

November 12, 2014



An interview with:

COACH McCAFFERY

Q. Have you gotten any letters of intent?

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, we have two (so far).

Q. Wagner obviously has played football this fall and gotten some looks for that. What is he playing for you, and is it power forward?

COACH McCAFFERY: He's got a lot of versatility, a great motor, tremendous athlete, great character. We felt like he was a great fit for what we did need and our style of play. We went after him hard, and we're thrilled that he's coming. No question he's going to make an immediate impact. He's a terrific player.

Q. How concerned were you with the football?

COACH McCAFFERY: I wasn't concerned at all.

Q. Why?

COACH McCAFFERY: He's a man of his word. Why should I be?

Q. What about Fleming? He's an Oak Hill guy now. What do you like about him and see for him in the future?

COACH McCAFFERY: He's versatile, can put on the deck, can make plays for other people. Athletic enough to play the small forward position, scores the ball well. He's a really good player. We're excited about him.

Q. Does he remind you a little bit of Matt Gatens in some respects?

COACH McCAFFERY: Thinking back, trying to compare them, I didn't recruit Matt at that time and see him that much at that age. I hope he becomes like Matt Gatens because that's one of the toughest guys I've ever been around. I do think he has some of those qualities. I think that's a fair comparison.

Q. Overall, what do you get from this class? Do you feel like it's a large class?

COACH McCAFFERY: I can only talk about the two guys.

Q. Not specifically, but just in general, the four guys you will get?

COACH McCAFFERY: Obviously, when you go after a particular recruiting class you're looking for certain things, and we feel like we've got them.

Q. Can you hold one to the spring or would you float that into '16?

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, it could go either way on that. It depends on who is available in the spring. Especially now, there just seems to be an extraordinary amount of transfers every year, unfortunately, or fortunately, however you want to look at it. I don't see that trend changing so there might be somebody out there that we want. There are some who signed late, so we'll see.

Q. Is there something you guys can do as coaches or anything to stop the transfer issue?

COACH McCAFFERY: Doesn't seem like it. It seems like, if anything, it's going the other way. You see some uncomfortable transfer situations, and you see some -- I think most people would want an athlete to be able to play wherever they want to play within reason. Unfortunately,

sometimes there is tampering involved, and in those cases I think most people would say if there is tampering involved they shouldn't be allowed to move. But I still think we'll have kids sit out a year, and I would like to see that be across the board.

I think, if anything, if there is going to be a lot more transferring, I think the guys should have to sit out. With regard to the fifth-year transfer rule, I've said publicly many times it's the most ridiculous rule in sport and they should not be allowed to do that.

Q. Are you targeting a forward because of who you lost last year and who are you going after this year?

COACH McCAFFERY: You mean with the last one or just in general?

Q. In general.

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, I mean, obviously we lost Basabe and McCabe, and we're going to lose Olaseni and White, we need some size. So we've got, I think quality. We've got some size. We've got versatility. We'll need a little more size.

Q. Without speaking specifically about the two other kids, how important is it to get into Chicago for your recruiting? Do you think that's laying the ground work?

COACH McCAFFERY: I think more is made of that kind of stuff than should be, quite frankly. We've been into Chicago, and we've been well-received in Chicago. We've got great contacts there. You're right, Tom, it's loaded with talent across the board. It's a big city. You go into the city, you can go to the suburbs and there are players everywhere.

Does it help you that you get some guys? Well, certainly, because they're going to speak positively about their experience, and other guys may come, but there is a lot of competition in Chicago, too. Lot of people are coming into Chicago, so what you can't do is get overly consumed with going into an area. You have to address your needs that you have in recruiting. In a particular year you may be better served somewhere else. It's no reflection on Chicago. It's a matter of can we go into Chicago and get the guys we want in any given year? You can't guarantee that in any major city. I've been recruiting Philadelphia and New York Chicago, LA for years. Sometimes it works, and sometimes it

doesn't. But we're going to keep going back in there because we need to.

