

December 28, 2012



An Interview With:

COACH McCAFFERY

Q. Can you talk about the matchup at center and what it poses?

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, I think it's a great challenge. Obviously, Cody Zeller's playing at a very high level. Did so last year. He's one of the best running big men I've seen in a long time, tremendous speed. Their running game is really on all cylinders right now, and that's obviously an issue for us at both ends of the floor and have to have the ability to get back.

So it's going to have to be a collective effort. Obviously, Woody (Woodbury) will start on him and then bring in Melsahn and Gabe at the back and rotate some guys on him. So, it's a great challenge. Got to sprint back, got to dunk the ball and then play before he gets it.

Q. Last year, adding Yogi Ferrell to playing guard, what has he brought?

COACH McCAFFERY: I think what you're seeing is a team with an incredibly high shooting percentage. Not that they didn't have good 3-point shooters last year; they did. He gets them the ball when they are open. He loads them up and he's constantly breaking his man down and creating opportunities for those guys to get open shots, and whether it be in transition or out of their half court.

So he pushes it; he's made their break better; he gets the ball inside, he finds three-point shooters, and he makes plays. He makes plays late.

Q. What parts of his game are improved from a year ago?

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, I didn't think he had too many flaws last year. I just think he's a little bit older, a little bit smarter, a little bit better.

But the thing about him, he's a tremendous ball handler for a guy that size. He has great hands and he can dribble and release. He's in great shape physically. He's able to sustain the ability to run the floor. A lot of big guys run the floor some of the time; he runs it all the time.

So he creates problems for you defensively and puts pressure on your defense, but he's got a game. He can post off, pop out, he can drive the ball from the perimeter. He can feed the post and he can make plays off the dribble for other people. Those guys will cover.

Q. Do you personally like games like this where when you look at their personnel, you see they have two 6-0 guards, you have two 6-0 guards, they have a 6-5 wing, you have a 6-6 wing, a 7-0 --

COACH McCAFFERY: To be honest with you I'm not like that. I look at who we play and I just try to put a game plan that I think will work for us.

We've had some teams that have been tall and played small and things of that nature. We've had to adjust. Those are the things you'll see all the season long. You just have to adjust to the moment. They are going to start a traditional lineup but they could go small. They have played Oladipo and Sheehey -- and Sheehey is the four, and they done that. So he's got a lot of options he can go to there. So, you know, we'll just lineup and play whatever they send out.

Q. Starting Big Ten play, your first three games -- is it easy or hard for you or your team to have tunnel vision and just concentrate on the absolute task at hand?

COACH McCAFFERY: I think it's easy. We have not even mentioned who we play after

Indiana. Not going to lie to you; I was worried, I wouldn't say we were locked in for Iowa State more than Iowa and then we had two games before Indiana. That was a time where I was worried about us looking ahead and I was proud of fact that we didn't slip there with their business and now we can focus on Indiana.

Q. Do players seem confident going into this game from what you can tell?

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, they are all playing well. I think they all feel good about themselves. They recognize who we are playing and they recognize the challenge before us. I think they feel good about themselves.

Q. Was this the situation you envisioned when you got the job -- sold out arena for the Big Ten, everything you wanted?

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, I hoped to get to the point where our fans wanted to come back and identified with this team and got behind this team and appreciate how hard they have worked.

They recognize our opponent and their history and the fact that they are ranked fifth. And they want to see great basketball.

You know, our objective is to make sure that we play the game the right way and compete at a level that puts us in a position to win.

Q. A couple bracket colleges have your team in the tournament, I know it's three months away, but from a recruiting standpoint and big picture standpoint, do you view that as a positive?

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, I like the fact that we are being mentioned. To be honest with you, I didn't even know that until you just said it, because it's really -- it's kind of irrelevant. But at the same time, it's the reality of where we are.

I don't think any of us ever envisioned that we would be a "Bracketologist" -- but there is. And the bottom line is, we work the numbers every game and people find that interesting. As you know, it means nothing right now. But, recruits do get on Internet and they do look at that stuff, so ultimately it is good.

Q. You've done well against Indiana lately and beat them at home last year; how is this team this year different from last year?

COACH McCAFFERY: Obviously, Ferrell has made a dramatic impact on that team and has

taken a lot of pressure off everybody else. It has enabled Hulls to -- he's just killing it from the 3. He's made 30 3s. He's playing at a high level and doesn't have to worry about handling the ball as much.

But I think the difference in their team this year is the play of Oladipo and Sheehy. They are playing like veterans now. They were always good and they were always athletic and they could always score. They are not making the mistakes. They made mistakes as freshmen and sophomores that they are not making now. They are really playing like elite players.

We already know they have Watford, Zeller and Hulls, three elite scorers right there and they have two other guys playing at that level. You know, pretty impressive.

