

January 4, 2011



An interview with:

COACH McCAFFERY

COACH McCAFFERY: I thought coming into the game just watching them on film, that one of the keys for us, and I think for anybody against this team that I have so much respect for, is the start of the game is going to be critical.

I thought we came out with a pretty good frame of mind. We came out with the energy that you would expect, and we got the lead. We were able to play from ahead for a good portion of the game.

Obviously, the part of the game that concerned me is when we had a stretch where it seemed like we couldn't score. Then our defense fell off just enough. Sullinger was killing us, and our rotations weren't as good as they had been.

I think the key for us in that situation is to kind of keep it at 6 or, 7, 8 as opposed to letting it get to double digits.

But, I'm proud of my guys and how they fought. This is as good a team as I've watched in a long time. They've got a number of different weapons. I haven't seen a freshman like this guy in a long time. They've have done a real good job with him, and it's the reason they're ranked number two.

We had an opportunity and a shot at them. We fought them, and hopefully we learned and got better.

Q. Melsahn played nearly as well as Sullinger tonight. Is this a big step forward in what he did tonight?

COACH McCAFFERY: I think what you're seeing with Melsahn, obviously proud of him in how he played. But I think you're seeing him blossom in terms of his versatility. There is so much more in there than I think he even realizes.

He can put it on the deck. He can shoot the ball 17, 18 feet.

We're using him off the dribble now. That is only going to impact our ability to go on the road and score, and score against the quality teams in this league. Because when the game started, they were really getting after us. Especially with Eric May out they were getting after Marble and Bryce, that's why Jarryd and Melsahn did so well in the first half, because they had the opportunity. Now with those two guys know what they're doing, it makes it that much harder for us to guard it.

Q. With Eric, I guess with the injury you expect him out for a while?

COACH McCAFFERY: You know what, he's got a pulled groin. We thought he'd be okay. We really -- it happened in the Illinois game. We had some time. We thought we had it under control.

He tried to go yesterday and he was about 50, 60%. Of course he wanted to go. In those situations I defer to Josh, and Josh said we've got too much season left. If we sit him for another few days we should have him ready. Sometimes these things never go away completely. But by giving him tonight and a few more days, I think we stand a better chance to have him at full strength the rest of the way.

Q. (Indiscernible) why was how they played inside so effective? Were you surprised how effective they were able to be inside against you?

COACH McCAFFERY: No, I think it was a combination of things. Number one, they both have really been coming. I'm using them more. They're more confident. It's in there. They have it.

But I think it's a function of how they were guarding us early. So there was a little bit more opportunity for them to have some space and then subsequently we kept going to them. We got a

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foul early on Sullinger, so we kept going to see if we could get a few more out of him.

Q. The offensive drought has been a bug for you all season. Is that something they'll have to grow out of with experience?

COACH McCAFFERY: Again, we don't have a lot of depth there. We kind of have some guys that we're counting on and they know that. So I'm okay with some droughts. I'm not okay with a couple of goofy turnovers we had there.

In the first half when we didn't score, we got offensive rebounds. In the second half when we didn't score, they scored and then we were turning the ball over. So we've got to shore up our defense and make sure we come down and get a shot. A good player, taking a good shot for him. So not only do we have a few bad turnovers, we had some guys taking shots that were (indiscernible) for them.

Q. Do you think this is the best 40 minutes you've seen out of your guys in one game this year?

COACH McCAFFERY: I don't know about that. I think we've played better. I think considering who we played against, I think it was a pretty good 40 minutes.

You know, I've said a lot of things the last couple of days about Ohio State. We've had a about a week to watch film, and to see them just carve good teams up and the things that they're able to do with the various weapons that they have and the experience and youth that they have, they have great chemistry. There is a reason why they're 15-0.

So I think our guys understood how important every possession was for us to beat this team. And that's what's upsetting about that one stretch where we just came apart, and I think didn't have the same intensity level and concentration.

You know, we'll go back and beat ourselves up. Should we have taken another timeout in there? Should we have taken another one? Should we have taken it earlier? Should we have run a set play? Because we weren't running our sets, we weren't running our motion effectively in that period.

The rest of the game we were really good. We got really good looks at it. We didn't have a ton of turnovers. We had 16 turnovers or four or five of them in that stretch right there, and that you can't have. You've got to get a crack at it when you come down.

Q. What is your position on moral victories? I think some fans will look at this and say progress. How do you view that?

COACH McCAFFERY: You know, with the way I address that with the team was very simply this: We're not satisfied, okay. Am I proud of the effort? Absolutely. You know, did we get better tonight? We got better tonight. And we're getting closer and closer to being where we have to be to where we can beat a team of this caliber. So from that standpoint, it's good but we're not satisfied.

Q. An acceptable job then on Sullinger?

COACH McCAFFERY: For about 34 minutes, 35 minutes. He got away from us there. It's such a tough cover because he's essentially unstoppable at 6'9", 280, with his skillset. And he's got so many three-point shooters around him, so if you double, you sort of pick your poison.

So we didn't double and did a pretty good job on him, especially Melsahn and Jarryd in the first half. Then we started going and that puts a lot of pressure on your rotations.

This is as good a passing team as I've seen in a long time. You look at their assist/turnover numbers for the season, I haven't seen them like that, like 100 over. You just don't see numbers like that. That's a function of a terrific freshman point guard and then a lot of experience: Fifth-year senior, senior, Buford's a junior starter, Lauderdale's a senior. So they don't beat themselves. You have to go beat them. And we came close to doing that, but we need to do better.

Q. How impressed were you to see the team come back with that 16-0 run with a three-point play?

COACH McCAFFERY: It's something I've come to expect from them. We've got a lot of heart, we've got a lot of character. I've said this from the day I got here that I love these kids. They give me everything they have. Yeah, I get frustrated. They get frustrated. Everything's new. But somehow, some way they're going to keep coming, so is I'm proud of them for that.

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