There are excellent coaches, excellent players. I think typically those kids want to play in the Big Ten. Some will leave, some have left. But by and large they want to play in the Big Ten, and it's important to be in there.

Q. You said some of the guys are a little banged up and you're concerned about that as far as how hard you practiced in the opener. How are they now?

COACH McCAFFERY: A lot better. Woodbury in particular is a lot better. He's had a bad bruise. Some of the busted up fingers that were a little bit problematic they're a little bit better. He had some sore feet. The only guy that is still out is Brady Ellingson.

Q. Are you going with the same starting lineup?

COACH McCAFFERY: Probably. It's not definite yet, but probably.

Q. Uthoff the other day came off the bench and he scored -- I should say came out of the break and scored 9 out of 11 and had an assist. You mentioned you wanted him to be more aggressive. Do you feel he's getting more aggressive or does he still have a ways to go?

COACH McCAFFERY: He is. The thing I like about him so far this fall is he's really been consistent rebounding the basketball and we need him to do that. With regard to being aggressive offensively, most of the time he's not as aggressive as he should be regularly. So, I mean, yesterday he had a phenomenal workout, so we're very happy with his approach mentally. I think his confidence level is good. We brought some officials in here on the weekend and scrimmaged and he didn't scrimmage well. He addressed that and came back in a big way.

I just think that's important for him. He knows he's got the green light. For whatever reason sometimes he gets a little tentative. As long as he plays aggressively, typically he puts up stats. I mean, he's going to get points and rebounds. He's not a big mistake guy, he'll block some shots for you. He's a really talented player.

Q. Coach, in your exhibition game

Peter Jok looked like a more confident player than I saw last year. Is that still progressing?

COACH McCAFFERY: Yep.

Q. I know he's in better shape. He actually had eight rebounds in that game also.

COACH McCAFFERY: And there may be times when we play he and Josh together and he's actually playing more of a three than he is a two. Kind of the same thing, two wings. But you're right. He is much better physically. His stamina's better, he's leaner, he's more aggressive, both looking for shots, but also driving the ball to the basket and being physical doing that.

Defensively he's light years ahead of where he was last year, so he can play significant minutes. He could end up being in the starting lineup at some point without question. I think you're right. I think his improvement is what we hoped it would be. Now he's got to do it in the games when the games start on Friday, but I do feel like his approach has been really good.

Q. Have you been tougher on him at all this past summer and in some of the stamina issues you've talked about?

COACH McCAFFERY: The stamina part of it is something that he has to really work on, and it's not uncommon when you have scorers. He's always been a scorer. He goes and gets buckets, and can take a possession off here and there and rest on defense a little bit. You just don't have the luxury to do that at this level because you're guarding somebody who expects to play in the NBA.

So you've got to sprint back and chase that guy around. You've got to go back and move without the ball because that guy is guarding you. It's a much more difficult situation and that's usually going to be an adjustment for him and for anybody. Last year he kind of hit a wall where he just wasn't playing well. He wasn't doing those things. He had to go one way or the other, and he went the right way and played great for us down the stretch, great for you us in the NCAA tournament. I think that propelled him into the summer with some confidence.

But unless you have an understanding of what you need to do, nothing good is going to happen. You're going to be in the same boat as you were the year before.

So for him, the only issue this fall has been he did sprain his ankle, and that set him back a little bit because, again, we're talking about

conditioning. He's working, working, working, playing great, and now he's out. He's got to miss four practices. He comes back and he plays four practices, and he tweaks it again, then he misses two practices.

He's been healthy and he's really working and is much more, I think, aggressive across the board. Attacking the rim, defensively on the glass, looking for a shot. I told him, with Marble gone, we need somebody to do that. And Clemmons is terrific, and Clemmons is doing everything we've asked him to do, but Pete's a different kind of player than that, and we need Pete to do that.

