

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

Wednesday, November 4, 2015

Fran McCaffery Men's Basketball



Q. Fran, when you look at the Division II schools that you want to come in and work on some things against, it doesn't appear to be that kind of team that is just going to let you work, I guess. They're a pretty good team. What are your thoughts about facing a team like this?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I think there's two ways to look at exhibition games. You can look at it, where you're playing somebody that you know you're going to beat and play everybody and work on some things, and you can play somebody who won 31 games who's experienced and has really talented players and they're going to challenge you in a different way.

So clearly that's what this game is.

We have arguably the toughest schedule we've played in a long time, so this, I think, would better prepare us for what we're going to face in the ensuing weeks and not a game that we're just going to rotate everybody in and not really see where our deficiencies are and how good we can be.

Q. Was that strategy for this game?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah.

Q. What's the next step for you, Fran, from the first exhibition to the next one in this process?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, obviously we played the other night, and there were some good things in that game. There were some things that weren't so good. It's part of it. Go back and get to work, and then you're working on the collective situation and then also the individual situation, how can we improve certain players and get them to -- especially the young guys, to understand a little bit better what we're doing, so that we've been working on that. Hopefully we'll be better than we were last week and each week following, because we've got tough games right off the bat that we're playing.

Q. Are you starting to see some of that consistency that you hoped you'd see?

FRAN McCAFFERY: A little bit. You know, I want more consistency than what we're getting, but it's better.

Q. Is there more inconsistency on offense or defense, or is it both?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Probably defense. And that's not uncommon, because the sophistication of what people are running against us at this level, and especially when you're experienced like Augustana in particular, when you have upperclassmen, they're going to execute their offense and they're going to run their counters, and that's what makes young players struggle sometimes. They can get back and they can get in their stance, and then all of a sudden things start happening quickly, and then the ball moves side to side, and then your instincts kick in, and then we want to run and then you've got to remember what you're doing on offense, what are we running, we're running plays, we're running motion and so forth. So there's a lot that hits you very quickly, especially when you play our style.

Sometimes it looks helter-skelter, but it's not. It's actually very organized, and they know that. We're just playing fast.

But Augustana plays fast, too, and I like that.

Q. You mentioned you needed a 10-man rotation. Is that getting clearer now who's going to be --

FRAN McCAFFERY: You know, it might take a little longer to get there. Eventually, I think, to get through a season, you need a 10-man rotation typically. A lot of teams have gotten through with eight, seven, you know, if you stay healthy and stay out of foul trouble most of the time, but I'm just a firm believer in you kind of need 10. That's the way I've always done it.

We clearly have many candidates for that. I would say it's a little bit clearer this week than it was last week, and hopefully it will get even more clear. You're looking for that separation, certain guys just separate themselves from some other people, and we're still in the situation where on any given days three or four guys look really good, three or four guys look like they're a little bit lost, and then it changes, and that's difficult sometimes.

Q. What's your thoughts on the rule change and how you guys handled that, especially the freedom of movement?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I didn't notice a big deal the other

night. I mean, it was -- obviously there were 10 fouls called quickly. I think that was more a mindset that they came in and they wanted to be physical, and the fouls ended up evening out over the course of the game. So I don't know probably until we get into it how much that's going to change. We just get our guys to move their feet and try to keep their hands off people because that's going to be a foul no matter what. Your secondary defenders have to get there quicker, get their feet outside that circle. It's a much bigger arc.

But other than that, it's pretty much the same game. I didn't feel the shortened shot clock really changed anything all that much. There may be a game where it does. It didn't seem to affect us the other night, either team.

Q. Do you expect to play more motion, less sets on offense, and then more man versus less zone on defense?

FRAN McCAFFERY: No, I wouldn't say that. I mean, I think we'll use whatever we think we need to use to try to win the game.

Q. This is kind of your last chance to evaluate all the freshmen before you make a redshirt decision. How much do you want to push them out there to see what you can see versus trying to establish a nine-, 10-man rotation and win the game?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I would probably lean towards playing the guys I think deserve to play and play the game as if we're obviously trying to win the game as opposed to I don't really care what happens, we're going to run a bunch of guys out there and I'm more concerned about who we're redshirting. That wouldn't be the case.

Q. With Christian Williams, he played nine minutes the other day. Is it pretty safe to say he's out of that redshirt mix at this point since you need a point guard next year?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I would say he's probably not going to redshirt, yeah.

Q. Is he a candidate to play multiple positions? I think you've played him a little bit at both spots in the back court.

FRAN McCAFFERY: He's a really good wing player, and that's the tough thing with him, because we are working him in at the point and we do need him to play point moving forward. But he is almost 6'7". He's got a 6'11" wingspan. He's really good in transition. He's a really good offensive rebounder. Your point guard doesn't offensive rebound, you get him back on defense. So he's got a unique skill set that ultimately you like to take full advantage of and not pigeonhole him into one spot that limits maybe some of the things

he can do. So that's going to be interesting to see how that unfolds.

