you just said. It's a combination of things. You start with experience, okay? But that's not why they're having the kind of year they're having and why they're eventually going to have the kind of year they end up with, which is going to be special. They have pieces that fit, so they have quickness in the back court, they have shooters on the perimeter. They have big guys that can shoot the ball. They had a great post player, probably a guy that's going to be the player of that year in the league, in Tuttle.

The thing that stands out to me is that they're all in. Whether they're experienced or whether it's Jeremy or Wyatt or the younger guys, they all accept whatever role has been given to them, and they share the ball.

I think if you're going to play a lot of guys, which Ben does, you've got to have guys that are willing to be the leading scorer one day and not the leading scorer the next day, and that's what they have. Every game it's two or three different guys seemingly. It could be five in doubles because of

the way they shoot the ball. But that's what's been impressive to me is the way they share the ball.

Q. What was practice like this week? How did you guys manage finals week?

COACH McCAFFERY: What I do in finals week is -- well, first thing, we give them two study days off. Get yourselves together academically and get prepared. Then what we'll do is look at the schedules and then we'll have practice when we can have people there. Then we just have practice. I don't look at it that this is a finals week practice. It's practice. If we're having practice, we're having practice. Otherwise we're not going to have practice, and that's how I look at it.

Q. How did the guys respond?

COACH McCAFFERY: They were great. They're very professional, I think in that regard. Obviously, we didn't play well in the last game. I would like to think if we did play well, we'd still be professional in how you approach the next practice, knowing that you have another great team coming up in the next game.

It doesn't really change anything in terms of how you prepare. You've got to be professional in your approach. You've got to be willing to honestly evaluate yourself, okay? And say, okay, did I do what I could do? If I didn't, okay, then I have to do better, don't I? How are we going to get there? That's where I come in. Can my staff and I help you be better and understand something maybe you didn't understand or whatever? It's such a long season you can't get too high or too low, no matter what happens.

Q. How do you guard a guy like Wes Washpun? He drives to the hoop and he's fearless, he's a fearless player.

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, and it makes him that much harder to guard when you surround him with the shooters that they have and the big guys that they have. You've got to keep him in front of you. That's the bottom line. He's great at

going by people. They give him space and set screens for him and his explosiveness has been very good, but he's finishing. He's making baskets, getting to the free-throw line and making free throws. That's why he got 27 against VCU. It's not all lay-ups. It's not all jumpers. It's not all threes or free throws. It's a combination of all of those things. That's how you get to 27.

Q. When you look at Peter last game, he seems to really have taken those steps forward that you need from him. Do you see him potentially challenging for a spot in the starting lineup?

COACH McCAFFERY: I do. And I want him to. If he does, then we're a better team. It's going to make Clemmons better, make him better, make Josh better. I want Josh to do the same thing. I want Trey Dickerson to do the same thing.

Q. How is Trey now after the injury last week?

COACH McCAFFERY: He's fine.

Q. Do you expect he'll play?

COACH McCAFFERY: Yes.

Q. Josh and Wes Washpun had been together in the summer. They're former high school teammates. How does all that play into this game?

COACH McCAFFERY: I don't know. I don't really think anything of it. It might have more, as far as they're concerned, that familiarity and they kind of know each other. I mean, Josh has been playing against Bohannon since they were kids. Josh and Wes were teammates, like you said. I really don't look at it any differently.

Q. Have you had a chance to sit down with Gabe since he's gotten back?

COACH McCAFFERY: No, I have not. But he'll be at practice today. It was important for him to do that and go home. I'm happy that he was able to stay for a little bit. He got there Saturday and left Wednesday at 5:00 their time. So he's there for enough time to grieve with his family the way he wanted to. But he's back in time to prepare for our next game, which was important to him.

Q. Do you see his minutes being affected at all by the layoff from practice?

COACH McCAFFERY: No.

Q. How about more minutes, maybe last week? Is that something he'd like to do?

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, I think he deserves to play more minutes. My intention would be to play more minutes. My intention would be to play him whatever minutes -- you never really know but he's played well enough to get more minutes and I've got to figure a way to get him in.

Q. Last year, I think you joked that Peter, nobody took more shots per minute in college basketball than Peter, at least the first month of the year. He seems to be taking better shots now ad his shot selection is better. What do you attribute to him?

COACH McCAFFERY: I think he's mixing it up. You don't ever want to be categorized as a shooter or a driver. All right? If you're a perimeter player, you've got to be all of the above. You've got to be an assist guy. You've got to be a driver. You've got to get to the free-throw line and make jumpers. You've got to make threes. And now you're hard to guard. If you're one dimensional, you're really easy to guard. And you're seeing a guy, I think, that's a little more versatile than he was last year.

Q. Your defensive numbers are kind of night and day compared to last year, field goal percentage, defense. What did you guys do differently in the off-season to prepare for this? And how have you guys performed differently?

COACH McCAFFERY: I don't know that we did anything specific other than emphasize what we didn't do last year. You can show it to them empirically, and show them the numbers and show them the clips, but at some point you have to decide, are we going to be a team that stops people or are we going to be a team that trades baskets? Because if you're trading baskets, you're usually losing.

So I'm proud of our guys in the sense that they played better defense. We didn't play better defense on Friday night. I think in that game in particular a lot of focus was on the beginning of the second half, where we didn't play well. But we didn't play well for 40 minutes. We got outplayed for 40 minutes. Our defense wasn't what it needed to be in either half, nor was our offense. So we had a lot of work to do in that regard.