Q. What is the ceiling for him, do you think?

COACH McCAFFERY: He can be a guy that is a 15 to 20-point scorer in this league, which is really hard to do. The leaders in the league in scoring are 18, 17, 16, typically in our league because of how teams play you and because the other players are so talented. So if a coach and a team puts a game plan in to stop you, it's going to be hard to score. That's what made what Marble did so impressive last year or a guy like Petteway. Those guys are hard to guard. If Pete can be that kind of hard-to-guard player, he's got a really sweet stroke from three-point range, which gives you another dimension. So that's kind of what we're looking for him to do.

Q. Kentucky's doing this platoon system. With your depth, have you looked into any of that or thought about any of that?

COACH McCAFFERY: We did that a little bit more last year. That sounds good. It presents problems, I think, Tom, with regard to chemistry because just because you picked this group and this group sometimes some of these guys play better with some of these guys. You start making wholesale changes and you lose any momentum.

In theory, it's nice. You have fresh bodies on the floor at all times. If you put two units together, both of whom have scorers, a lot of times your second unit doesn't score the ball like your first unit. We could put two units out there that have scorers in both, and so do they. So I don't think we'll look to do that. We'll kind of sub a little bit at a time, but there will be games where maybe four or five of the guys coming off the bench are maybe more involved than the guys who started because that's the kind of team we have.

Q. Coach, the Hampton team took Penn State down to the wire. They've got four starters back, a transfer from Tennessee. It's a pretty salty group.

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, they won 18 games and they're expected to win over 20 this year. They can certainly contend for the MEAC championship. Very quick, very aggressive, very experienced, like you said. They've got starters back. They've got double-figure scorers back. They've got transfers. They're going to come after us with some pressure, a very physical team defensively. When they get going, they're quick off the dribble, and they make plays and put it up and go back and get it.

You're right. This is a difficult -- when you're playing a team that is going to be a 20-win team that expects to win their league, that's a different kind of opener than a lot of people are going to play. But when we agreed to play in this tournament two-and-a-half years ago is when I think we agreed to do it, we kind of knew, all right, the field is really good that ends up in New York. But the rest of the teams are also going to be good. North Dakota State same thing.

So the first two games, North Dakota State of course last year won well over 20 games. Went to the NCAA tournament. They lost a few guys, but they got some people back too. They're a program, just like Hampton, that expects to win. So you have a group of guys that are coming in that are not going to be intimidated by the atmosphere. They're going to come in expecting to play well and expecting to have a really good shot to win.

Q. I know you don't want to look past Friday night, but going back to the Garden next week has got to be exciting?

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, I think anytime you have a chance to play in Madison Square Garden it's a great opportunity for our program, for our fans, especially for our fans from that part of the country. We saw that two years ago. We were in the Final Four of the NIT and they showed up in force. It was a lot of black and gold in the Garden. Obviously we're going to be going back there more now, back east. I think it's important that we do that.

Q. With Clemmons last year he would have a couple of good plays and then a turnover on the next possession. Have you

noticed any better consistency with him and his game? Is that part of the reason why you're expecting more out of him here starting?

COACH McCAFFERY: I think one of the things that helps in that particular situation was he was more consistent when he was a freshman. You'd have a little bit more reservation if that was his freshman year. So can he get back to doing what he did and ultimately play like a junior? I mean, you start with physically he's much better. He's in great shape. He's kind of a tweener. He handles the ball well. He can run your offense, he can play the two. He can guard a bigger guard. He can guard a smaller guard. He gives you a level of toughness defensively, and he gives you some savvy that I think our team needs. So that's important.

But you're right. I think the way he played in the exhibition game, he played well and he was effective in a lot of different areas, and I think that's going to be critical for him. He'll steal the ball. He'll drive the ball. He'll make plays for his teammates. He'll hit some shots and his mistakes need to be down because ultimately what hurt his playing time last year was mistakes. No question about it. So he'll be right in the middle of it, and he should be fine. I feel really good about him.

