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An interview with:

COACH McCAFFERY

Q. Michigan State again so soon; Is that bad?

COACH McCAFFERY: I don't think it makes any difference for either team. Both teams fresh in each other's minds. We just played them twice. We know each other well. Yeah, I'm fine with it.

Q. Bryce doing okay?

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, he's fine.

Q. What's your philosophy going into a got to win four in four days type thing?

COACH McCAFFERY: You've got to win one. That's it. You've got to win one. So all we're worried about right now is Michigan State. That's it. Then we'll go from there.

Q. Have you been in this spot before? I would imagine you have where you've got to --

COACH McCAFFERY: Have to win four? Yeah, it's ironic too, because the one year -- well, it's happened more than once -- but the one year I remember we tied for the regular season championship. We were technically conference regular season champions but lost. We tied with two other teams and lost the tiebreakers.

So we thought going in we had the best team and we had to win four and Davidson had to win three. We won the first game; we won the second game in a war; and then we lost the third game when we got tired. That happens. But we'll be fine. We'll just go one game at a time.

Q. Do you like that the winner of the tournament gets an automatic bid, or do you think it should be the regular season automatic?

COACH McCAFFERY: Tournament champion.

Q. What is your reasoning behind that?

COACH McCAFFERY: I think that's the reason to have the tournament. The regular season champion in our league is going to get in anyway. I think you would argue it from places where I've come from.

In the last three years, we won the regular season championship, and then had we not won the conference tournament championship, may not have made the NCAA Tournament. Probably one of those three years we would have anyway, but that's not a definite.

So I think you could argue that your body of work being more extensive should get you in. I think it's a legitimate argument. But I think what this time of year is -- I mean, you watch championship week like everybody else. It's really an exciting time of year. It gives everybody a chance.

In the league I coached in before, the fourth seed is new to the NCAA Tournament. They're a 20-win team, but the fourth seed. So going into that tournament, you know you have to win it; a lot of pressure.

The only unfortunate thing is sometimes the best team doesn't go because they have a late season injury, and they can't be at their best for those three days. They might have gone 16-2, that would be unfortunate. But that's the way it is, and I would support it either way.

Q. Considering the way your team has improved this season and the fact you're losing one player, although he's a player that's made great improvement this year, how far does the

curve have to be on October 15th, then you were a year ago?

COACH McCAFFERY: I think a lot further along in a number of ways. We'll have more bodies, but we'll also have an understanding of how we're going to play. More of an understanding how we work together and how the league is at that particular time.

I feel really good about where we're headed. We've got to get a couple more recruits in and that will solidify different positions, give us more weapons. We're trying to find complementary pieces, pieces that fit that make us a better team. Make us better to absorb injury or sickness because it's such a long season.

I feel like next year's team will be better set-up for that. I think going into next year seeing that we were able to beat some quality teams this year, play some quality teams to overtime with a young team, now that we're more experienced, I think we'll go in with more confidence.

Q. The Big Ten won't be near as experienced next year as far as teams. Is that something you can base them on?

COACH McCAFFERY: Yes, I don't think there is any question about that. This is a very difficult year to be young. But it's also a great opportunity, because every night you're playing somebody that you can -- we had a great opportunity to knock off Wisconsin when they were arguably the hottest team in the country that night. I mean, they had beaten everybody, and they were rolling. Same thing for Purdue when we did beat them. Michigan's a real hot team right now.

So I enjoy those opportunities that you have in this league to night-in and night-out make progress by beating ranked opponents. It will be interesting to see next year. We've got a number of NBA players this year in the senior class, and also maybe somebody like Sullinger who might go.

Q. You're talking last night on your radio show about how you plan to play at a faster pace. You're kind of scratching the surface now. How important is getting shooters to that equation?

COACH McCAFFERY: Phenomenally important. You've got to be able to stretch the floor. You want to run. When I first -- when I was playing in college, we didn't have a three-point line. We taught run to the paint. You run back to the paint and you protect the basket. If somebody wants to shoot a long jumpshot in transition, we'd

welcome that. But the game's changed. You get it in, throw it ahead and just fire. You didn't shoot without rebounders in position.

Now we shoot, and there might only be one person on that side of the ten-second line, and we'll shoot the ball if he's open.

You think about it. If I'm going to come down and run a play for a good shooter, what are we going to try to do? We're going to try to get him open. If he's already open, let him fire.

So I think when you have shooters that stretch the floor, it helps you in so many different ways. It takes away the double team from Melsahn Basabe; it gives Cartwright more space to drive the basketball, which can then enable us to get better shots because the driving kick is there.

It puts the defense at risk of having mismatched situations and of being on the side of you. It puts them in a position where they might foul you, get into the bonus or double bonus earlier in the half.

I mean, Saturday they had 11 fouls in the first half. We were in the double bonus in the first half driving the ball, and that made a big difference in the game.

