

November 9, 2011



An Interview With:

FRAN McCAFFERY

Q. Have you settled on starters for your opener Friday?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Pretty much the same five we started last week.

Q. How is Andrew Brommer doing?

FRAN McCAFFERY: We'll know more today. He was able to go through non-contact on Monday, did a little more yesterday on his own. Probably -- it was a day off for us, so I didn't see him. But he was fine after Monday's practice. The plan was to let him go live and to see how he's doing then. He'll probably do some stuff up and down today. It'll be good to see him back.

Q. Any chance he will play Friday or are you going to wait on that?

FRAN McCAFFERY: You know, if he's okay today -- more so if he's okay tomorrow, after today, and then if we want to go ahead and play him tomorrow, see how he feels Friday. If he feels okay, we're going to let him play, yeah.

Q. When you broke down the exhibition game, what pleased you the most about what you saw?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I think the thing that pleased me the most was the play of Matt Gatens and Eric May. Their consistency of effort was absolutely phenomenal, because if you look at pretty much the rest of the roster, they all played well at times. They all had spurts where they didn't play as well. Bryce was pretty good, but he got in foul trouble. But I mean, everybody had spurts. I put Archie in at the start of the second half; he wasn't very good. I put him back in; he was great. Basabe had some great spurts and he had some spurts where he didn't do much.

Marble, same way. I thought McCabe and Aaron White were pretty solid, but the tone was set by Gatens and May, I thought, at both ends.

And the ability to sustain effort the way they did I think really impacted that game, because it was one of those games, you look at the final score, Iowa wins by 20, that's kind of what was supposed to happen, but if you were there and watched it, that team competed as well as anybody we've ever faced in an exhibition game. They played defense, they fought, they had experience, they made shots. I mean, they had a game plan. They knew what they were doing. And we had to really fight to win that game.

And I think ultimately that's what you want in an exhibition game. You want to play a good team that comes in with a game plan. That's why we don't play those foreign teams anymore. They came over here with no plan, they were just hanging out. These guys came in to win a game and set the tone for their season, and they'd been practicing for six weeks, and they were in shape. I mean, they banged us. They got on the glass. Ten offensive rebounds in the first half. So we had to go in at halftime, we had to make some adjustments, we had to make some improvements. If we gave them ten offensive rebounds in the second half, who knows what would have happened. That was the beauty of that game.

Q. What do you need from Archie? What are you expecting from him?

FRAN McCAFFERY: What I'm expecting from Archie is the same consistency of effort we got from Gatens and May. I don't know if he can do that for 34, 35 minutes. I quite frankly won't expect him to. He won't play that many minutes. But when he's in there -- you saw how he played in the beginning and at the end; he was showing on ball screens, he picked the point guard the one time, he had the monster dunk, he had the great move. When he's moving his feet and he's running

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the floor and he's flying around the court with his length, he's a pretty good player. And he then feels better about himself.

But when he sort of stands up and lays back and his man flashes in front of him and he doesn't run the ball as much and he's late on ball screen shows and things of that nature, then he's not as effective, so he's just got to understand that.

Q. Have you seen enough in practice and the exhibition game to think that your perimeter shooting will be improved from last year?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Oh, there's no question our perimeter shooting is going to be better for a couple different reasons. Obviously Oglesby helps tremendously, and Matt is not starting the season with an injury. Eric May is shooting the ball really well. Marble is going to be improved. But I think the other thing is Cartwright is better. I think McCabe is better. Aaron White is another perimeter jump shooting threat. So you're talking about a lot of different weapons. It's not like we have just a couple two guards that can shoot. We've got some four men that can shoot, we've got three men that can shoot. So that's what's exciting for us.

Q. Will it translate on the free-throw line, too?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, you know, we've got good shooters, we should make free throws. The key for us, obviously you want to make free throws, but the key is to get there. We've got to get to the free-throw line. You've got to do that by driving the ball, which we did. We've got to throw it inside, which we did.

Q. What type of benefits do you see from participating in a tournament like this where the games are set and it's not something like say last year when you went to the Virgin Islands and played basically three games and didn't necessarily know who the opponents were?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, it's obviously much easier in terms of game preparation. We went down to Virgin Islands, we knew we were playing Xavier, that's it. So we had game plans prepared -- we had scouting reports on everybody. It wasn't like we weren't ready for Alabama, but we were ready for Seton Hall, who we never played. So knowing that we play Chicago State is obviously a great benefit.



