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An interview with:

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY

Q. Fran, Michigan State statistically is playing better defense than they have under Coach Izzo. Does that show up on tape as you watch their defense?

COACH McCAFFERY: You know, what I see is a consistent defensive team with a focus and a determination that has been their staple. It's what's made them special over the years.

They have great players and they can score, but they're going to battle you. They're going to be tough. They're going to be physical. They're going to rebound.

I mean, never more evident than the Indiana game. That was really impressive. I have a lot of respect for Indiana's team and what they've done. Defense that night was pretty intense.

Q. One through five, too, wasn't it?

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah. But I think that's fairly typical of them.

Q. They've always had good point guards who are pretty good leaders. Travis Trice has stepped into that role, leading the Big Ten in assist-to-turnover ratio. What does he do?

COACH McCAFFERY: He's done that well in the past. Appling has had some injuries. He took over.

The thing about him is he can also score. He can shoot the ball. He's a late-game shot-maker. So, yeah, his role this year, he's the guy. He's a senior. I think he welcomes that.

But he's been pretty good his entire career there, getting them into their stuff, making threes, not turning the ball over.

Q. The last two years here, two games with great opportunities for your team. Couldn't make the one more play to win. Does that have a lingering effect or is it out of everyone's mind?

COACH McCAFFERY: I think that's a good point. They've been very intense, hard-fought games. We had leads, and we didn't close them out. They're always frustrating, you're right.

But I think what you do is you respect your opponent and you try to figure out, Okay, what can we do differently on offense, what can we do differently on defense? As coaches, should we run different kinds of plays, play different guys? You just keep working at it, you don't belabor it.

Q. Last year after that loss, you questioned your team's toughness. This year that doesn't seem to be an issue. How is your team mentally different?

COACH McCAFFERY: I thought our team last year was pretty tough. I didn't think we were tough that night. That wasn't characteristic I didn't think of that team. I thought that night we weren't the tougher team, simple as that. I said it. I wasn't afraid to say it. I said it to them and I said it in here.

This year's team, I think the difference, which is what your question was, our consistency defensively has been better. Last year, I said this the other night, at this time we were a very potent offensive team, scoring 88 points a game or something like that. Different kind of team. I think we tended to rely on that a little bit more maybe.

This year's team has had to rely a little bit more on defense and rebounding and toughness to win. Certainly the other night was evident of that.

Q. Is Gabe a guy that is more comfortable coming off the bench than starting?

COACH McCAFFERY: He really likes coming off the bench. The only reason to start him

is when I felt like it would be a reward for how well he's playing. Any time you make a change in the starting lineup, at least the way I look at it, it's got to benefit both people: Is it good for Woody, Gabe, and ultimately for our team?

When Gabe comes off the bench and gets 18 points, it's easy to say he should be starting. Woody's contribution is more at the other end of the floor. He's a communicator on defense. He's a high-level rebounder, high-level defender. So his value is every bit as important to our team, just in a different way.

Q. In terms of what it takes to win, is your team built this year, just like Michigan State?

COACH McCAFFERY: I certainly hope so. They have set a standard of winning for a long period of time, which as you know is hard to do at this level. Teams have runs. They have been able to sustain it in a very difficult league. Ultimately, I think that's what you want to build.

In order to do that, you need size, you need depth, you need gamers, and you have to guard people. You're not always going to make shots. You're not always going to make 10 threes. You better be able to win on nights when the ball is not falling in.

Q. Have we seen a different Uthoff the last three games?

COACH McCAFFERY: We've talked about it before. I mean, that's what I want from him. He's got that ability. He's got a unique skill set that he can score in a lot of different ways.

What you're seeing is he's raising up, shooting the ball. If he's missing, he's raising the ball, coming back and shooting again. Arguably the biggest shot of the other night, puts us up two after we fell down one. He was very confident doing it. That's what I want him to continue to do.

Q. Is it a confidence thing for him or is the game finally slowing down?

COACH McCAFFERY: I don't know that it's a confidence thing for him, no, because he's not like Josh. They just play the way they want to play. You know, it's not like, Okay, I'm going to be more aggressive now. They've never done that.

They let the game come to them. Open, they shoot it. Try to rebound, defend, keep it simple.

But sometimes you have to decide, Okay, am I going to be the guy or one of the guys? Now

you got to go get some buckets at tough times, make contested shots at times, which he did.

The jumper he made at Ohio State, that was a big-time play. He was highly contested. What you're seeing is a guy I think who is becoming more comfortable in that role.

Q. When he shot the three, you spoke of the transition. He had the confidence to take it.

COACH McCAFFERY: He has a green light to shoot that in transition. I want him to shoot that in transition. Same with Josh, same with Pete. Those three guys for sure have the green light to shoot it in transition. I mean, nobody was guarding them. Why not shoot it? He's a really good shooter. Let it go.

Q. When you look at the hallmark of Michigan State under Izzo, toughness is their MO, whether it's physical or mental. They've been down here and still came back. Physically they battle you up until the whistle. How do you match that? What is it about them that as the game goes on they continue to get tougher?