Q. Are you confident that your team will be much more effective offensively next year?

COACH McCAFFERY: Yes. I think we'll have fewer dry spells than we've had in this season. At times we've overcome it, at times it's been difficult to overcome. But I think that's a function of a couple of things. Experience, depth, and then also the pieces that you need in terms of shooting.

Q. When you look at last week's game against Michigan State, defensively there were some breakdowns in the second half that really cost you. What specifically did you see that you need to work on this week or prevent?

COACH McCAFFERY: A lot of our mistakes I thought were fatigue. From a technical standpoint, we didn't defend ball screens perfectly the whole game, and you have to with Lucas.

But other than that, I thought Bryce ran out of gas. I thought he did a good job on him for a portion of the game. I only played eight. That's what I felt like playing on that particular night, and you could argue that was not a great decision when it was over because we definitely wore down.

Hopefully, we'll have Archie. Don't see why we wouldn't. He played Saturday, and he played well. We could use him. They're a big, strong physical team. We need all the big guys we can get. It gives us another body.

Maybe I have to start thinking about moving Stoerner in there. I've said that before that I'm comfortable with him.

Q. Coach do you think about maybe giving the guys an extra practice in this league in the season?

COACH McCAFFERY: No, what we would do is we don't kill them this time of the year. We just need to get out there and get shots up, stay sharp, and then work on things that we think specifically will work in this game.

Q. Michigan State's fighting for an NCAA Tournament at-large bid. Does that make them even more dangerous considering they're kind of a desperate team coming into this tournament?

COACH McCAFFERY: I'm always curious about those kind of questions. I don't know what would make somebody play harder. I think you should play hard when the game starts, no matter when it is. It's the Big Ten Conference Tournament. You want to be Big Ten champions.

Maybe they will play harder. I can't imagine that they would -- I mean, I wouldn't think that my guys would play any harder based on that. They should play as hard as they possibly can on every possession of every game. That's what I would expect from Michigan State. My experience with Tom Izzo is that's how his team's play.

Q. These last two scholarships here in the late period, you talked about finding role guys?

COACH McCAFFERY: I would say finding the best player available. That's what we're looking for, the best player available. I wouldn't call them role guys. I would call them pieces that fit. They complement one another. So they bring a skill set that makes sense. It's not a duplication of what we already have. It's something else that will together make our team much better.

Q. Emphasis on shooting, is that fair to say?

COACH McCAFFERY: Emphasis on shooting and athleticism, yeah.

Q. Is it imperative to get a post guy?

COACH McCAFFERY: No. I would like to. We need one. But if I had a chance to get a 6'3" guy, or a 6'5" guy that was better than the 6'9" guy I could get, I would take the better player pretty much no matter what.

Q. Is your philosophy to throw a net out there over the guys that you feel fit those complimentary roles? And whoever takes the scholarships first are the guys you take?

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, I guess. We put the offer out there. Once we put the offer out there, that means we're ready to accept it immediately. So if I say, hey, I'd like you to come. And they say, okay, I'll come. Doesn't happen usually, but it happens sometimes, so you have to be ready. Once you offer it, you have to be ready to accept it.

So a lot of guys want to take their time, and they want to visit as many places as they can. I'll tell them, hey, this is how many scholarships I have left, this is how many I've offered. So if one takes it, there is one left. You might get a phone call, there's none left.

But I also don't offer 20. There will be more offers out there than I have scholarships, but not by much.

Q. The two players you brought in, Fran, both got some kind of Big Ten honors yesterday. Is that the sign of the kind of players you're going to bring in here?

COACH McCAFFERY: I would like to think so. We're going to be very particular about who we're bringing in in terms of what their skill set is and how good I think they are. I'm really happy for both of them. Melsahn is still just scratching the surface of how good he can be.

I think what we'll see next year is a bigger, stronger, more consistent version of what we saw this year, so his numbers will be improved.

Cartwright, I'm so happy for him. Here's a guy who, as I've said to you, in his heart he knew he could play at this level and didn't have a lot of opportunity. He was willing to wait. Thankfully he waited and we were able to get him in June, and he leads the Big Ten in assists.

It's just a great story. I'm really proud of him. He really worked on his game this year. He worked on being the kind of point guard we needed him to be. If you remember how he was

when he started, you would not have predicted that he would have ended up leading the Big Ten in assists. He worked to make that happen. I think that is an example of the kind of character that he has.

Anything short of that, if he was selfish at all, he would not have been able to do what he did. So the fact that he was recognized by the league or by the media is really I think special for him and for us.

Q. Is it fair to call those guys both overachievers? Is that fair?

COACH McCAFFERY: It was easier for me to see it with Melsahn because I was so much more familiar with him. Keep in mind the day I was hired, I didn't know who Bryce Cartwright was. Then we went after a couple of guys that didn't work out, sent a couple of them home.

He was still available. I watched him on film. I never saw him in person until I got off the plane for his visit. But when you spend time with him, he's such a likeable young man. You could tell that he would fit here and he would blossom.

He wants to be a good teammate. He wants to please his coach. He wants to be a guy that people remember. I think when it's all said and done, that's what it's all about.