Q. Mike shot the ball really well in that first game. Have you been seeing that short of consistency?

FRAN McCAFFERY: He's been shooting the ball really well, yeah. Feeling really good about himself offensively, attacking the basket, his mid-range game, which has always been there, his three ball is going in. He's shooting it with great confidence, and I think making great decisions. You don't see him taking contested shots. He knows when he's open and he knows when other people are open.

I think you're seeing a guy who's a senior and playing that position really well.

Q. Guessing you probably got a lot of scouting on Jansen from Augustana?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I saw him a lot. I saw those guys play, at least 60 times probably. I was always impressed with him. You know, it was funny, too, because a lot of people were looking at him, and he was just comfortable with what he found there. They've got a great coach, Tom Billeter, very established. They have a winning program, and that was comfortable for him. I think he would have had a lot of Division I options had he chosen to go that route based on what I saw and based on who was at the games. I don't think there's any question about that.

But it certainly worked out for him. He's very likely going to be the school's all-time leading scorer.

Q. Any of the freshmen since the last exhibition game that really took a jump up in practice? You said a couple of them have kind of stepped forward.

FRAN McCAFFERY: You know, I think when you look at that group, the guys that you kind of expect, obviously Dale Jones and Andrew Fleming, you're looking at them, they've got to get it figured out defensively. I mean, they're good offensive players. You know, Christian is a guy that we've already talked about him. Ahmad is rock solid. He really understands kind of what we're doing. So he's going to be in there.

You know, I think we need Dom to take a step. I thought he had a great practice yesterday. That's important, being that he's big and experienced.

You know, after that, you're looking at Brady and Nicholas, who didn't play last year, but they don't play like freshmen, either of them, and they shouldn't, because they're sophomores. They didn't play any games, but they're not freshmen. So those two guys are really smart, intelligent players. Both can make

shots, both can put it on the deck, both defend, and both aren't mistake guys. So they're going to be in the mix, too.

Q. With your newcomers and everything they have to learn, how much of their ability to score will help them play early?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, typically your ability to score is what gets you in the game and what keeps you on the floor. But at the same time, we have pretty good offensive players, and if you can't defend, especially against a really good team, obviously Friday is one of them, but there's so many good teams on our schedule, if you can't defend, then you can't be out there because you're creating so many problems for everybody else. You can't be playing four-on-five because they're going to find the open guy and they're going to score.

So we've got guys working right now. They're not always in the right place. They're not always positioned correctly, but they're battling, trying to figure it out.

Q. How is their effort? I know you've talked before about there's a difference between playing hard and sometimes playing smart. Do you feel they made strides in that area over the last few days?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I feel like they're trying to. You know, it's not like you're going to watch the -- play the game, watch the film, make a couple corrections and everything is going to be corrected. It doesn't work that way. They're a hungry young group that wants to do what they're supposed to do. They want to be coachable. They want to be good teammates. They want to be on a winning team. They're trying. But it takes time.

I mean, if you only had one or two guys like this, you wouldn't think anything of it, because a lot of times that's what you have, two or three freshmen, two or three sophomores, two or three juniors, like that, and this just happens to be a unique bunch where we have eight newcomers, six of them weren't here last year.

You know, I remember when Pete was a freshman, I mean, he struggled, and he was really talented, and he's really a smart kid. He's a good athlete. I mean, and it really took him the better part of three quarters of the season before he got it figured out, and he was really playing well. If you remember at the end of that year, I think he was the leading scorer against Tennessee in the NCAA Tournament. If not he was the second leading scorer. And that's just an example because there's a guy who, same thing, he wanted to be good, he wanted to work, he wanted to listen, he was trying, and it just took him a little bit of time. It

usually does.

You go back to when Marble was a freshman, he had to play. All those kids had to play, Marble, McCabe, Basabe, Cartwright was new, we had to put them right in and live with whatever mistakes they made.

Well, this group has got a substantial group of experienced players ahead of them, so it changes things, and I think in a lot of ways, it puts pressure on them because they all want to be that guy. They all want to be in that next group, and okay, what if I play all five of the starters 32 minutes? How many minutes are left? There's not many.

So it's a complicated process for those guys to try to figure out, okay, how can I be that guy and will I accept that role knowing that there's more down the road when this group leaves, but for this year, you've got to be maybe a little different role than you were in high school or in junior college, and that's not easy sometimes.

But if you have character and you're smart, you can see what this team needs and what we're looking and then fill in that accordingly.