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Q. Of your real good teams in the past, how many guys have played with that consistency and effort that Gatens and May did, and how many would you expect to play that way every game?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, certainly your starting five. The great teams I've had, at the very least the starting five, but typically your top eight. You know, and I think we're close. I think Cartwright has improved. He's, as we've talked before, a little bit in a different situation because we're asking him to do so much with the ball and then guard somebody who's really good. I mean, starting with Northwest Missouri State, Cooper can play, and he had to get after him, and they were running a million ball screens at him. Bryce, we want you to pressure up on this guy who's a bullet, but by the way, don't get in foul trouble. That's not easy.

So for him, if he's consistently pushing the ball and just moving his feet on defense and staying in his stance when his man doesn't have the ball, for him that would be the key. I think Basabe and Archie will give us that effort; I think McCabe and White will give us that effort; I think so will Marble.

I don't think you'd ever question Marble's effort. Some of his decision making sometimes needs to be discussed with him, but part of what makes him good is the fact that he plays with that reckless abandon. He just keeps coming at you. He's never nervous, he's never worried about the situation, he's never worried if we're on the road, at home, time and score, who's guarding him, if he's an all-American. He doesn't care, he's just coming at you, and you have to love that about him. But then you also have to temper that with, all right, at some point you've got to understand time and score, especially if you're going to play one.

Q. With that reckless abandon that you just mentioned, is that something you're happy to see him come back and play with after coming back from a concussion?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Absolutely. It was amazing because he missed a lot. I think I mentioned to you, the irony of it all is a lot of times when guys are out, they ride the bike, they're in the pool, they're maintaining their cardiovascular situation where it was because he was obviously in great shape before he got hurt. But when you

have a concussion, you get shut down completely. You can't get on an elliptical, a treadmill, you can't get your heart rate up. He just sat there for two weeks. First practice, it was like he's running up and down and never got tired. That's an excellent athlete. He's got the body type physically, he's not going to put weight on. He's lean and fit, but I was really amazed at how easily he came back.

Q. Is he a better shooter now compared to this time last year?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think he's a better shooter, yeah. He's also focusing more inside the line. I think like a lot of guys who think their future -- certainly for him, is a two. I've got to shoot threes, and he is a much better shooter 18 feet and in. He's got a great pull-up game, which as you know is almost a lost art. Everybody drives or they shoot threes. He's got a pull-up game, and with that length of his, it's hard to get to him.

Q. You told Melsahn to change his game in the sense that he's bigger now. He looked the other day like he couldn't make a decision whether to face up a guy and shoot or take it on the dribble. He didn't look decisive.

FRAN McCAFFERY: He was very indecisive, and we talked about that. He is thicker, he is bigger, and when we talked about that directly. Sometimes guys are better at 215 than they are at 235. The interesting thing with him is he's 8.7 percent body fat, so it's not like he's put on bad weight, he's put on good weight. But he was a little slow to decide, more so than I think he was slow in general, if that makes any sense. He was a little indecisive. He caught the ball a couple times with an angle to the rim. Instead of going right to the rim, he felt like he had to make a move and go the other way and finish with his left hand. He got fouled a few times doing that, and that's fine, but he's pretty much just go lay it in. Right off that left shoulder, go in there and windmill it, and I think what we're going to see now is a better understanding of that from him and I think a little more aggressive approach. That's clearly what he needs to do, just get it and go.

Q. You talked a lot about White's versatility. Obviously he showed that. How important is that going to be for him to help you guys immediately?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, for Aaron, it's no big deal. That's kind of how he's always played. For us it's a big deal. That's why we recruited him.

When you have a 6'8" guy who can handle the ball the way he does and can pass the ball the way that he does and can finish in traffic with dunks the way he does but then can also pick and pop, make threes, he screen rolls, he knows how to get open, he reads where his man is, and I think one of the first things that really impressed us when he started working out, especially with he and Josh Oglesby, was how well they understand how to play, both of them. So it's great to have Josh as a 6'6" two who can make threes and understands how to play, can dribble and pass, but then have a 6'8" player, as well, who can play pretty much three, four, five, gives us a lot of versatility. He's also as good as anybody I've ever had at the point of the press, and that's where he'll be most of the time he's on the floor.

