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An interview with:



THE MODERATOR: We'll open up the floor for questions for our student-athletes.

Q. This question is for Dev. When you look at what McRae's done on video, what do you see and how does he compare to yourself and are you going to be the one that looks like you're going to have to defend him quite a bit?

ROY DEVYN MARBLE: Jordan McRae is a good guard. I think our games resemble each other a little bit. He's asked to carry a lot of the scoring load for that team, and, yes, I will be guarding him.

Q. Devyn, is it interesting to you that you're playing a Tennessee team that you very nearly could have faced in the Battle for Atlantis, and does it help or hurt? What are the benefits of playing a team that you guys probably scouted and got a chance to see, play in person earlier this season?

ROY DEVYN MARBLE: I don't know if it's any benefits or advantages or anything like that, but it is a team that we were prepared to have to face, like you said, in Atlantis. And the coaches have done a good job in keeping us focused and concentrating, making sure we have the right game going into it.

Q. Both Zach and Melsahn, it's been four years for you guys to get to this point.

Does tomorrow's game and the preparation for tomorrow's game feel any different than any other game in your career?

ZACH MCCABE: You know, obviously it's a big opportunity being in the NCAA Tournament and an opportunity to play, and I think we just have to focus like any other game, just take it like we've been doing in our routine, every game each year and stuff like that.

So we just have to be prepared and focused and be ready for a great team in Tennessee.

MELSAHN BASABE: To piggyback what Zach said, I give credit to Coach McCaffery and the coaching staff. We're prepared at an elite level for each game whether it's a preseason scrimmage or non-conference, or any game we treat as a very important game.

So obviously the stage is a big stage, and this is elimination setting, but as far as our preparation, you know, the coaches have built the culture of us always being diligent and focusing no matter who you play.

Q. All three, and I'll start with Melsahn on this one, defense has obviously been an issue down the stretch in some of these losses, but also seemed to be kind of lack of communication on defense, not really the high tides or whatever that were there earlier in the season. Is that just a perception, or is there some truth to that, that maybe there's not either as much intensity on defense and the chemistry isn't as strong as maybe it was before February, before you played Wisconsin?

MELSAHN BASABE: It's not perception, because obviously the numbers show that we haven't been defending to our capability. Like you said, we were a really good defensive team. The last two years we've been one of the good defensive teams in the country. I'm going to say as a senior I'm going to start off by letting my voice be heard. I know Devyn and Zach will do the same thing and let it carry out throughout the team.

We're just going to play defense the way we're capable of playing.

ZACH MCCABE: It's lack of focus, I think. Not doing what we need to do. And, I mean, it's kind of just killed us the last couple of games. We just gotta get back to the basketball we were playing, playing together as one unit, and gotta get that back.

ROY DEVYN MARBLE: I think we've been able to make some adjustments. We're communicating better as far as practice, leading up to this point. I think you'll see a higher energy level. If this doesn't excite you and energize you as a player, then I don't know what will.

Q. All three of you, this is the first NCAA Tournament Iowa has played in since '06. Have any former Iowa players reached out to any you, sort of giving you advice or offering their hand at all going into this game?

ROY DEVYN MARBLE: I've talked to Matt recently. He reached out to me. I've also stayed in constant communication with guys like Archie and E. May and Jarryd Cole. So they're all supporting us, and we appreciate it and they've given me different words of encouragement that I've definitely taken into consideration.

ZACH MCCABE: Yeah, same pretty much. I've been reached out by Matt Gatens and Jarryd Cole and Eric. And (indiscernible) actually texted me and just told me to play, just get our team ready to go, play with energy, stuff like that, and leave no regrets out on the floor.

MELSAHN BASABE: I have spoken to Devon Archie as well as Jarryd Cole, but I always speak to them. They're like my big brothers. And then actually Dev's dad, even though he was playing in the '80s, he's been a mentor person I talk to a lot, so that's a former player that I was speaking to just about the stage and how it works.

Q. Dev, your coach is in a tough spot with his personal situation. Do you see that as being any kind of rallying cry for this team, or are you just going to be there and support him behind closed doors, let it go at that?

ROY DEVYN MARBLE: You said something about rattling?

Q. He's in a tough spot personally with Patrick. Is it a rallying point, not rattle, rally behind him?

ROY DEVYN MARBLE: Yeah, of course. Coach McCaffery is our guy. We love him. We're all like family. Pat is a guy that basically at practice with us every day. He's like our little brother.

So I think as a unit we will rally behind it, and hopefully we everything goes well for them. They're all in our prayers.

