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An Interview With:

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach?

Q. After a brutal seven-game opening stretch in the Big Ten, it's been widely discussed, that it's almost a break going here now. Is that something to guard against in overconfidence that you're playing Nebraska and not Ohio State?

COACH McCAFFERY: I'm not worried about that. I think Nebraska has our full attention. I think they've got everybody's full attention.

If you look at Nebraska, they didn't have two of their best players the first three games they played. And they've got two excellent wins already. And you look at the league, top to bottom, same thing. I mean, very few leagues have the top two teams with at least two losses and everybody with at least two wins.

So I think every team that we play and every team that we watch do something special, like everybody's done. I think that's enough to get anybody's attention.

Q. It's been well documented that this conference is good from top to bottom, but because you don't have the ranked opponent night after night, do you and the coaches look at your remaining 11 games and set a goal as far as what kind of wins you can attain?

COACH McCAFFERY: No. We're just trying to beat Nebraska. And that's as honest as I can be.

Q. What did you guys do practice-wise and did you give the guys a few days off?

COACH McCAFFERY: They got two days off in that stretch, which I think they deserved. We had such a grind there for a while. We had a couple of guys banged up, nothing major.

And we worked on our own offenses, our own defenses and try to get a little bit sharper. Looked at some different combinations. And then did a lot of situational stuff.

Assuming that we're going to be involved in a lot of close games, making sure we make the right decisions in those situations. And really didn't spend any time talking about Nebraska until today.

Q. In the Purdue game, you seemed to have some good tempo when Bryce Cartwright was in. What are your expectations for him going down, not the stretch, but the last 11 games?

COACH McCAFFERY: For him, I think he's really coming into his own. Offensively he's been pretty solid all year long. He hasn't shot the ball as well as he's capable, or as well as he has in the past, but he's making some shots. And he's finding people. I think his decision-making is pretty good. Defensively he's not giving us what he needs to give us and that's been my discussion with him directly.

For us to be the kind of team, he's got to be able to put pressure on people and rebound and he's done that. He's a steal guy. He can make steals.

He can get in the lane; he can get rebounds when he wants to. He just has to focus on playing both ends. When he does that he becomes one of the better guards in our league; when he doesn't, we struggle because we have a guy playing one-half of the floor.

Q. Was he better at that last year?

COACH McCAFFERY: He was better. I still don't know he views himself as a lock-down defender. He still views himself as an offensive

player. We welcome that, and he's been great at times.

He was spectacular at Wisconsin. He's been great at other times this year. But the guy with the ball in this league is too good to not get up and after him a little bit, and we are not big and strong enough where we can't have all five guys rebounding the ball. And I've seen him go up and over 6'9" guys to get rebounds. He's just gotta do it regularly.

Q. This is Melsahn Basabe's second prolonged break this season. Do you try to hit the reset button over the course of the last week to get him going?

COACH McCAFFERY: No, we just keep working with him. Show him film. Everything stays exactly the way it's been. He's still going to be in the starting lineup, and he's got to be pushed.

We had the situation where clearly he was having fatigue issues, and we felt it was weight-related earlier. We peeled some weight off. I thought that helped him.

I think teams are focusing on him now and doubling him and doing some things and taking some things away. I'm just trying to get him to go back to doing what he does. And that's run the floor and rebound and block shots. Don't try to be what you're not.

I think players that do that get into trouble. Guys that shouldn't be dribbling, they dribble and things of that nature, and I think from an attitude standpoint, he's been spectacular. And I think he'll be fine.

Q. Looking at defense, you have Matt, who in the last couple of years really under your watch, has been very good. What kind of strides have you seen in that and has peeling off the bulk, being lean, been a factor?

COACH McCAFFERY: I think that's helped him, because he's still big and strong enough to guard a 6'6" 215, 220-pound player, which he's done. But the lean side of him has enabled him to guard some of the quicker 2s and stay after them.

But for him, it's just a matter of mental toughness. He's phenomenally tough mentally, because to stay after it and then still run around on offense and we run sets for him and we run motion for him and we run a variety of things, he's got to sprint the floor in transition and stay engaged offensively, because they're doing to him what he's

trying to do to them, which makes you work that much harder on offense.

You've got to be in incredible physical condition, but, more importantly, you've got to be incredibly mentally tough, and he just keeps coming. He's got the ability to put it behind him if he makes a mistake, and if his man scores, if he misses a shot, he just keeps coming.

So at the end of the game if we lose and he doesn't have statistically one of his better games, he's still pretty good. And whoever beat him, whoever got him had to really come with it.

