

# University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

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## Fran McCaffery Men's Basketball



**Q. Your team has shown a lot of cohesiveness all season pretty much, but at the very beginning, it seemed to be maybe a little bit of a disconnect between your older players and some of your newer ones. How have you been able to bridge that gap and how have they been able to bridge that gap where you can have that?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think it was a combination of things. I think first of all, it took them a little while to kind of figure things out, which it usually does. As they started figuring it out, they got better. I think the upperclassmen did a pretty good job mentoring them. Maybe not so much in the very beginning, but as we got closer to playing games, they recognized there's only so much those five guys can do. They need these other guys to step up, and they've been very helpful there in terms of leadership, communication, encouragement. There was a stretch there where I was really tough on those guys because I knew we weren't going to make the deadline, which was the beginning of the season. They weren't ready to contribute right off the bat. We saw that in the Augustana game, which is why we played that game, which ended up, I think, being something that benefitted our team because those guys were experienced and they played that way.

So it was an indication to our players how to get ready, how to prepare, how to improve, how to overcome a setback, because a young guy, you're not going to play great every second of every game, but you have to be somewhat consistent and understand the defensive concepts of a game plan, understand the complexity of our offense and how everything fits, and you know, it came to fruition probably as well as it has all year on Sunday when we had that front line on the floor of Dom, Nicholas and Ahmad Wagner when we pulled away, and I think that's what we all hoped would happen.

**Q. I think it appeared to me they had to learn more patience, some of your seniors, because -- Gabe Olaseni wasn't coming off the bench?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: There's no question. A couple of years ago it seemed like we had two of everything, and even last year we had great depth, and this year we still

do, but it's different. It's young guys trying to figure it out. Dom, of course, being the most important one, because he's one guy who did play a lot last year. Brady played in a couple games. He's been solid, but we knew with those other guys, okay, which ones were going to step up. Nicholas Baer I thought would be one of those guys, and he was. I thought Ahmad would be. If you remember the first game he was my first sub. I thought Dale would be, which he was. Unfortunately he got hurt.

You've got to be able to go to your bench in this league. It's too long of a season. The teams are too good. The games are too physical, the travel. You just can't get by with five or six guys.

**Q. Your guys will probably see that Rutgers score from last night. What do you tell them about that?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: You know, that was a unique situation in my opinion. Purdue with their incredible size was not a good match-up for Rutgers. I think Rutgers is much better than they showed last night. You look at the Wake Forest game, you look at the Indiana game, I mean, that's more indicative, I think, of how Rutgers is, and we have to know and understand that.

**Q. Why is Dom Uhl shooting so well this season?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: He's really worked on it. I mean, I think he's always been a good shooter. He's always had great confidence in his three-point shooting. You look at him, and he's playing relaxed. He knows he's going to play a lot. He knows I'm going to go to him. And he knows he's going to have the opportunity to play through his mistakes. You don't always get that sometimes when you're a freshman.

He didn't make a ton of mistakes last year, but a lot of times I would take him out, not necessarily because of anything he did, but because I wanted to get White or Uthoff back in the game.

**Q. What's his best position ultimately, Dom, would you say?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, the thing about him is he's a stretch 4. That's the new term, I guess. But he's got a lot of 3 man skills and he's a mismatch nightmare for 5s. He can play some 5 now because he's added weight, and we kind of use him in all those different

ways.

**Q. He only played, I think, two minutes against Augustana. Was there a conversation that took place somewhere along the line that turned him around?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: No, and I didn't play him a lot down in Orlando, either, in a couple of those games. I had conversations with him throughout the course of the year, what I expect from him, but nothing specific. As we move forward, we just had to play him more, and he started playing better. Yeah, that time he was good.

**Q. What was the conversation like about having him play center minutes this year?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I never had one. Yeah, it was just -- I look at it like this: Everybody wants to play, so you play them where you think you need to play them, and everybody wants to be on the floor. Nobody is going to complain and say I don't want to be a 5, I don't want to be a 3, whatever. If you put them out there, they'll be thrilled. So I never really had that conversation with him.

**Q. Is Ahmad just more comfortable now? It just seems like he's --**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I think it's that, but I'm also playing him more, in his defense. There was a stretch there where -- you only play a guy a little bit here and there, it's hard to get comfortable, and that's what we struggle with all the time as coaches on the bench. We've got to get this guy ready, is he ready, and that fine line between the only way he's going to get ready is if we give him minutes, and we're hurting the team in the meantime.