But I do think we are more committed to being a better defensive team. That's one of the

issues you look at with Clemmons in particular. You want to say, okay, he hasn't scored as much recently. Do you want to make a move and get him out of the starting lineup? Well, you can do that, but he's typically a defensive guy that changes things for us. So he'll still be in the starting lineup.

Q. What do you feel like you need to see just performance-wise across the board?

COACH McCAFFERY: It's got to be better across the board. Our transition game, both offensively and defensively has to be better. UNI runs, we run. Okay. Iowa State runs, we run. We lost the transition battle Friday night both ways. Any way you cut it. So now you go back to half court. What was our defense like half court? Well, it was pretty good with regard to how Woodbury played Niang, but it was poor not getting off the three-point shooters and not getting dribble penetration and things like that. Giving up 13 rebounds to Dustin Hogue, that kind of thing.

So it's guarding your man, rebounding the ball, and paying attention to detail. Or if we're in rotation mode, strength and weakness of the guy that you just picked up.

Q. In a couple of your losses, do you address something differently (first four minutes of the second half) at halftime from here on out?

COACH McCAFFERY: No, I'm not as worried about that. The other night we got a defensive stop and then had a good scoring opportunity on our first offensive possession. Then on transition defense, Niang gets the three, then we had turnovers, okay. Now White's not a big turnover guy. He had two of them.

It was disappointing that on top of that Uthoff and Gabe both made bad ones. The only thing I would have said there is those turnovers, every one of them led to a lay-up. You've got to foul somebody outside, and that's the only thing I addressed. I said, guys, we can't turn it over to get the lay-up. You foul a guy 60 feet from the basket, and take the ball on the side, you get your defense set. They're not in the bonus. Nobody's in foul trouble. If you realize you're the one man, they're on the 4-on-1, you've got to foul. Good, clean foul and then give them the ball on the side. You've got to understand that. We didn't understand that.

Q. Would you like to see Jarrod operate more towards the basket? Is he settling too much, do you think, for the turnaround jumper?

COACH McCAFFERY: The thing you don't want to do with him is say, okay, you've got to do that, because he'll do that. He's that kind of guy. Then you say, well, you weren't successful the other night with that in-between step-back jumper that he likes. He made one, he missed a bunch.

So you've just got to be really careful with him because if he thinks that you're doubting him, he'll stop shooting the ball, and you want him to have -- he's one of my green-light guys. So post-up, shoot off a curl, shoot a three in transition, whatever and don't really think about it.

Now the reality is having played the game myself, it's kind of like if you're missing, you kind of then just move it on. So that's the fine line there. Okay, what do you do now? I've got a scorer who is missing. Do you shut him down and just tell him to be a passer and rebounder and post-up guy? Maybe. I mean, you could. But he's never going to get out of it if you shut him down. I kind of want him thinking in a more aggressive mode, I guess I would say.

Q. You have two of your best shooters kind of with that. Josh just can't seem to get out of a funk. You've talked before about you've got to have amnesia and don't worry about your shot. But mentally they're doubting themselves and you can tell a little bit. How do you get them out of that other than just give them some confidence?

COACH McCAFFERY: Josh is different than Jarrod, I think in that sense. Josh has never been -- you saw him in high school, he was never that guy who just hunted shots. He's a good shooter; always was. But he would turn down shots, and he would pass the ball to open people and he defends. He's just not a guy that you would refer to as a pig. He never was. He had the ability to be, especially in high school, if he wanted to be. But even then, if you went and watched him play. So I don't know if he's ever going to get out of that mode. He'll shoot it, he'll turn it down. There are times you say, you would have been better off shooting it than throwing it there to that guy in that situation. In his mind, that guy was open, so I threw him the ball. He'll always be that guy, and

you can't do anything but respect him for that.

There are times you say, "Go hunt some shots. Go get us buckets." And he's done that. You remember the Wisconsin game last year here, he went and got us buckets. So it is a fine line, okay, let him be who he is or try to make him more aggressive and give him a more aggressive mindset. I keep going back to what you said, I want him to play with supreme confidence. I tell him I have supreme confidence in him. He's got the green light to shoot the ball.

I think by and large his shot selection has been good. You see some guys start to press and start taking bad shots, and it's only going to get worse. For him he needs to see it go in a few times. He did see a few go in the other night, so maybe that will help him.

Q. Do you ever think of putting (Josh) in the starting lineup to get him going and get him some confidence?

COACH McCAFFERY: We thought about that all year long. At the start of the season, because we have started him. He's one of those guys that seems to me by now, I think I know him well enough, he's equally good one way or the other. That would be something you might consider, but I haven't considered that yet.

Q. It's got to be a little bit agonizing as a coach and what you go through. You see guys getting open shots and they're hitting 22%. As a coach, you're getting the open shot, so how do you feel?

COACH McCAFFERY: I feel bad for them. I've got good players that are good shooters. They're working the ball. They're sharing the ball. They're getting open, but it's not going in. So the only thing I can say then is very much like the Carolina game, "If it's not going in, you better get back and guard somebody. You can still win." To me, I thought that game was a big step for us, but we didn't do that against Iowa State, you know?

Yeah, we had some goofy turnovers like we were talking about a minute ago, and they were leading to lay-ups and things like that. You've just got to learn from that and don't let that happen again.

We apologize, but the question about Brady Ellingson was cut off and did not get recorded... basically coach said he's improving and looking more like himself every day.