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An interview with:

COACH McCAFFERY

Q. Can you talk about Gabe's development from the first time you saw him and started recruiting him and how he's really impacted the game?

COACH McCAFFERY: The thing that is so gratifying to me is you look at a guy who has incredible work ethic, desire, desire to be coached. He just wants to get better, appreciates everything you do for him; arguably the most humble person I've ever coached, and just keeps trying to get better. I'm not surprised. When we first saw him, he played as well as any player that ever played in a workout that I ever attended. But there's a big difference between playing in an open gym and a Big Ten game. It doesn't always translate. We knew it would take a little more time with him due to his background. He only played a few years.

But as I've said before, I don't typically do projects. I'm not a big -- let's sign him, he's a project. I didn't view him as a project, I didn't look at it that way. So I thought he could be a good player. He was a really good player for us last year. He's better this year. His freshman year he was up and down. But he's still not where he's going to end up though either. He's going to be better next year.

Q. (Question about Olaseni)

COACH McCAFFERY: He's a perfect fit for this offense, and I think he was analytical enough going through the process to figure out that he would be a fit here. As he went through it and said, okay, once we started recruiting him, he started watching us on TV and really analyzed it and said that's where I belong. Then he came up here and loved it.

Q. This exactly the type of offense you wanted to run when you came in here? You talked about wanting to run and get up and down the court. With ten deep and the guys you have, is this exactly what you envisioned?

COACH McCAFFERY: It is. I would say this. I thought we would press more and we are. As I said to you before, it's not a function of I don't believe in my guys. I think it's the talent that's in this league and the number of quality ball handling each team has. You have to be really careful how much you extend the floor. We do it. We do it more in some games than others, obviously, based on whether you're ahead or behind. We do a little more three-quarter than we may have thought or I may have thought. Doing a little more trapping, rotating, that kind of thing. Our defense has been very good this year, so probably keep doing it like that.

Q. Do you teach toughness are or do you have to recruit toughness or is it a combination of both?

COACH McCAFFERY: I think it's a combination of a lot of things. You have to start with recruiting toughness. Toughness doesn't mean a guy's going to square off and fight. It's controlling your emotions at crunch time, and really competing in a way that enables you to be successful. It can manifest itself in a lot of ways. You look at the game film, the offensive rebound and the jump shot by Josh that is a game winning play right there, and that is something that overtime he's figured out how he can impact the game that way.

First, he's got to be on the floor at crunch time. Now he's got to figure out what can I do? The fact that he went and got it because he had to go out of his area, and then had he to go dribble it out and don't shoot it, and make them foul us again and use as much clock as possible.

So, as far as toughness is concerned, I think a lot of it has to do with experience. Just being through the wars, you're going to be a little tougher in terms of your decision making. You're going to be physically stronger as you get older.

You get a guy like Melsahn where his body was his freshman year, where it is now. Marble, same thing. Those guys were tough kids when they got here, but they were still 17 years old, and now they've gotten here and played so many games in this league, they're completely different and better capable of being successful late game.

Q. Was there anything about last Saturday's game that stood out to you as something you didn't see from your team before?

COACH McCAFFERY: I don't think so. I think I would have expected them to respond that way. We were not sharp with the ball. We got that 21-point lead, and you look at the next four minutes, and we weren't sharp. That was disappointing. Those are the kind of things that happen on the road. Illinois has a very experienced starting five, older group, they didn't panic. Some of their young guys hit shots later in the game -- a couple foul calls, couple and-ones for them, that type of thing, but we never panicked to the point where we still were in reach. Even with 8-and-a-half minutes to go, we were still down 5, and there was no panic in the huddle. There was a lot of confidence knowing that we would make a run, and we did.

Q. When you play a team for the second time in Big Ten play, how much do you rely on the previous game plan?

COACH McCAFFERY: It is a lot of that. I think it's a function of how quickly do we play them again. It's a lot of time and what changes have they made personnel-wise, whatever. If it's the same starting five, and we played them just a week ago or two weeks ago, we'll do a lot of the same things and see some of the adjustments made by both coaches throughout the game maybe changing defenses or what they ran against that may or may not have worked, both man or zone, who was guarding who and those kinds of things. I think they're always tweaking it.

But (Matta's) got the same starting five for the most part. He could switch Scott and Thompson. He's done that. Either way, we look at the starters Scott and Thompson, they've had the same starting lineup every game, so there is only

going to be a certain amount of change that you're going to see.

Q. With two of the better teams in the league coming in this week, how important is it in the context of wanting to win a Big Ten title to take care of business this week?

COACH McCAFFERY: No different than any other game on our schedule. Obviously, we have tremendous respect for Thad Matta and Ohio State. Saturday is Saturday, we play here, that's a whole other topic. But it wouldn't matter if we were playing Ohio State or any other team in this league. The evidence is there to look at it.