Q. What were your impressions of Gabe in the time that he was able to --

FRAN McCAFFERY: You know what, he only played five minutes. He traveled the one time. It was one of those plays where it certainly looked like he traveled when I watched the film -- it didn't look like he traveled, but it looked awkward. And I think two things have to happen: Number one, he has to be able to play through those mistakes because he tends to get down on himself, but then I took him out. I need to be able to let him play through those mistakes, and the question then becomes I have other options now. So for him, if I leave him on the floor, he's going to get more rebounds than everybody else. That's been proven over time since he got here. He can rebound the ball, and he's going to run the floor. So he will be very effective.

The key for me is to be able to give him enough minutes to settle down at the offensive end because those guys were physical, and then game to game, teams will guard you differently in the low post. Some teams double from the opposite post, some teams double off the passer, some teams double from the top, some teams don't double, they just mug you down there. And he's now trying to process all that as it's happening to him.

In the open floor, he's as good as any big man in the country, but as you know, at various times you've got to play half court and you've got to be able to play in traffic. That's where he's having trouble right now.

Q. So it's playing through the mistakes,

is that something that you're kind of stressing with him now over these next few weeks?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, so much of what we've done with him is teaching. We constantly are coaching and teaching him, and it's getting to the point sometimes where in practice we feel like we're talking to him too much. I said, the thing you've got to remember is don't ever confuse criticism and coaching, okay. We're not criticizing everything you do, we're coaching you, we're trying to help you get better, because there might be ten stoppages of play that all involve him. All right, Gabe, do this; Gabe, do that. After a while you start to feel like you're getting picked on.

But he is such a coachable person by nature, he's taking it all in, and he's trying to take it all in, and he's trying so hard to do what we ask him to do and to be a good teammate and to be the best player that he can be, and he wants it now and we want it now. It's going to take a little bit of time. But when he really gets it, you talk about a dominant guy there.

Q. I think you used ten guys in the first eight minutes or something. Is that the idea going forward?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, forward press, we've got to rotate guys, because the press is predicated upon we have to have some respect for the opposition. We're not going to turn them over on the first pass inbounds every time. They're going to get it by us. You have to sprint and recover and rotate and flick and challenge, and sometimes you just get them to play faster and getting more people to handle the ball and giving them less time to run their set plays. So you're dictating more tempo. But that takes a great amount of effort, because when we get it back, even if they score, we want to run it back at you. So we're going to come up to get you, press, sprint, and then sprint back at you, and then again and again and again.

And that's the key, especially with big guys. Some of them tire more quickly than others, and they start fouling. Well, we don't want that. We want to be in the bonus, we don't want them to be in the bonus. So it all has to fit together.

I mean, realistically I couldn't do that as much last year. We didn't have enough bodies to do that, especially in the front court positions. We needed to keep those guys out of foul trouble. Now we do, and that's how we're going to go.

Q. Collectively how do you feel about the group you have coming in?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I'm ecstatic with the class we have coming in, because I think we've addressed the needs of this team as we move forward. We've improved -- we needed size -- we're losing Archie and Brommer. We needed help at the point. We're losing Cartwright, losing Matt. We needed athleticism, so we've addressed every area.

Q. Woodbury, what does he bring? What is he going to bring for you?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, you know, there's a reason that Adam Woodbury is one of the top 25 players in the country, and I think if you watch him as much as I did the last two years, I mean, nobody was at more of his games than I was. As you know, there's a limited number of times I can go see him during the regular season, but in the summer there is no limit. So every time he laced them up for the last two summers, I was there. So I think I have a pretty good feel for his game and who he is as a person.

You rarely get seven-footers to consistently run the way he does. He's as good a running big man as I've seen since I got into this business. And as a result, a lot of good things happen. He's tipping balls in, he's blocking shots, he's contesting shots. Good things are happening for him. So he's got an incredible ability to sustain effort, like we had talked about at the beginning of this press conference with Matt and Eric. You've got a seven-footer who does that, I mean, that is I think every coach's dream.

But more importantly, he's just not a seven-footer who can run. He's a really good basketball player. He can dribble, he can pass, he has feel, he has an understanding. He's been coached. He's smart and he's competitive. So those are the guys that you need to help build your program, and those are the guys you're comfortable saying are going to make an immediate impact, and he will.

Q. How much did you think your effort paid off with him? You said you saw any chance you could --

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, the only chance we had to get him was to outwork everybody else for him because it was obvious to me early on that he was going to have multiple

opportunities. You know, if you are sort of the best offer on the table at the time, you might still get a guy. But if every school in the country wants him, then you have to do something to separate yourself, and we were able to do that.