Q. As the head coach, how delicate of a balance is that? You know you've got to bring them forward but not --

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, it's every day. It's a challenge every day because some days, you know, we'll just coach and teach, and then other days we'll push them a little bit harder, and other days we will get on them more, and then we'll come back and we'll back off them, because, the tendency sometimes can be to just drill them every day because they're not where they need to be, and that can be counterproductive if you're not careful.

So we have an experienced staff, and we try to know the difference. Okay, today we need to hug them. Tomorrow we need to kick them in the rear, and then we need to pat them on the rear and handle it that way.

Because the only time that you'll ever really get upset is if you think you're not getting effort or they're not interested in team basketball, and it's only personal. If that's the case, now you've got a problem. But that has not been the case for any player in this program.

As long as you see that, then you know that you can make progress and get it figured out.

Q. It's got to be interesting in today's world. There were 700 transfers and some situations didn't work out. You yourself had a transfer.

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, and I'm not saying there won't be a transfer at the end of this year. I mean, there could be. But everybody is all in right now. It will be difficult because a couple guys aren't going to play that probably thought they were going to play. And then a couple guys that thought they were going to play a lot won't play maybe as much as they thought. You never know how that's going to end up.

But in the meantime, what you're seeing are character people battling it out every day, trying to make the guy in front of them better, trying to improve in areas that we're teaching them about, and it'll be an interesting journey. I mean, we've had the last two years really experienced teams that were deep, and quite frankly didn't have any issues with regard to, okay, I'm not starting, I'm not happy. If we started Clemmons, he was fine. If you started McCabe, if you didn't McCabe, Basabe, if you started them, didn't start them, those guys were all good with it. And Uthoff didn't start. He was good enough to start for most teams in the country. He didn't start his first year, and there was never an issue there.

I don't see one on this team, but who knows, there could be manifested down the road. We'll deal with that then. But right now, everybody is all in.

Q. With your five upperclassmen that you just talked about, this is the first time you've been so experienced like this with older guys that are mature --

FRAN McCAFFERY: I've never had this before, never. Five essentially starters, one guy played a little bit and eight guys never played a second. Usually you have three or four, four or five guys that have played a little bit, and you kind of know what you're going to get. You know, I thought Nicholas showed us a lot the other night. I wasn't surprised at all, but he came off the bench at a time in a game where we needed him to play the way he played.

I think Brady will be better. I mean, he hits his first three, he stepped out of bounds unfortunately, got fouled again. Ahmad got in foul trouble. So you know, there's certain things that happened in that game that precluded maybe somebody from looking better than they may have. Brady and Ahmad have been playing really well in practice. They both didn't play as much, Ahmad because of foul trouble.

But Fleming did a lot of good stuff. Dale Jones, five rebounds in nine minutes, he's a rebounder, and he can score. It'll be interesting to see -- there were clearly some jitters there. First game, a little bit of jitters, and there will be some jitters on Friday night. But little by little, that stuff goes away.

Q. Do you envision making a redshirt call this weekend or all the way up until November 13th or even beyond that?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think we need to make it pretty soon, yeah. I think you need to make it pretty soon, and then make sure that what we think makes sense as a redshirt is exactly what the player thinks, because if the player doesn't agree, that's a problem. So there will be discussion there in regard to why and what we think is best, and then hopefully everybody is all in.

Q. Could it be more than one or just --

FRAN McCAFFERY: Could be more than one. Could be more than one. Probably at least one.

Q. Looking at Jarrod, I guess I'm kind of surprised he's underrated nationally, a lot of the top 100 player lists have come out, I think ESPN had 16 players from the Big Ten and he wasn't included on it, and I know last year I voted for him higher than that.

FRAN McCAFFERY: Right.

Q. Are you surprised at all that he hasn't gotten maybe the due that most people think he should get?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I certainly think he's one of the top 100 players. I mean, I think he's higher than that. I don't really -- to be honest with you, I don't really put anything into that at all. I don't pay any attention to it. I would like for his sake for him to get the recognition that I think he deserves. Maybe it'll make him that much hungrier. I don't know, he seems to be pretty hungry. He's in the gym all the time. He's shooting right now, and he got here at noon. We practice at 3 p.m. So he's been in the gym for three hours already on his own. So I mean, you're talking about a committed individual.

Somebody thinks he's pretty good. He got invited to the Nike camp, and that's not a popularity contest. That is the NBA people saying these are who we identify, and so those things I think are for fans to look at and to create interest. But again, you know, Aaron White wasn't first-team all-Big Ten last year until the end of the year, and that's when it matters. And talk about who's going to be all-American and who's going to be a first-round pick and who's going to be second- or third-team; who cares. What happens at the end? Are you an all-league player? Are you a draft pick? And that's based on what you've done, not based on what people think you might do. And he's preparing to get things done.