So what we have to do is play well. We have to have a good, solid game plan. We have to execute the game plan. We've got to make adjustments as the game goes on. We have to rebound, and we've got to make sure that their best players don't get away from us. Against them, you can't turn the ball over. If you turn the ball over, it's a light on for them. You can't take crazy shots. You can't get caught up in the moment.

We are aware we'll be home, and it will be a great crowd, and we appreciate it. Obviously, last Tuesday's crowd was awesome and we hope we'll have more of that tomorrow night.

Q. By the time this week's over, you'll be playing three of the previous four games all on ESPN. You've been ranked a good share of the year and had a lot of national publicity. Give me some perspective on how that helps recruiting and getting your brand out there?

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, you're talking to the guys on the phone and they're watching the games. It's right there. It's in the conversation. They see some; they don't see some. Not everybody gets BTN. Certainly some people in the Midwest, but they may or may not find you, depending on where it is.

ESPN, they know where that is; they watch it. They watch it Tuesday nights, so a lot of guys we're talking to are pretty much watching all of our games, and both of them are so that's the cycle.

Q. When you first got here, you had to change everything about the team. From an offensive perspective, you had to them change their physiques --

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, Eric May was

234. There is no way he can be 234 and play for me as a small forward. And ultimately he was a really effective two guard, and then in high school, he was a four guard. And Matt Gaines was 228, he was playing the four spot for Todd, and he was going to be my starting two guard for two years, you have to get down between 208 and 212. I mean, that's what Michael Jordan weighed, and they're the same height so that's what you should weigh. So that's what they did.

It probably helped that their strength coach at that time had them doing some running, but a lot more had to do with diet.

Q. With that, and teaching your offense, which is so much faster paced, what were some of the principles that you tried to imply to them right away to understand what they want especially when there was an offensive rebound?

COACH McCAFFERY: The interesting thing was we had a lot of things going on at the time. The desire is to get them all on the floor so you can work them out. School is still in session so we can get the guys together and work.

But we had three guys who were -- and they weren't there, one of our guys was injured, so he wasn't there, and we're trying to figure out who we had in terms of recruits. So the first workout I went to we had three guys there, so I wasn't able to do what you just said and kind of get them all together and institute the philosophy. We talked about it, and we did it on a smaller scale with who we had there.

I do remember one practice where we finally had more guys, and like I said, I'm not a big believer of getting in line and running suicides, and getting up at 6 a.m. to run. We're going to run with a purpose. We're going to be running in lanes, out-letting the ball, pushing the ball, and run this lane, and run this lane and open up your shoulders and be able to make a play from there. Then you have to run back and guard somebody, get up the line and be in the passing lane and things of that nature.

That was the hardest thing about the first year because we didn't have a lot of depth. If you want to run, you've got to run back and defend, you've got to run motion games and screen and cut, and go down screen and pop out first, screen and pass and cut through, that takes tremendous conditioning. So we had to be careful there; because as the season wore on, some guys were pretty tired.

You look at the minutes in that game, Jarryd Cole, Melsahn Basabe, they had to be careful getting them to the wire if they had anything left in the tank. But it was a mindset that we tried to establish. Then the beautiful thing was they bought in and didn't fight me on it. They were all in. They wanted to play faster, even a guy like Eric May, who completely changed his body and his game. And to watch him perform the way he did last year was one of the most enjoyable experiences in my coaching career. I mean, if you had told me he was going to be a starting two of mine in the championship game, there was absolutely no way. Like he was, and he wanted to be good. He was smart, he was tough and he studied the game. He always played football and other sports, and now he's just moving and figuring it out.

Q. You have several forwards who can handle the ball. What is your primary instruction whether it's Melsahn or Jarrod or Aaron?

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, Melsahn is a little bit less. I love him, but don't dribble too much. But you're right, he's a lot better than he was. But Uthoff, Aaron White, Zach, get it and go. You're the middle man. You're the point guard. The guards can fill in the lanes. Basabe, Woodbury, Gabe, while I trust those guys handling the ball, and obviously we have them in the back court a lot against pressure, so I trust them to make a couple dribbles, throw over the top and recognize the double team, get rid of the ball. I never want them panicking in that situation. But the other guys I treat them like guards.

Q. And with Marble the way he can pull up and then Gesell with his flat out speed, how essential are they in running the fast break?

COACH McCAFFERY: Incredibly essential, because they're all going to end up in different locations. So (No Microphone) Devyn might be the one, White might be the one, he's on the right wing, he's on the left wing. Devyn can run down the floor and post-up if he wants to. Zach can run the wing man. It doesn't matter. Now, obviously, the more you can run that, the better capable you are of running and running effectively...

Q. Are you always tinkering trying to get a little faster, or is there a point where it's just the speed you like your team to play?

COACH McCAFFERY: I would say it's more that we're constantly trying to make sure that we're doing that and not slowing down because teams are doing things to stop our break. They're trying to get you to stop running and they'll jam the outlet, they'll press, they'll get in the passing lanes on the wing, and they'll draw a three, they might draw a four -- those kinds of things. It's just a constant reminder that we're still going. We're still going. We're still pushing down the floor. If we have to outlet it to the two of the three, then let's go.