Q. Did you ever start to feel good, or was it until the very end?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I don't think I ever felt like it was a done deal because of the intensity level that in particular North Carolina put on him this past summer. Not so much the summer before; the summer before they were locked in on Marcus Page. But this summer it was clear that they were reevaluating Adam Woodbury, and after he was MVP of the NBA players camp they turned the heat up and then they were at all of his games. When the premier head coaches in our profession show up at all your games, then they want you. Every time they were there, he played well. It wasn't like he would have a couple lousy games and you're thinking, they're going to come back and they're not sure; they're watching what I'm watching; they're going to offer him, because he was a dominant player at LeBron James camp, one of the top players in the country. He was not out of place. It was not some type of figment of anybody's imagination. He was clearly substantially better than a lot of players who prior to that camp may have been rated higher than him, and that's, I think, a credit to how hard he works. I mean, he just outworks people, and he's already in better shape.

I mean, I think you look at him and Mike Gesell in particular, they are two of the hardest working players I've ever recruited. They're always in the gym. They're always in the weight room. And they have an incredible desire to be great. Not good; they know they're good. They want to be great. And I think any coach would want to get their hands on somebody like that.

Q. They played together this summer so they already know each other a little bit?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, they know each other well and liked each other. I think that's important. A lot of times guys play with each other, they don't necessarily like each other, and these two guys, I think, recognize how the other one approaches it.

Ultimately when a guy's career is on the line, he wants to go and be with people who are equally motivated and are going to make good decisions in their lives so that they're with people

that they think they can win a championship with. If you look at Mike Gesell, if you're Adam Woodbury and say, well, what better point guard could I play with, I mean, this guy, all he does is win. He was a player of the year in Nebraska, two-time state champion. You're talking about Adam has a 3.8, Mike has over a 4.0 GPA. Mike is probably going to be valedictorian of his senior class. You're talking about the total package in both of these guys. But just consummate winners.

Again, it's consistency of approach to everything that they do. The thing about Mike as a point guard, it was interesting because in the summer a lot of times I think people -- because he's such a great shooter, people thought he was sort of an undersized two because Marcus had the ball a lot. And a lot of times they would switch and Mike would take the ball and Marcus would go to the two because Marcus is a great shooter, but the reality is if you watch Mike Gesell, his future is at the point. When he makes the NBA, it'll be as a point guard, and he's going to have the ball and he's going to be making plays and making decisions because he can think, and he's got one of the most uncanny abilities to put a bad play out of his mind. I mean, it's like it never happened. If he makes a mistake, it never happened, and he goes and makes four good ones in the next minute and a half, and that's what the great ones do.

Q. How do he and Anthony complement each other?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, the thing I love about Anthony is he is a lock-down defender, but the thing about Anthony is Anthony can shoot the ball. Anthony has got three-point range. Anthony can get to the rim and dunk on your head, and that's gives us the flexibility to play those guys together. We could play three small ones, I could play Gesell, Ingram and Clemmons together, and you'd say, well, that would be a smallish team. You'd basically have three 6'2" guys, but those two guys, actually all three of them, are incredibly powerful athletically. They all rebound, they're all just incredibly tough guys. They just compete.

I think that's what separates Anthony Clemmons from some other people. You look at him first and say, boy, he's this talented player, but he's a gamer. We needed that. We needed help in the backcourt, we needed athleticism, and we needed that kind of toughness. But we also needed another guy that could make shots, and

that's what he does.

Ingram, he's going to score more in transition. He is phenomenal at attacking the rim, plays above the rim. He's an absolute power pack. He's an assassin defensively. He will just take you right out of the game.

When you look at a guy who's always on teams that win, and you look at all of the players that we're talking about here, their teams win all the time, there's a reason for that, and Patrick is that way. I have tremendous respect for his high school coach, who I've known since he was at Butler and I was at Notre Dame. He was afraid that nobody at our level would step up and recognize what he thought was a foregone conclusion, that this guy is a bona fide high major player. Ironically when I went to see him, I went to the game to see somebody else. That's why I was there. I wasn't even there to see him. I didn't even know who he was. And that day he was the best player on the floor, and his team won. They weren't supposed to win, but they did. Huge crowd, Conseco Fieldhouse, the whole setup, Indiana state tournament, all that fanfare. He was the best player on the floor that day, and that's what happens a lot of times with him, and that's what I love about him. He's going to come here hungry, thankful for the opportunity, wanted to play in the Big Ten, and he's going to get that chance.