So I know, like you said, he's in a tough spot, so we're just trying to make this as simple and easy for him as possible.

Q. This one's for Zach and Mel. Tennessee has a pretty good inside player in Jarnell Stokes. What have you seen of him on video and what's your challenge going up against him?

THE MODERATOR: Zach first and then Mel.

ZACH MCCABE: Obviously a big body. Guys we haven't seen in our league. They're very good offensive rebounders, and just on the glass constantly. So it's something we haven't seen.

But I think we're prepared. We know what we need to do. They're great players, and they bring a lot of energy to the game. So we just gotta match that and bring even more than we have in the past. So it's just a mindset game and we just gotta be aggressive with that.

MELSAHN BASABE: Obviously Jarnell is a very talented player. But like I said, the Big Ten has been pretty good my four years here, so I've seen everything from Sullinger to Draymond Green and Adreian Payne and Brandon Dawson and all those guys. So I'm used to competing against high-level big men. And he presents his own challenges, but I think as long as you play them correctly and bring the proper intensity and you've got to realize when that shot goes up, it's going to be a war for the rebound, I think we're able to get it done.

We just gotta have confidence in our own experience, our own ability while respecting our opponent as well.

Q. Zach, not to harp on the Battle for Atlantis, but you guys played well in that tournament. How would you compare how you played at that point to these last few games you've been in? Do you think you can get back to that point in another tournament setting?

ZACH MCCABE: Yeah, I mean, definitely it's a different type of environment there and

tournament setting, and I usually play my best in tournament settings.

So just gotta stay confident, believe in my shots, stuff like that, just getting in a rhythm and just play the best I can.

Now, that tournament was a great tournament for me, and I hope I can continue to play like that in the NCAA Tournament.

Q. Zach, you said you play your best in tournament setting. Is there something different about sort of that format, for all three of you, that makes it easier to elevate your play?

ZACH MCCABE: Just knowing it could be your last game. Every game after that, there's nothing to prepare for after that if you lose. So just brings you full circle what we need to do to win.

And it's a big opportunity for us in the NCAA Tournament. And we look to going on a run and stay aggressive and bring energy like we have at the end of the season.

Q. This one is for any of you three, doesn't matter which one who wants to address it, but after halftime the last four games you guys have given up sizable runs. Is there anything, any common element in the locker room at halftime that I guess -- kind of a lack of intensity right off the bat? Or what is the common element as far as giving up those runs right out of halftime?

MELSAHN BASABE: It relates to us getting away from who we are in the first half of those games. I can't remember the exact numbers, but we was doing what the coaches had told what we had to do and we were playing great team defense, playing up to our capabilities.

I think when we start giving up runs and stuff, we start going away from what has made us successful and what we're capable of.

So that sample of what you just talked about, those spurts just relate to the whole body of the stretch, which is not that we're not capable, where we're getting away from the things that make us successful.

So I think we need to whenever when we go into halftime just -- the coaches send their message, repeat what got you here, in the situation when we are up, and if we're down, remember, okay, what gets us out of the hole and what's going to help us win this game. I think that's it.

THE MODERATOR: Any other questions for our student-athletes? All right, Melsahn, Devyn, and Zach, good luck tomorrow night.

We're now being joined by Fran McCaffery, the head coach of the Iowa Hawkeyes.

Coach, an opening statement and then we'll open up the floor for questions for you.

COACH MCCAFFERY: This has been an incredible journey for our team and we're just thrilled to be here. I've been here before playing in the NCAA Tournament. Incredible venue here at Dayton. And I'm just so excited for our guys to have this opportunity to play in the tournament.

We've prepared well. I like our professionalism in terms of how we approach getting ready for this game. And that's about it.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach?

Q. Fran, in your experience as a coach and especially tournament time, what's your take on the importance people place on point guard play?

COACH MCCAFFERY: I don't know that I would look at it any differently in terms of this time of the year or any other time of the year. I view point guard play as incredibly important. You look at this game, in particular, and you say, well, it might be rebounding, because they're so good in that area.

It could be transition. They run, we run. It could be any number of things. But I think when it's all said and done, the guy that's got the ball most of the time and his ability to make decisions is going to be critical in terms of who wins and loses the game.

Q. Coach, watching the bracket, pops up you play Tennessee, is there a benefit, anything good about playing a team that you got a chance to probably scout and see over at the Battle for Atlantis tournament earlier --

COACH MCCAFFERY: I don't think there's any benefit because both of us thought there was a real good chance we were going to play each other. If we both won or we both lost, we were going to play each other in the second round. So I'm sure they have a scouting report on us. We have a scouting report on them.