Q. What would make you want to press more? Talking about the talent level in the Big Ten, would you need more athleticism, or have you given up on that notion or are you still going to try?

COACH McCAFFERY: I don't think you ever give up on the notion. But we're pretty confident with where we are. You look around the league and you see who is bringing the ball down, whether it's Craft or Frazier and guys like that, Appling, you name it. You've got to be careful pressing those guys. If you can, and at the right time you can, if you come up on them and give them 94 feet, it's a lot harder to cover 94 feet with those guys than it is if you give them 20.

Q. You talked the other day about how you went to that zone and you thought you got soft defensively --

COACH McCAFFERY: That's part of it. Actually, as I reviewed it, there were other things that broke down prior to that. Then we went to the zone. I thought we stood a little bit and we didn't contain penetration. Sometimes you go to the zone and guys are just trying to hang out and hope. But the teams still screen and still drive and still overload zone, so it doesn't really change much in terms of how you effect whether you're in man or zone. Sometimes the defense just stares at the ball.

When we're playing a good zone, we have a feel for cutters whether it's behind you or in front of you. You play the high post, you play the baseline, you can contest shots.

Q. How hard was it to re-recruit Marble? I'm sure he had plenty of interest when Todd left.

COACH McCAFFERY: He probably should have had more interest, as I look back on it. He was kind of one of those late bloomers. He was still young. He really should have been a freshman. He should have been a high school senior when he was a freshman, I should say. So the teams that were coming after him were not at the level that he saw himself. So that was a benefit to us as long as we could develop a relationship with him, which is important. It's important for me to recognize that. But it's also important for him in terms of developing comfortability and coming to a place that he was obviously familiar with.

He had to feel like some good things were going to happen for him when he got here, so there was a lot of discussion there. But, again, he's a really good person, and he's reasonable and he's thoughtful. He thought it through. He wavered a little bit. We've talked about that before. I understand that. I didn't get angry at him. I didn't wonder. Kids are going to waiver in those situations. They want to be sure.

You know, you can transfer, but you only get one crack at this thing. In five years, you play four, and you really don't want to go through that unless you really have to, and it worked out well for him.

Q. When you saw him first on video when he came to campus and you looked at recruits, were your initial thoughts he's young, but year three he could be really good and turn out to be the way he has?

COACH McCAFFERY: I didn't look at it like that. I looked at it that we need him now. Looking at my team, watching film, and the team that played the year before and how I want to play, he's a guy that's going to be in the mix right away.

What I didn't see was his ability to play point guard the way he has. It wasn't like I didn't think he could. It was I didn't look at him that way. I mean, he's 6'6", and averaged 28 points in high school. He was going to be finishing on the break. The beauty is in his versatility. Posting him, playing the three, giving him the ball and he clears, set ball screens for him and use his space.

He just has a great feel for how to play. A lot of scorers do when you play them at the point, they can't get rid of the ball and it kills your break.

He throws it ahead, throws the lob pass, you can tell he's played a lot of basketball.

Q. Talk about LaQuinton Ross' game...

COACH McCAFFERY: He's a terrific jump shooter. He's got a versatile game. He's got enough size to post up. He's got a little in-between game, the shot-fake driving, you know, he's able to shoot the ball at crunch time. He makes his free throws. He gets to the free-throw line. He's just one of the many guys in our league that is really talented offensively and you've got to pay attention to him.

Q. Last time you played Ohio State, Jarrod came out and played really aggressive for you. Is that something you tried to reemphasize with him going into tomorrow?

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, we showed him clips of the things he did and the mistakes he made and just trying to help him get better. This is a good game for him. I thought he did a lot of good things on Saturday, and I think he'll play well tomorrow.

Q. When you do those individual tapes you're speaking of, is that a way to prepare for the next game or is it equal to skill development for the future?

COACH McCAFFERY: It's both. Wherever you break a game down, you're really more than anything else trying to help that guy get better. You show them the clips from the time he played before, it's a little more, all right, these are the things that they were doing to you. These are the things that you can do to them. You can't guarantee that everything will be the same, but it's the same personnel, so let's take a look at this film.

Q. As a team you watch the tape of the previous game?

COACH McCAFFERY: Not the whole game, no. We break everything down. That would take forever. We have editing equipment and all kinds of stuff.

Q. So it's like offenses, sequences, defense, rebounding?

COACH McCAFFERY: A little bit of all of that. Like I said, it's the teaching points that you want to make. Whether it's like you say, offense, defense, transition, zone, man, off the free-throw line, how they ground the bounce plays, the things you need to know and remember.

I remember what Ohio State does on bounce plays, but we've played a bunch of games and they may have forgotten. So we show them this is what we ran against them...

Q. A guy like Aaron Craft is always surrounding the ball and showing effort; is it hard to scout a guy like that?

COACH McCAFFERY: No, I think it's easier. Because as you just said, you know where he's going to be. There is no confusion there. He'll be after the ball, and he's good at it.

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