

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

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Fran McCaffery Men's Basketball



Q. How much did you know about Chris Street when you got here, and kind of what have you learned?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I knew a lot. I watched him play and thought he was tremendous. Just watching from afar, would watch them on TV. He was so big and athletic. He had that combination. He was all over the place, but he had skill. He's my kind of player. I always love those kinds of guys with that kind of length. They play with that kind of energy and athleticism.

The way he impacted the game, it was amazing to watch. It sort of infected the rest of the team in a very positive way.

I went on the Nike trip, and we didn't get invited to that stuff a lot in those days when you're the low major coach. I was at Lehigh. So I go and got paired up with Coach Davis at a dinner. He was terrific, easy to talk to. I knew who he was and know him.

He said, hey, you know, we just got this commitment from this young kid. In those days, that was rare. We took commitments from -- he was like a sophomore. We were just trying to get seniors to say yes in those days. He said, yeah, I think the kid's going to be good, came to our camp, told me the story.

So I made a point to watch him, and I remember hearing that he was killed and saying it's just awful. I can't imagine, as a parent, getting that phone call. What it meant to the program at the time -- they were playing so well. They had a really good team. Then I used to see Gary Close on the road a lot, and Gary and I became friends. We would talk about it. It really affected him. And I remember saying, how's the family? And stuff like that.

But since I got here, I've gotten to know Mike and Patty really well. The golf outing is something that I think is unique to our school in the sense that we fill up the morning session, the afternoon session, all of our players come back. And the commitment from businesses and the community that donate stuff for that event have been doing so for a long time. Obviously, endowed a scholarship in Chris' name. I

think that was really important To the Street family. They come back and play in the golf outing, his sisters and his uncle, obviously his dad.

But there's times where I'll look up in the stands, and there's Mike and Patty sitting there. They come around a lot. I went to a concert over at the state fair, and I know where they set up shop. So I go visit them. It means a lot to me, and it means a lot to our program and to our players that they come here every year to present the Chris Street Award, which is the most prestigious award we give out at the end of each year. It's not necessarily to the best player. It's to the person that most exemplifies the qualities that Chris did. It means a lot to our guys, and they know and understand that.

The fact that we're going to honor his memory the way we are tomorrow is special. It speaks to who we are as a program, as an institution. And I always use the words we're a family, and that's what you do. You remember, and you honor. It will be good for everybody involved.

Q. Do you worry about your players trying too hard under these circumstances while trying to please everybody?

FRAN McCAFFERY: No, I don't. I think they'll be very professional about it. I think they'll play hard. They'll play a little hard. They're playing a team that's 18-2. They're ranked third. To me, there's only one way to play regardless of what else is going on. You play one way. You play as hard as you possibly can for as long as you can, and you do that with an intellectual approach to the game as well. So it's not just physical, it's physical and mental, because anything short of that, you're going to get beat by a team of that caliber.

Q. Talk about that. Playing hard in a game, why hasn't that happened in the last month or two?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I wouldn't say the guys aren't playing hard. We haven't played as well sometimes. We've played against some teams that have played better. But I think the kids are playing hard.

Q. How cognizant are you of Jordan's workload? Are you trying to mitigate that?

FRAN McCAFFERY: You get to a certain point of the season, like we're not going for three hours. We have

an 11 a.m. game tomorrow. We're not going to go that long today. Yesterday we went hard, short. I don't really think about that. I will assess how he's playing and is he tired during the games, and if he's tired, we'll take him out. If he doesn't want to come out, and I think he's perfectly capable of playing 40 minutes if he had to.

I've said this before, but four media time-outs per half, you've got halftime, sometimes there's fouls, sometimes coaches take time-outs, and Jordan's in pretty good shape and a pretty tough kid. He's more than capable of playing the minutes we're giving him. I'm not even worried about that.

Q. How impressive is it that he's shooting 45 percent on threes even though everybody's scouting report is don't let Bohannon get loose with three?

FRAN McCAFFERY: That's right. That's hard when you know what their scouting report focus is. Stay on him. Don't help off him. Pick him up early. Stay up on ball screens, all that kind of stuff. But he's pretty crafty. He dealt with that in high school, and he dealt with that on AAU circuit. Obviously, bigger, stronger, better caliber athletes now, but sort of the same concept.