Q. Would you think about putting Matt on Spencer or would you use Marble, or would you switch that up?

COACH McCAFFERY: I think we would rotate. I think Marble's length would be good on him. I think Matt would be great. I think Eric May would be very good. I think there's a lot of ways to go, especially with a guy who is as talented offensively as him, I think different looks would be helpful.

Q. With that, besides being a scoring option, as we show more recently, what's the most valuable thing that he brings to your team?

COACH McCAFFERY: I think this year he's so much more of a mature player. He's not making the mistakes. He made a lot of freshman mistakes. What that did -- it wasn't helpful to our team but more importantly it wasn't helpful to his confidence level.

So what you're seeing now is a much more effective and then ultimately a much more confident player. He's attacking the basket. He's making jumpers. He's defending much better. He's staying out of foul trouble. He's taking advantage of what he's learned in the last year and a half and using it to his advantage.

Q. You mentioned all the stuff you've worked over the last week without a game. With your experience are extended layoffs like this beneficial, or are there some negative effects to not having a game for so long?

COACH McCAFFERY: You know, I think it can work both ways. For us I think it was a good thing in terms of where it was timed. We just start the new semester academically. They had a chance to refocus there.

We had a couple of guys with nagging injuries. They got a chance to take care of those. But you do get into sort of a routine where you're playing twice a week, and it's two-day prep, play the game, two-day prep, play the game. Mix in your one day off.

But the thing about the break is you don't have to give them a day off. And we typically don't during that period of time because they're not doing anything else. So we keep them occupied. We're watching film. We're shooting free throws, we're getting a lift in or we're practicing.

So while it's, I think, a fun time for them, it is a grind. And it's a long month. So I think it was good. Will we be a little rusty, we'll find out.

Q. You guys will probably be looking at this as a staff, are you still of the mindset not to use the scholarship you have available this spring?

COACH McCAFFERY: I think we're still of the mindset that we're open to using it in the spring. But there's nobody that we're locked in on right now. And those things kind of have an interesting way of unfolding as the spring comes and the signing, spring signing date is upon us.

We're looking at a few players. We're going to have to be pretty excited about that person if we're going to use it, I'll be honest with you.

But sometimes we are. And sometimes a really good transfer becomes available at that time of year. Probably later, a little bit later, when coaching changes take place. A lot of guys move. So we'll see.

Q. Sort of on that note, there's a talk before this conference call about post-graduate transfer rule. Where do you sit on that line?

COACH McCAFFERY: I think it's a horrible rule. Horrible. It is not -- I understand why it was put in. It was put in, I think, for all the right reasons but that's not how it's being utilized, and I think that's unfortunate. I'm a firm believer, if a guy is at one place and he's being treated the right way and he's having a great career, he shouldn't have the option to go somewhere else.

Q. You're second to last in the Big Ten in made three-pointers. Is that something you're feeling content with?

COACH McCAFFERY: Typically we like to see us make more baskets; so, yeah, we would like to see it improve.

Q. I think yesterday I was -- I think there were only 17 nationally two more point attempts, do you try to be up-tempo, push the ball?

COACH McCAFFERY: We're a driving team. We're an up-tempo team. She's right, we don't have a multitude of 3-point shooters. But we do have, I think -- I think it's important to shoot the kind of percent -- we've got decent percentage. Oglesby's decent percentage, not so much in league play. But we know he can make shots. Gatens, pretty solid. McCabe, pretty solid. I think Marble intelligently has, he's got a terrific pull-up game and a terrific 17-foot jumpshot. He's gotten away from shooting a ton of 3s. I think that's part. He's wide open, he shoots them from the corner and minimizes his attempts.

Cartwright is not shooting the 3 really well. He's a pull-up jump shooter. He's a driver. I think you take advantage of what your strengths are, and I don't think it makes sense to start jacking, especially guys that aren't traditionally good 3-point shooters.

Q. Where do you see McCabe taking his game after the way he played in the last game, especially offensively, is he doing a better job staying on the floor?

COACH McCAFFERY: Doing a much better job staying on the floor. The thing about him is he does a lot of things, can dribble, pretty good passer. He's not turning it over like last year. A lot of that was not all his fault. He's playing a lot more 3.

So he's been more in the post this year. So he's able to go off the dribble. He's finishing with either hand. He's really playing tough. I think when he doesn't play well, or if he makes a mistake, you know, he really, I think, works hard and thinks about coming back and doing something positive.

He doesn't let it linger on him, which is I think understandable with a freshman in particular. And they make a mistake. They think they're getting yanked. They think they're letting the team down.

