

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

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Fran McCaffery Men's Basketball



Q. Michigan State the way they play, the transition game and so forth, break it down, in a nut shell, what makes them particularly good at what they do in those regards?

FRAN McCAFFERY: They run on both makes and misses. A lot of times it's off your bad shots and turnovers. That's when they're particularly effective. But they will score right on top of your baskets.

It's nothing complicated other than everybody runs as hard as they can every time and they push it hard every time, and they're committed to it. So it's a credit to coach Izzo and to the players to consistently do that. Ward and Winston are especially good.

So it starts when you have a really good post player and a really good point guard. But their wings are flying, then they go into motion or call a set. But you've got to get back or they're going to get easy baskets, plain and simple.

Q. From a Big Ten standpoint, are there much teams do at this point that surprises you, or are you guys so familiar with each other these days?

FRAN McCAFFERY: No, especially when you have coaches that have been at the same place for a long time. They have a certain philosophy and they play a certain style. They might make a few adjustments based on personnel, whatever personnel they have. But typically guys like Tom recruit who they want to play the way he wants to play. There's complete buy-in, typically, with what he brings in.

Q. What did you think of your shot selection up there last time?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, it was good at times and it was really bad at times. When it's really bad, they go on runs. You know, there's nothing complicated there. That's exactly what happens. You look at our game and everybody else's game.

Q. They made around three threes and scored 90 points.

FRAN McCAFFERY: It was all a transition off of what you're talking about, maybe a bad turnover here, a bad shot there. Now, we did get in a little bit of foul trouble

in that game, so we were a little bit tall, that's why we went zone. They heard us in the zone posting smaller people. You know, there wasn't much we could do about that other than pack it in a little bit more.

Q. What's different in your team from then to now?

FRAN McCAFFERY: We're just further along in the process, that's all. You've got opportunities for Joe Wieskamp to grow, Connor to grow in particular. They're the new guys. But even Luka, he went through a stretch where he was hurt. But the more experience he gets, the better he gets. I think you've seen Isaiah continue to grow as a player. In this stretch, he's really taken his game to another level.

Q. You've faced a team that's such a big rebounding team and so good in transition. Do you have to be really selective in going for the offensive rebounds in terms of deciding whether to get back?

FRAN McCAFFERY: That is a legitimate concern for everybody that plays against this team, you're right. You know they're going to the glass. So it stands to reason that we should go to the glass. But it starts with not settling for a bad shot to begin with. Can you get a good shot to begin with, and you have a higher percentage of it going in.

But we have to pound the glass because they're going to pound the glass. They send four a lot of times. You know they're going to run on makes or misses anyway, it's just got to be an all-out sprint. You can't jog. You can't back-pedal, you can't run to your man. You've got to pick somebody up. You've got to stop the ball. You've got to fight the post. Then if you do all that and they still have 25 seconds to run whatever they're going to run with the same guys, so I don't think it's going to get any easier.

Q. On that note, students are getting in for free. How much can home-court advantage, I guess, help when you're facing a team like this? You need that extra energy?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Anytime this place has been full, it's, obviously, good for the home team. For us, we've responded over the years to a raucous Carver crowd. We appreciate it.

I always talk about sometimes it's over break and it's

not full, but it's still pretty impressive. We still get a bunch of people that come and support us. It was like that when we were up there. It was full and crazy, and that's the way it is. That's the way it was at Northwestern. It's the way it's going to be in a lot of places we go to from here. You want the same thing when they come to our place.

Q. You've coached a lot of cerebral players over the years. Scholarship and non-scholarship. In what way is he maybe similar and then different from a mental perspective or how he presents himself?

FRAN McCAFFERY: The thing with Nicholas that makes him unique is the relentless approach that he brings to the game. He's a skilled guy who has become really cerebral. When he first got here, I think everybody had the assumption that that's who he was, and he really wasn't. He was a high school center with some low-post game.

What he did was he took the red-shirt year to get stronger, and he took the red-shirt year to work on his jumpshot, and he watched film and he became a more sophisticated basketball player. It became evident to him that he's going to have to play any of the wing positions or maybe the post.