But that was so long ago. I remember watching them and watching them recently and saying, you know, how impressed I was with how

they've continued to improve, how their team came together. At that time of the year you're sort of not sure, where are we going to end up. Both teams obviously came into the season with great expectation. We both have experience. And typically with experience you have expectation. And fortunately we're both here.

Q. Fran, your three seniors just said the guys you mentioned Sunday, Cole, May, Gatens, those guys, had reached out to them, wishing the best of luck. Is that a sign leadership doesn't end when your career's over maybe and how much those guys want it for these guys?

COACH MCCAFFERY: I do, but I also think it speaks to the character of those guys and how close they are that they've remained in touch with each other.

I think Jarryd Cole in particular really took Melsahn and Zach under his wing and tried to show them how to do it. And so did Matt and Eric with regard to Dev, and you could see it's been reflected in their play and their development.

And I think when you have -- when you have great leadership, you don't have other issues. If you have issues, you don't get here.

And so I'm thankful to the leadership that came before and hope that those guys feel very much a part of the fact that we're here.

Q. Fran, this game features two explosive 2 guards in Marble and McRae. What kind of challenges does McRae present and is Dev going to -- when you're in man, is he going to largely draw that responsibility on defense?

COACH MCCAFFERY: There will be a lot of times he does; there will be some times when he won't.

McRae has really been impressive to me. Watched him live, of course, but when he's making 3s, his first step is so quick. He seems to always have his defender on the side of him.

If that's the case, then he can create. The thing about him, he's a scorer. But he also gives it up easy. And I think that's what makes him special. He also will run you down and block shots. He has the ability to guard and take advantage of his incredible length.

He's explosive, but I think his length presents issues at both ends of the floor that make him a guy that I think will ultimately end up in the NBA.

Q. Coach, were you able to work on a situation where you're able to fly back to Iowa City, spend some time with your family and make it back to the game tomorrow?

COACH MCCAFFERY: I was. I'm going to leave tonight about 8:30. So we'll obviously -- we got here yesterday. We had a meeting, we practiced before we left, so actually had two meetings, a meeting this morning, and obviously we'll have practice today. We'll have another meeting and then I'll take off. And so we'll put everything to bed for today.

Tomorrow, the other coaches will handle the morning meeting and the shootaround. Hopefully I'll be back before the last meeting we have which is typically right before pregame meal or right after pregame meal and be ready to coach the game, assuming all goes well.

Q. Walking off to the plate, I heard you guys laughing behind the scene here. I guess, you know, with the way these last few games have gone for you all, have you noticed kind of a -- has there been almost a relief of pressure? Are they more carefree than they were when the regular season was ended the way it did, or is this kind of like a refresh button for you guys?

COACH MCCAFFERY: I hope so. I really do. I think there was so much emphasis put on this team's ability to get here, to get into the NCAA Tournament in terms of progression. We all look at progression. 18 wins two years ago, NIT bid. Second round departure, then 25 wins, NIT championship game. The next step is you've gotta go to the tournament.

I think without question that was on their minds every time we took the floor. And I think it was helpful at times. Maybe it wasn't as helpful at times. But like you said, once you're here, you know then, okay, we all have an equal opportunity to win a National Championship. And it starts with the first game. And anybody that you play against is going to be really good. And we recognize that and we'll prepare and be ready.

Q. Fran, have you been concerned at all about the communication issues on the defensive end, or sometimes does it seem like guys are talking to each other, a little out of sorts? Have they been ironed out over the last few days?

COACH MCCAFFERY: I don't think that's been the case. I think we've talked quite a bit. Sometimes the recognition isn't exactly what you want. But that's true for every game.

We've had some unique sets of circumstances that happen in games recently that, quite honestly, defy the law of averages. We typically will go after the other team's top guys and try to lock into them, and in a lot of cases it's been other people, which is a credit to the opposition that have made shots against us.

That said, we have to react differently. I don't disagree with that point. I think you're right, and we have addressed a lot of those areas. And I think our practices have been incredibly spirited and intense and focused, and we have already shown that we're capable of playing really good defense. It just hasn't happened in recent weeks.

Q. Is it hard for you not to remember the Siena-Ohio State game when you walk into this building?

COACH MCCAFFERY: It was not hard at all. We're in the locker room next to the locker room that we celebrated in. I remember walking off the floor like it was yesterday. And Coach Francis and I were just talking about it five minutes ago. Great feeling, incredible sense of accomplishment, and hope to enjoy similar experience.

THE MODERATOR: Any further questions for Coach? Fran, thank you for your time.

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