Q. You had to come in and just get players right off the bat when you first got here. Do you feel like this is probably the foundation of a class that can do what you want them to do, whereas the other ones, not dismissing anybody you have, but they're players, this is what you --

FRAN McCAFFERY: The hardest thing when you take over a program today, me or anybody else, it's open season -- I've said this before. It's open season on the players that are on your team. Everybody starts recruiting the players that are here and the players that you signed. It's not legal, it's not ethical, but that's what happens. So you end up spinning your wheels. You have to re-recruit the players that are here and then you have to re-recruit the players that somebody else signed. I never saw Cody Larson play, and I find myself having to re-recruit the guy, and he's got to decide if he likes me. Same thing with Ben Brust, same thing with Devyn Marble. It became evident early on that the two guys -- this is no disrespect to the guys that didn't come, but it was obvious that two guys were a better fit here and a better fit for

me, no disrespect to those guys at all. But we got the two guys that were going to help us.

But it takes a lot of time. So there was a lot of time there. I had to go try to see what Aaron Fuller was going to do, I've got to fly out to Arizona. There's a wasted day. He was gone. In his mind he was gone, but he didn't say that, so what are you going to do? I only had two coaches, it's me and Andrew Francis, so you're trying to maximize the hours in the day.

Okay, well, if we don't get a head start on Woodbury, Gesell and that group, we're not going to get them, either, so a lot of times you find yourself spinning your wheels in year one, falling behind in year two, and you don't get the guys you want in year two, now you're in year three, and they're beating a drum on you. I mean, that's how it works.

So what we tried to do was we needed a point guard, okay, we absolutely needed a point guard, and we were fortunate enough that we got not only a great one in Bryce Cartwright but an even better person because you don't always have a chance to be sure about that when you're recruiting somebody that you've known for a week or two weeks. The first time I ever met Bryce Cartwright he got off the plane for his recruiting visit. He's got to decide if he likes me and I like him, and that was easy for me because he's such a great person.

But Basabe we knew. I thought he was going to stay at Siena because my assistant got the job. But he said immediately, "I'm out. If you're not there, I'm out." And the Big East was coming in. I said, well, if the Big East is coming in, then we're coming in. So at least we knew Basabe was a character guy who could play.

But we weren't going to waste scholarships after that on guys that we were unsure about. We needed a big guy and there are big guys out there, let's go get somebody. Well, those guys end up being wasted scholarships. They never pan out. They never help your program. So we would sit down, and we managed what we felt we could manage in terms of where we were going to spend our time. And clearly Woodbury and Gesell were the focal point, as much as anybody in that senior class, the minute we got here. And quite frankly we went after Marcus Paige pretty hard, too, at that time. But that was easy; he's right up the road. Woodbury and Gesell are a little bit harder, but in state. Mike,

of course, was across the river.

But we felt like we had to make our mark in this class if we were going to be able to build this program the way we wanted to do it.

I couldn't be happier. I have to tell you, as hard as we worked with those two guys, when they both said yes and they picked us over some pretty impressive institutions and some fabulous coaches. That's as good as I've felt for a long time in this business. And then it was incumbent upon me to go out and get some other guys that filled in. Obviously the guy that I can't talk about, he committed first, and he's going to be tremendous, as well.

But we needed another point guard and we needed athleticism and we needed some toughness defensively, because you know how I want to play. So I feel really good about this class and how they complement what we've already brought in, and that's how you build a team.

Q. How long after you got hired did you offer Adam?

FRAN McCAFFERY: It was about a week roughly. I remember I drove up to Chicago to see Ben Brust on a Saturday morning shortly after I was hired because I think right when I was hired then it was the Final Four. That's a dead period. Because he was saying, why aren't you coming up right away? Kids get their nose out of joint. Okay, why aren't you coming like right now? Well, because it's a violation to come right now. I'll come when I can get there. So I did that.

And on the way back, I was on the phone with, at the time, Jeff Vanderloo was a coach, not Raz; Raz, who's the coach now, is his brother, and I spoke with Adam that day. And then shortly thereafter he came up for the spring football game, and then I spent time with he and his parents and we went from there.

Q. Mike Gesell, you offered him about the same time?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Right, as soon as I got here, I talked to Van Coleman a lot about the players in the state. I got opinions from a lot of different people. It didn't take too long to figure out that Mike was a key guy. I never offer anybody based on anybody's recommendation. I want to go see them. So I flew up there and watched him work out and offered him there. That was a no-brainer.

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