Q. Have you talked to Jarryd at all about having a role with the team even after graduation?

COACH McCAFFERY: I have not. But that would be something I might talk to him about at some point. While he's still playing, we don't want him thinking about that. But he's a guy that I would love to have around, and I think he would be great in our business if that's what he chose to do.

But he's got a lot of options. He's got intelligence, he's got personality, he's got work ethic, he's got characterful of so I would think a lot of people would want him in their organization.

He hasn't even said, hey, I'd like to keep playing. If he wanted to keep playing, we'd try to help him find that situation to his benefit.

Q. Appling had a good night versus you last week. Was that expected that he could shoot like that or was it just a career-type night for him?

COACH McCAFFERY: It was certainly a career night for him for this year. He hadn't done that much. But he's a good player, as I said after the game. Appling was a McDonald's All American

for a reason. He got thrust into the starting lineup when Lucias was kicked off and has handled that position pretty well. Most of the jumpers he got were in the zone. When we ran man-to-man, he was not as effective. So we've just got to do a better job with him.

A team like Michigan State, you have to expect that we've got to go after Lucas and Green. They're the two guys. Summers is the next guy. He's been a little bit inconsistent, but he's been great on certain nights, he's been great in his career.

Then they have X-factor guys. Appling is one of them, Nix has hurt us. He hasn't hurt as many other teams as he's hurt us. Payne's good against us. And Delvon Roe can be a handful, and Thornton has shot the ball well, not this year, but in his career, and he shot the ball well against us the other night.

So you go in knowing you have to go after the two big guys, but after that they've got some players too. Hopefully we'll do a better job on Appling, and he won't get away from us and shoot 7 for 8.

Q. From a distance, how surprising has it been for you to see Michigan State end up in the position they're in where they're playing you guys in the first round as opposed to being one of those top teams that they've been in year's past?

COACH McCAFFERY: I don't know. I just think what it is -- I don't think it's that surprising when you look at the league. There are a lot of good teams. They haven't lost to anybody that's not good.

They're still at .500 in this league. They got to 7th based on tiebreakers. Joe Lunardi still has them in, so I think he knows everything there is to know about all this stuff, apparently (laughing).

Q. You get a sense that this is your first year so guys are just getting used to you, but that everybody's coming back next year and everybody's on board for next season? We've gotten pretty used to it around here guys leaving the program?

COACH McCAFFERY: I don't see anybody leaving. But I've been in this business a long time. You never know what's going through somebody's head and what somebody wants out of their career.

I know this: The best teams consist of players who accept their roles. I think a great example is Purdue, a great example is Ohio State. They've got some all-Americans who don't get into the game. They've got a guy that scored 3,000 points who was the seventh man.

So ultimately we need to have a team consisting of really good players, all of whom contribute and put winning above all else. If someone doesn't figure into that equation, I don't want them around anyway.

Q. Do you sit down after the season with every guy individually?

COACH McCAFFERY: Yep.

Q. (inaudible)

COACH McCAFFERY: Exactly. Sometimes that conversation goes exactly like I thought and sometimes it goes into a completely different direction. But that's all part of it. I mean, there is not a conversation that I'm going to have at the end of the year that I haven't already had, I can tell you that. I've seen it all. You can't believe some of the stuff. Those end of the year meetings and some of them go smooth when you didn't expect it.

I've got good kids in this program. For the most part I think they're pretty sensible. When it's all said and done, I'm a firm believer in this: regardless of what someone might say or think -- and I've played the game. You know exactly how good you are, and exactly how good you are in comparison to the rest of the players on the team.

You might say I should get more playing time, you know. My coach, my uncle thinks I should get more playing time. You know if you should get more playing time, because you're there every day and you're either playing well or you're getting your tail kicked by somebody else, and you can't hide from that.

Q. Is it one of those things where when you go into these meetings you let the players speak their mind before you say what's on your mind or do you just get it out there to them first?

COACH McCAFFERY: No, no. I'll take control of the meeting at the front end. They always know that they have the ability to come in. They don't have to be called into my office to have a discussion with me about anything regarding their career, how they feel. I want feedback.

I want my players to have a personality and to be able to tell me if there's something they don't agree with or they don't like. They might not like the answer they get back, but we have to be able to have that conversation.

I mean, I can remember vividly a young man coming in and saying he'd like to play more. I said what position do you play? He said I'm a 2. I said we have the best 2 guard in the league. He scored 2,000 points. He's like, well, why don't you move him to the point and let me play at the 2?

I said, well, then I'm taking 2,000 points out of a 2 guard, so, you know, nothing surprises me. Believe me.

Q. Have you seen enough of Cully and Bryce to feel comfortable they can play together next year? Maybe you didn't see it much this year?

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, they didn't play together too much. I think I saw enough of Cully to know that he can play. I think they can play together. I think Bryce is better with the ball. Not that he couldn't play off the ball. He did, and he has in the past, but he seems to be pretty good with it.

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