COACH McCAFFERY: I don't think it's anything tricky. They have good players. They're just going to keep playing. They're going to play till the end of the possession. They're going to play till the end of the game. They're not a team you're going to get down by 7, you're going to look up and they're going to be down 25. That's not who they are.

If you get them down 7, you hope to at least keep the lead. But they're going to keep coming. I mean, I think when you're a coach, that's all you can ever ask. You can't expect perfection all the time, but you can expect ultimate effort. So anything short of that, have a hard time beating them.

Q. Dawson, I know he only played once against you guys, what is he doing better now?

COACH McCAFFERY: He's playing like a senior. He's got supreme athletic ability. He's one of those guys that he doesn't have to gather when he jumps, he just jumps. He gets rebounds out of his area. He plays the four spot a lot, but handles the ball like a guard.

I think he's very comfortable in his role this year. He's got a much more important role

offensively than he had when they had Payne and those guys.

He's accepted it and he's been successful at it.

Q. How is Dom progressing?

COACH McCAFFERY: He's doing a lot better. His energy level, his understanding, his competitiveness. I love the fact that he made a mistake at one end, came back and scored a big hoop for us at the other end. That's a big step for him. He's going to be really good for us.

Q. Does Clemmons coming off the bench affect Trey's minutes?

COACH McCAFFERY: A little bit. If you start your two point guards, you can't sub one for the other. They're both getting tired at the same time. Trey is still battling. He'll be in the mix.

Q. You have a couple of interesting connections with Anthony playing with Bryn Forbes, Denzel Valentine in Lansing, then one of your incoming recruits and Travis Trice. What did you learn from Travis' dad? How much do you know about Travis Trice?

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, Travis' dad was as professional as you could ever hope for as a coach in a recruiting process, especially in light of the fact that it was a little bit unique in the sense he never played football before, then walks onto the football field and he's all-state, which I think speaks to his athletic ability, one of the reasons we love him. But he's also a really good basketball player.

His dad is a terrific coach, winning program. That's about all I can say about that.

As far as Travis is concerned. I saw him, he was a terrific player. We weren't involved with him. He had already kind of moved in that direction.

The irony of Clemmons is we were actually recruiting a different kid on that AAU team. Denzel was already committed. The other kid was still in the balance. We looked at him. We kept watching him. Then we ended up offering Anthony.

Q. Cameo appearance in the Hoiberg dance video. He said you had a chance to do some dancing and you declined. Is that accurate?

COACH McCAFFERY: It's somewhat accurate. We got the script prior to flying over there to do the commercial. I read it. I'm trying to

figure out, Okay, am I going to be dancing or not? So we called up and said, Do you expect me to dance? No, you're not dancing, Fred is dancing.

Fred showed up. He had never seen the script. He didn't even know he was going to have to dance. Jamie and I are like, 'You didn't see it?' He said, 'No.'

They took him for an hour, had a choreographer work with him. Fred was sopping wet, sweating. We did about 15 takes before I ever even got on the stage. They did it in three segments. The first was him dancing, then my part, then the third part was when him and Jamie were in the car.

Fred had no idea what was going to happen when he showed up in Detroit. So he was a really good sport about it, I thought, and did a really good job. He bought in, Hey, if this is what you want me to do, I'll do it. He was all in.

It's interesting to see it come together. It's like they were making a movie. There was a hundred people in there, Do another take, say this, say that, walk here, look at him this way, look at him that way, all that kind of stuff. Fred was a good sport.

Q. How did it come about?

COACH McCAFFERY: They've done it before, okay? They do one every year. So basically Troy Hilton from the NABC called and said, We'd like you to be in the commercial this year. I said, Okay. I had no idea what that meant. Typically you're going to be in a suit and tie and say something about Coaches Versus Cancer, the Infiniti Challenge.

Last spring I flew down to Nashville to be the speaker when they presented the check to Coaches Versus Cancer, Infiniti people, \$720,000. Maybe that's why they wanted me in this commercial.

But then it sort of became, you know, an Iowa thing in many ways because Jamie was, I don't want any part of this. At first it was like, when they said to me, Okay, it's on. It's on Hoiberg. Say this. They kept changing it. They go back, figure out how do we ultimately want it to end up.

I haven't even seen the final product myself. I was there the whole time.

Q. How many takes to get the warmup pants off?

COACH McCAFFERY: About 15, yeah.



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Well, they came off easy. They take you back, it's makeup, black and gold stuff. They went with the old-style pants, old-style socks, short shorts. That's what I played in when I played, so it was fine for me.

Q. (Question regarding changes in the starting lineup.)

COACH McCAFFERY: It's been great. It's been great for both of them. Anthony was really good the other night as a point guard. He was really good in the Ohio State game as a point guard because Mike is terrific, but Mike is going to get tired at the pace he plays, people coming after him. You've got to give him some rest.

You put another junior in for a junior, you don't lose anything in terms of experience, steady play.

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