He's developed ways to get open. I think the tendency is, when you're a really good shooter, to force and just jack. He doesn't do that because, if he did, he wouldn't be shooting 45 percent. So he'll wait, and it will come eventually.

Q. How difficult is it when you have players that are, say, on the bench 7 through 10, and one night one of them's good, and the next night they're inconsistent, and somebody else is the same way. How difficult is it to kind of set a rotation and stick with it?

FRAN McCAFFERY: It's hard. You're right. It's hard because the one thing I've said to you guys from the beginning when you've asked me those questions is the only thing that I can do is try to institute the best case of fairness possible. So, okay, we're going to bury this guy because we think this guy's better. Okay. Well, then all of a sudden, that guy doesn't play well, and you put the other guy in and he plays well, so what do you do now?

So I'm just trying to stay with guys that I think have the ability and continue to give them opportunity. The struggle with that is some guys are like I'm playing 17 minutes, I want to play more. I think I'm better. I should be getting 26 minutes. I should be getting 32 minutes. And that's the thing that every coach has to deal with and every player has to deal with who's not starting. You get a guy who's not starting and he's

playing 17 minutes a game, maybe he thinks he should be starting. That's not uncommon.

I'm going to keep going at guys that I think have ability and I think have prepared and worked hard enough to deserve an opportunity to play in that game. So I'll keep putting him in. I won't just give up on a guy. I might move a guy ahead of another guy. That's bound to happen, especially when you're losing some games like we have. You're going to make some adjustments.

We've changed the starting lineup a few times, and some guys have gotten a few more minutes than others, and that's just based upon what we think should happen in this game, and we'll see how it goes from here.

Q. We've asked you about what you've struggled with. Has that changed at all in your mind? Have the things you're struggling with changed?

FRAN McCAFFERY: They've changed. In some cases, they haven't changed enough. But I'm not seeing a disregard for what we're trying to get them to know and understand and execute on the floor. They're trying. We're not there yet. I think we're getting closer. We'll keep grinding and stay positive with them.

You don't want to just start screaming and yelling and blaming. That's not getting anybody anywhere. So we stay positive and keep showing film. I think you get a little more in situations like this from encouragement than you do anything negative.

Q. You get to compete against a team that's better than it was last season and lost one of the best players in the country in Caleb Swanigan. What makes them so good, that here they are giving up 60 points a game in Big Ten play. They're one of the top scoring teams in the Big Ten. They have veterans, but they also have youth. What makes them so good?

FRAN McCAFFERY: They play together. They make the extra pass. They share it on the break. When Haas is in the game, they throw it in to him. They go to him. They run good stuff, and they have counters to it, which makes it really hard to guard. You can't just say, okay, when they come down and they line up like this, they're going to run that. Well, they might, but they might run four other things that are similar to that.

But at the end of the day, it's not what they run, it's who's running it. Vince Edwards is playing as well as anybody in college basketball right now. Haas has emerged with Biggie gone. He's a handful. And you've got a 7'3" guy backing him up with 57 shot blocks.

But then it's the other experienced guys. Mathias, one of the best defenders in the league, phenomenal three-point shooter, so's Vince Edwards, and so's P.J. Thompson, who's a terrific point guard. So I've just mentioned a bunch of guys, and their leading scorer, I haven't even talked about. He's Carsen Edwards. He's a sophomore. He's terrific. They get good contribution from the bench. They only have two losses.

The thing you always say about a team like that is you've got to beat them. They're not going to come in here and turn it over. They're not going to come in and take bad shots. That's why they're ranked third.

So we have to execute, and we have to put two halves together, which, quite honestly, we haven't really done against good teams. We've played terrific sometimes one half versus another. And even in some of our better victories, we get down 20 to Illinois, but we won. Colorado, we blew two leads and won. You've got to play both halves against that team.

Q. How do you coach a team to be consistent? Obviously, inconsistency has been the problem. Is it just a matter of keeping at it every day?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, it's constant reminders. For us, because of our style, we play fast. We go. I turn my guys loose. Sometimes we're not making the best decisions. There have been times when we've had more turnovers than we should. But I always say that sometimes a bad shot is just as bad as a bad turnover.