Typically with him, you're not. He's going to give you effort on the glass. He's not a big mistake guy. He's not going to come out and start jacking threes. He's going to move it on and screen and run the floor and be an athletic big guy.

**Q. Christian Williams, are you in that spot with him where you're trying to get him on the floor?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, I'm really kind of disappointed in myself quite honestly that I didn't play him a little bit on Sunday at least, especially because of the way he played against Michigan State. So we'll try to rectify that moving forward.

**Q. How much did it help Dom last year having Aaron and Jarrod and people like that? Are those the people he learned from the most?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: He did. It also precluded him from getting on the floor more. But I think watching how those guys work and prepare, and that's year-round, that's not just watching a game, how they

prepare for practice, how do they study the scouting report, how do they work out in the weight room, did they work out with court agilities in the fall, so being around those guys I think was very good for him, no question.

**Q. Pete was the Big Ten Player of the Week. He keeps saying he still needs to improve on his defense. For you what does he have to improve on because obviously right now it kind of looks like he's hitting his stride.**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, he's improved in so many areas. He couldn't guard like he does now when he first got here. He didn't have the stamina that he has now. He wasn't as strong. And ultimately what you're seeing is a guy who's way more consistent at both ends of the floor. He's impacting the game at both ends of the floor, and you've heard me say this before, his game was a little sloppy. He would turn it over, he was a little lazy at times, and I'm just so proud of him and how he has figured out how to work and how to prepare and how to compete, and he's made himself an elite player.

We always knew he'd be good, but now he's an elite player, and that's what you have to do. He had great examples. He had Marble and those guys when he was a freshman, and he traveled with them overseas that summer before his freshman year. You saw flashes of brilliance his freshman year, but you also saw when he played like a freshman. The fact of the matter is he was a really good starter for us as a sophomore. Now he's a junior, he should be hitting that stride, which he is.

**Q. You've been pretty tough on Pete sometimes, gotten into him. Some guys take that, some guys don't. Why does he take that?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: He responds very well to it because he knows it's coming from a good place, he knows I love him, he knows I trust him, he knows I'm going to go back to him. Some coaches, they yell at a guy and then they bench him for the rest of the game. I never felt like that accomplished anything.

I can jump him for things that he's not doing at that particular time, but I've got to give him a chance to go back in there and rectify, which he always does.

**Q. You had four turnovers against Michigan -- a great number -- and had three against Drake. Other than taking care of the ball, where did that organically come from, that efficiency?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, it starts with we've got two point guards on the floor and three guards, but you look, I think Adam is the only one in the starting lineup, and he's almost at one to one. Everybody is a plus.

You're talking about a team that is not a mistake team, so you're coming down, you've got a chance to get a shot, got a chance for a second shot, and you've got a chance to get your defense back. Turnovers usually lead to points, immediately, and that affects the flow of the game. It affects momentum.

You've got to come down and you've got to execute, whether we're in motion or whether we're in sets, you've got to execute and you've got to get a shot up, and if you don't, it affects everything that everybody does on the floor.

**Q. You talked about being hard on this group early in the beginning of the season and stuff. Did you have any kind of team bonding issues, like Navy Seals training or anything to try to bring them together?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, we did. We brought the program in again.

**Q. Did that help do you think?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think it's terrific. You know, and the first time we brought them in, I didn't know what to expect. But it's a different kind of mentality that they're looking for with that, and it's really more mental than it ever is physical.

I always think it's great for everybody, but in particular for the younger players, to kind of see how you put it all together because what you have to do is you have to follow instruction and you have to work together and you have to communicate with one another, all the things that are absolutely critical on a basketball floor, and in their world it's about survival.

They will study our team and they will put the guys through various things, and it says a lot about the team, but also the individuals on the team.

**Q. When did that take place? Was it August?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: No, it was after that. I think it was September, wasn't it? Yeah.

**Q. In what ways have they gotten better as far as communicating? Has it been practice, just kind of working together? Did you pull your seniors aside or anything and tell them anything?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I just challenged them. I do that some. But in those situations I'll just challenge them in front of everybody and say, you need to -- it can't consistently be me that is communicating with these guys and what they need to be doing and what they're not doing. So those guys, I said, you need to hold those guys accountable, not just me, because if they're not doing what they're supposed to be doing, it's going to reflect negatively on our team.