Q. How has Melsahn responded?

COACH McCAFFERY: He's good. He's practiced hard the last two days and generally no signs of any problem.

Q. They put a lot of pressure on your defense last year, what do they do that --

COACH McCAFFERY: There's a lot of things that we have to pay attention to. If you look at last year's game here, it was completely different than the one that was played there.

Obviously we were hoping to do well at the one that was played here, but that was 32-31 with under eight minutes to go in the half and we go in down 17. So we sort of fell apart. Teams have a tendency to do that against them.

They are a big spurt team. You know, you are looking right at them and the next thing you know you're down 15 and it happens so quickly. And a lot of times because they are talented because they move the ball and they make 3s and they are very unselfish.

But a lot of times, it's the insane offense that makes no sense at any particular time: Backing threes, driving into packs are threes and turning it over. If you turn it over, it's a dunk against this team. So we have to be intelligent with everything that we do.

Q. You have a tough schedule right away with Michigan and Michigan State; how important is it for you guys to get a big, signature win on Monday? Of course every win is important.

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, what's important is that we play well and that we play the way we are supposed to play against a really good team. Obviously we really want to win, and obviously if you can make a big impact, you can win.

But we recognize who we are playing and we recognize that we are going to have to play better than we've played up until now. With all due respect, the opponents that we've beaten and some of the great games that we've had, we are going to have to play mistake-free basketball, shoot it better.

They are a phenomenal rebounding team and for a team to average 13 offensive rebounds a game and if they are shooting 52 percent, that's an incredibly impressive number. It's not that many misses and they are going back and getting them and keeping you on defense. We are going to be challenged on the glass, at full court, at halfcourt. They are changing defenses a little bit more. They are going to make our young guys think.

Q. Of the six Big Ten teams that are ranked, you only play one; so maybe you don't have as many opportunities to get a signature win, but looking back to four wins last year in Top-25 teams, that's going to be what defines this team as far as postseason play.

COACH McCAFFERY: In terms of postseason, yeah, that's going to be the critical thing. We have got opportunities we have got to take advantage of.

Q. Looking at core match-ups, you mentioned Jordan Hulls; what are your expectations for guys like him going up against somebody like that?

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, they just have to stay locked in. He's a guy, if you're guarding Hulls, if you letdown for one second, it's three points. He's got that relentless ability to stay focused and he constantly moves.

The thing about him is that he can pass. He's not a shooter. He has the capacity to be a great shooter, but he's not what I would call a shooter. He can play off the dribble and he can find people. A lot of it, dunks that Zeller had

against him last year, especially down there, were off of his passes.

So you have to be locked in and guard this guy because he can hurt your team in a lot of different ways.

Q. You've played this team four times in the last two years, most of the players are still there. Do you look back at your old scouting report and blend them with new ones?

COACH McCAFFERY: No, no, everything's different. To a certain extent, there are some of the same players and they run some of the same plays, but this is a completely different team. They have got freshmen that are playing now, Perea is playing; he wasn't playing before. They have got different pieces that make this team different. We have got to prepare different.

Q. Do you feel your team is better prepared?

COACH McCAFFERY: We have a better team. We're deeper. You have to be deep. This team is going to make you guard them. If you don't guard them -- they are averaging 89. That's a big number. They averaged 80 last year, now they are averaging 89.

So you've got to really make sure that we are rotating personnel and we have got first personnel on the floor and we have to be back and have to be up toward the ball and have to put pressure on the ball and we have to continue to dribble, and then we've got to battle them on the glass. It takes a lot of effort.

Q. In non-conference play, being a little more aggressive defensively and full court, do you have to change that against the Big Ten?

COACH McCAFFERY: We may. It will be a function of a lot of different things. We were playing -- we're going to press pretty much every game we play.

Q. How do you feel like you guys are doing for 2014 recruiting-wise?

COACH McCAFFERY: I think we are doing pretty well. We've locked in on a few guys. I think it's a good class. Had a number of people on campus. We'll see.

Q. Position-wise what do you need?

COACH McCaffery: Well, I think you typically target what you lose. We'll look for a wing guy who can play the point and some post guys, so we've got to get some forwards, preferably a versatile guy.

But, you know, you go in and say, okay, that's what we are looking for, but not necessarily what we are going to get. If you have an opportunity to get somebody who is a great player at a position, you're going to try to get them anyway.

Q. In Chicago, that class, how important is that area to you guys?

COACH McCaffery: Well, I think it's potentially very important. We've worked Chicago since we've gotten here and it's been good to us over the years. A lot of terrific players, terrific coaches. A lot of really good players that have come in ready.

But you know, like I always say, if we don't get somebody from Chicago, we'll get somebody from somewhere else that can play.

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