So you have guys that are wanting to make a play and wanting to do something positive, and it turns out negative. So they're not trying to make a mistake. We had those the other night. I think Cordell Pemsil is a great player, but he shoots a step-back jumper in the corner the other night, and that's not what we need right there. I'm not picking on him because he's been really good. It's understand to do what you do and everybody else do what you do. And then stay together.

If we're in motion, we're moving the ball. If we're in sets, we're setting good screens, we're executing, we're looking at the options. Every play's got options. You're reading the defense on those options. And sometimes nothing's open. Okay, now what do you do? Now you've got to move the ball. Now you've got to drive and kick. Recognize are they switching? All of those things. Are we running? Are we getting anything out of our running game, or are we just running around?

So sometimes, all right, we're playing fast. We've got to slow it down a little. And veteran teams understand that a little bit better. So to answer your question, we just continue to talk about those kinds of things

repeatedly and then show it to them. And sometimes a guy says, I thought I had him. I thought it was a good shot. I thought there were five seconds on the shot clock, and maybe there was nine or ten, so we could have moved it a few more passes.

The other thing is we're having an off night. Can we pound the glass? Can we get some of them back? We have done that in some games, and we have not done that in some games. So hopefully, we'll understand that.

Q. Is it similar on the defensive end?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, the defensive end, we're going to change defenses. We always do. When you get into this league, the teams are so good, and the players are so good, you've really got to be locked in. You're locked in collectively. We're man. This is how we're playing our man. We're in zone. This is how we're playing zone. So who's in the game, and who's where? What are they going to do? They're going to have their shooters on the floor. If they don't, okay, you're going to play that guy a little differently than the other guy.

That's what we thought. When you talk about being connected, it's knowing and understanding, okay, who's on the floor right now for them? Is he a 45 percent three-point shooter and he's a 22 percent shooter? Okay, we don't completely disregard him, but you'd better know where he is, stuff like that. That sometimes takes a little longer. Sometimes it happens pretty easily.

Q. Do you pay close attention to how guys interact in huddles in games, like what they're saying to each other, body language?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Normally, when there's a time-out, they come to the bench. We meet as a staff, and the players have an opportunity to talk then. By the time I come into the huddle, there really isn't any talking at that point. That said, I don't ever want the guys to feel like they can't say, hey, Coach, or -- or hey, Coach, and say something to their teammate because, when they're doing that, it means they're thinking. It means they're trying to process the information that we gave them. So you encourage that.

But you can't have four people talking in a huddle because you're not going to get anywhere. Same for my staff. My staff has the opportunity to talk to the players all the time, but once we're in that huddle, they need to hear one voice. So that's how we try to do it.

Q. How confident are you in your point guards behind Jordan? Are you getting what you want out of those guys?

FRAN McCAFFERY: You look at someone like Maishe. He didn't play much last year. Kind of brought him in as a wing forward, long and athletic and got a great stroke. Now he's playing the point. So he's trying to understand get us into our stuff, when to be aggressive, when to play with reckless abandon, when not to. He's really trying, and he's really studying it. So I'm thrilled with him.

Now, could he be better? Sure. But considering where he started from, considering in the summer and in the fall, we didn't really anticipate him being in that role.

Same with Brady. Brady was playing great. Then we tried to make him a point guard, and it disrupted his ability to go score the ball. So now we try to move him back over there, get him going again, and let Maishe play that spot. So those are things that happen when guys get hurt or sick.

Q. How do you coach against impatience, as you mentioned, with Cordell, trying to take a shot he probably shouldn't take? And other guys too, when they get down, they get restless?

FRAN McCAFFERY: It's ongoing. It sort of never stops. It's not, okay, we're now going to remind them that was a bad shot. We try to make sure that you know and understand what's a good shot for you, what's a bad shot for you. Okay, what's a bad shot based on the time and score? What's a good shot based on time and score? Because if everybody understands that, then you're typically coming down getting good shots. When to go, when not to go.

So you come down the floor and you're playing against a pack line defense, you don't put your head down and go. You've got to screen and move and get cutters. Now when you get it, now you've got some space, now you go. So you'd like to think that, after we explain that and see a lot of clips, you're not going to come down and put your head down and go against five guys that are sitting right here. I think our guys understand that.

Q. What do you think of the transfer rule, the proposed transfer rule? I believe it's that the players will be able to play basically right away when they transfer.

FRAN McCAFFERY: If that happens, that would not be good. That would not be a good thing.