And what you're seeing is Woodbury is really good at it. He's constantly talking to the young guys. He's really helped Ahmad tremendously, Dom, so has Uthoff, and then Mike and Sapp with all of our guards, Pete. Pete is constantly talking to our young guys. And sometimes it's so much better when it comes from them than from one of us.

**Q. With Adam in particular, he seems to be such an unselfish player, especially on offense. There was one play where he was down low, he could have went up for a shot. Instead he passed it to Uthoff, kind of gave up a good shot for a great shot. That just seems to represent the kind of player he is.**

FRAN McCAFFERY: He's always been a guy, and I've said this to you before, but he's always been a guy who likes to pass the ball. He considers himself a guy with vision and a skill, and he's a willing passer, and he understands the value of that to our team. And I think you look at our team right now and the success that we're having, that's one of the main components of it. It's our ability to share the ball. Sappy had a wide-open three the other day. He shot faked, drove, drew and kicked to Uthoff, who had a better shot, and that's team basketball. That's how you win close games. That's how you beat good teams.

**Q. Your depth obviously was key the other day, but obviously the experience is helping, and it seems to show up, last year was Wisconsin, the experience they had helped them reach their goals. In your case it's the same way. Is it kind of a throwback to some era in some respects where this is what teams used to be, where they'd kind of grow together and when they're seniors --**

FRAN McCAFFERY: And that's the only teams I've ever had, so to me it's no different. I had 27 wins with the Siena team. We had seniors. We won in the NCAA Tournament because we had been through it all, and you've got a senior point guard hits two threes to beat Ohio State. It's kind of the teams I've always had.

Like I've said before, I wouldn't mind coaching some one-and-dones, but I love being able to watch Pete and Jarrod and Woody and those guys just keep getting better and watching them figure it out and watching them compete, and then watching them help the younger guys do the same.

That's more, I think, rewarding as a coach, at least I took at it that way.

**Q. The Navy Seal thing, what was the last time you've done that?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: We've done that three times.

**Q. What prompted to sort of get back into it?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: What prompted it was I had a conversation with a good friend of mine Ed DeChellis, who at the time was a coach at Penn State, he's now the coach at Navy, and he brought them in, and he said -- because I've never been a guy to bring people in. You know, have all these people in, team-building exercises, and I always thought that stuff was a waste of time. I'll be honest with you.

And he said, this thing is unbelievable.

The first time I brought them in, I would concur. It was really interesting to watch. We had a Navy Seal and an elite sniper, and to put these guys through a ton of different things, some outside, some in the pool, and watching -- like in the beginning, you're like, well, what are they doing. Then all of a sudden it all makes sense. But what's beautiful is the kids have to figure it out. Nobody tells them. They have to figure it out on their own.

Every time they come, they do a different sort of exercise, and this one was different than the last two, but they're all incredibly valuable.

**Q. So you've done it three times at Iowa?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Three times at Iowa, yeah.

**Q. Your team is ranked below the No. 10 ranking so in the top 10, I guess, so for the first time since 2002. Obviously the focus is the next game, but have you guys stopped to reflect on how far you guys have come?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: No, no, and we won't. You know, I think -- I told you guys the last time we were ranked 10th a couple years ago, we did, and we did it because I felt a particular connection to that group, Basabe, Marble and those guys, because when they were freshmen we were picked 11th in the Big Ten, and then that same group was 10th in the country. So I paused to compliment them on that ascent and what went into making that happen.

But I think most of us would say, rankings this time of year are incredibly meaningless. And I mean that sincerely. It just doesn't mean a thing. We've got a game on Thursday, and if we win that, that'll be great. Then we have another one on Sunday. At the end of the season we'll look and say, okay, where are we, because then that will define seeding for NCAA Tournament, we're in, here's your seed, but if we don't take care of business between now and then, it won't matter.

**Q. Is it also fair to say the program is further along and it's maybe not quite as big a deal as it used to**

**be?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: No, I wouldn't say that. I would just say I'm happy that our guys are playing well enough and they're getting recognition. I think you always want your team to get recognition if your players deserve it, and I'd prefer that they get it. More and more people are talking about Jarrod Uthoff and Mike Gesell and Adam Woodbury and Peter Jok, and there's just a lot more requests for me to go on the radio and for them to do stories on the journey, things like that, and that's something that they deserved. They earned that opportunity.

And so I'm thrilled for them, and I'm thrilled for our program, for our institution. But again, you can be ranked ninth and in like six days not be ranked. Three days sometimes.