He's got the ability and maturity now I think to play through those mistakes and come back and do a number of positive things. I think the next phase for him is going to be improving his rebounding numbers. While they're good, I think

they could be better.

But, again, that's asking a lot. We're asking him to be a scoring post player and also a rebounding post player. But I think, again, I think he's capable of it.

Q. You mentioned yesterday you went to every summer game first Woodbury and Mike, did you cross paths with Doc Saddler?

COACH McCAFFERY: I did.

Q. Did you see the ticket package for the students, what are your thoughts on that?

COACH McCAFFERY: I have a lot of thoughts on that, not the least of which is when I got here, I talked about the Hawk fans. And they have been phenomenal in the two years I've been here.

I just can't say enough about how much I appreciate how they've been. At the same time, as you get into league play, you need the student body. You need the students, the Hawk's Nest being as rowdy and as engaged as possible.

We see it. We've seen it on the road. We saw it clearly at Purdue the other day. So what I like to do is make this an impossible place to win. So I would just encourage our students to get their tickets. If they're not using them, give them to their buddies.

If there's a new ticket package available for the remaining games, and we've got to make this place, as I said, as difficult as possible to win. And it's been that, and it will be even better when our students are engaged.

Q. When you look at Nebraska, obviously Spencer is a great player but what stands out to you about that team as you're trying to --

COACH McCAFFERY: I think the thing about them, when they sort of stumbled out of the gate, it really wasn't a reflection of that team. They had a great non-conference record. Two of their best players were injured for the first three games of conference play, and they played three great teams.

When Talley and Diaz came back and it gave them the seven quality players that Doc goes with, that's more of a reflection of what this team is capable of doing. Because now you add another wing scorer who can handle the ball.

You add another low post threat to go with, gives them some options with McCray, makes them deeper and more scoring weapons. You

take not only the top seven but two of the scorers out of the top seven.

I think that's why you see them beat Indiana, they've got more weapons now. So it's a team that I've been impressed with as I've studied them obviously early and then when they had the guys out and when they came back.

You saw how they played at Illinois when they finally got everybody back. I mean, that game was in the balance with ten seconds to go, tough game at Illinois.

So they've proven they can play on the road. They've proven they can beat people, and when you take a guy like Spencer, he's a serious weapon, but he's not the only thing they have going. They have a number of -- I think McCray is terrific. Diaz is a handful. Talley is a double-figure scorer. I saw him a lot in high school. And they're going to get after you.

Q. Does adding them -- you mentioned the things they do well, did adding them to the Big Ten make this a better basketball league?

COACH McCAFFERY: There's no question. Because not only that, they've got a fan base. There's atmosphere in that building. They're getting a new building. So I think it's terrific.

Q. You've seen some contributions from Brommer and Archie and Gabe over of the course of the year, would you like to see one of those guys or some of them --

COACH McCAFFERY: That's a good question, you look at that. I struggle with that. Sometimes I pick one and just go with that person and see if we can let them settle down.

But, quite frankly, what I've done is there's times when I think Brommer is a better fit for this game for personnel. There's times when I put Archie in -- I thought Archie at Minnesota, we don't win that game without Archie, plain and simple.

I thought against Purdue he was terrific. And there's times Brommer's been really good. I wanted to get Gabe involved more. I think he's practiced well enough, but like you said, okay, where do you come up with the minutes? Where do you come up with the minutes?

Because I'm a little bit different this year. Last year it was sort of Basabe and Jarryd Cole, now it's Basabe, McCabe and Aaron White, we rotate those guys. So the minutes are minimal.

And you're trying to get the maximum you can. So those guys have to be ready to impact the game any way they can.

With Gabe, it's going to be his motor. With Archie, his explosiveness in terms of shot blocking, and Brommer a little bit more of his passing and his post defense, and we'll probably just go game by game, personnel by personnel.

Q. Matt's always been a leader by example more on the court than being vocal. Did you talk to him at all since he was a senior about being more vocal with this team?

COACH McCAFFERY: No, I don't think you ever want to address somebody and try to get them to be what they're not. He speaks when he has to. And that's what he should do.

You start speaking too much, then nobody wants to listen to you anymore. And when he does speak, he's got credibility because he works harder than everybody else. So I just let him be the captain and speak when he wants to speak. And don't speak when you don't want to speak. But the key is to speak when it's important that you speak. And I think he's got the ability to identify that.

Some guys talk all the time and after a while nobody wants to listen to them. You need to say stuff at the appropriate time. And he does that.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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