Q. Aaron White is so effective running lanes and rebounds. You don't feel you need to call plays on him? He's 6-for-7 in the exhibition and led the league in FG percentage last year?

COACH McCAFFERY: I think you could kind of approach it that way. That is kind of always how he scored. I still say you need to run some stuff for him especially since he's such a good foul shooter. So we'll set him up a little bit.

But you're right. He typically affects the game in a variety of different ways, and in the end you say, boy, he's really good. He's going to rebound. He's going to run the floor. He's going to offensive rebound. He's going to get a lot of loose stuff around the basket. Always seems to be in the right place. He's one of those few players that you never have to tell him where to go and where to be. He's already there. That's a tremendous feel that he has for playing this game. I just think he's going to have a really good senior year.

Q. Second part of that with Uthoff at 6'9", I would think that's going to make Aaron

more effective because he kind of looks behind the defense?

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, you can invert, post-up Aaron and play Jarrod on the perimeter. You could flip it. But I think his game, which is not always the case for a 6'9" player, it's speed, it's athleticism. It's being all over the place, flying at the glass, flying down the floor, moving without the ball, being unselfish, making a play for somebody else. But he's also just so smart out there, especially if you have him in there with some of the younger guys. He'll talk to them and get them where they need to be and settle them down.

Q. Is that from senior leadership? Clearly this is his team?

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, he's very vocal. Lot of leaders are not vocal. They're still good leaders. He's very vocal.

Q. How is Brady's health coming along? Is he improving?

COACH McCAFFERY: He's improving. I mean, it's been slow. Obviously, he's been real slow. He did a lot more in the last three days than he had in a while, but that was by design. Felt like it was time for him before and he came back and he was still hurting, so we shut him down. He didn't really do much for probably three weeks, which is a lot this time of year. He missed three weeks, but he's in the weight room right now and working hard.

So we'll see every day just a little bit more. Pretty soon he'll be back playing, and then we'll evaluate him and see where he is because he's got to get back in playing shape. Physically he looks good because Bill Maxwell's working him out hard in the weight room, but still, running is a whole other story.

Q. Do you anticipate using him this year as a redshirt?

COACH McCAFFERY: I still do. Redshirt is a possibility though, you're right. You get to a point where you say okay, that's it. We're not there yet.

Q. How is Mike's confidence?

COACH McCAFFERY: Good.

Q. He played point last year. Kind of sees himself as a point. I know you play him at point sometimes too. But has he fit in okay?

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, he's been great. He's a point guard. Yeah, no question.

Q. How about Trey Dickerson? You mentioned he has to downshift a little bit. He's got one speed. Is he progressing with that?

COACH McCAFFERY: He is. He had a great workout yesterday. He's another guy who didn't play well on Saturday. It was a good sign because he really came back and was terrific yesterday. I think little by little, figuring out how to run a team. I think that's what we're talking about. He can get by you. He can get in the lane and push you hard. He's going to have nights where he scores it, others he won't score it as much. But the idea of tempo and time and score and loading up your shooters and knowing who is on the floor and where they like it, that's the next step for him. If he can do that he'll be pretty good because you know you can put him in and just turn him loose and he can impact the game just with that. You just have to be careful when you're in tight ballgames especially in league play. Can he run a mistake-free offense and engineer a victory? That's what you want your point guard to do.

Q. You had Josh on one wing and Peter on another wing, and Trey was breaking down the defense. Looked like you had a nice run with that lineup?

COACH McCAFFERY: We did. And I've done that a lot, and those three guys have played really well together. He does a great job of finding those guys and they run because they know they might get it. And you better run or else he's going to be in front of you. You've got to sprint to get to where you need to get to. He leaves the floor sometimes still to pass to shoot. As long as he just settles down a little bit.

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