Because at first when you look at him, he's 178 pounds, he's not going to play the post. But he's long, and he blocks shots and he's cerebral and he's active. So maybe he can, especially with a lot of teams downshifting to smaller lineups. So for him, you watch a transformation of a guy who was a really good high school center to become a really good college basketball player and impact the game in a variety of different ways. Sometimes it's 3-point shooting, sometimes it's his hustle plays, sometimes it's being a really cerebral defender and helping on ball screens and communicating to his teammates where to go and what to do because of his experience. So ultimately for him, for us, he's a winning player.

Q. A difficult transition for somebody. He's really good at that, 6'7", and as you mentioned, skinny as a rail. But to change his game.

FRAN McCAFFERY: You don't see that much, you're right. You do not. You don't see guys come in and say, okay, he's going to become a great shooter. It doesn't happen very often. The guys improving. He didn't shoot a lot of threes in high school, obviously. But he became a really good 3-point shooter. There's been times where he's blown a game open all by himself. The Iowa State game, for example, he was phenomenal in that game here. But that's not the only time he's done that.

So he's able to come into the game off the bench,

which he prefers to do, and understand what our team needs at any particular time. Whether it be activity level defensively or offense, you know. Sometimes he'll figure out, hey, we're going to start running some set plays. He executes really well. He knows where to go. Somebody forgets where to go, he tells them where to go. Just, a guy that you constantly appreciate and never take for granted.

Q. There were some games last year where Jordan maybe carried the lone offense at times, but he seems to be very comfortable. He can get his own shot when he needs it, not really hunting. How much is his leadership and maturity this year benefit the team?

FRAN McCAFFERY: The thing about him is I don't have a problem with him hunting shots. I really don't. He's always done it. If you watched him in high school, he did it in the AAU circuit. If you're a good shooter, it's okay to hunt shots. It's okay to take shots, what might seemingly be an inopportune time on the shot clock or maybe a little deeper than you think would be a good shot. Well, it's a good shot for him. It's not a good shot for most people. It's not a good shot for most people in that situation.

So I kind of give him the freedom to make his own decisions there, and you run the risk that he might miss four in a row. But he might make seven in a row. So I just let him go. He's not a selfish guy.

You look at his assist numbers. He knows we've got to get the ball to Cook. He pushes it on the break. Throws it in there. Throws it on the wing to our shooters. So I just think for him you're seeing a guy that's now a junior, and he's seeing different defenses, maybe, as a sophomore, in the beginning than he did as a freshman. He's just a really good player who is figuring stuff out.

Q. Have you ever had a freshman as well-rounded as Joe?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah. They're rare. But I've been lucky. I've had a few. I've been doing this a while, so. I had Daren Queenan who scored 2700 points for me in his freshman year. He was 18 or 19. He was dominant. Now as an assistant, I had Laphonso Ellis and Troy Murphy. Troy Murphy gets 30 in his first Big East game on the road. Those guys were lottery picks.

So I've had a few. Since I've been here, probably the most polished of any freshman, Marble was great, but he was a skinny freshman, Aaron White, same thing. I didn't have Uthoff as a freshman. We had some really good guys.

But his complete skill set and his ability to impact the

game, I always say in various locations on the floor. He might blow a game open with his 3-point shot. It might be drives to the basket. Get and-ones, we post him up. He gives you tough baskets, but he also can move his feet laterally and defend. He rebounds. He rebounds in traffic. He has a keen understanding of time and score and what we need and what we don't need. He doesn't do anything crazy ever.

So I think the thing with him is he's probably going to keep getting better because he's a worker and he's really smart. So it will be fun to watch.

Q. How would you define Winston's impact?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, he's one of the best point guards in the country. You look at his numbers, they're phenomenal. He's a gamer. He's a competitor. He, a lot of times in games, you look at the score at the end of the game, and you're thinking well, that was an easy win for them, and it wasn't an easy win for them. They did things at various points in the game that caused the result to be the score that it was.

A lot of times he's right in the middle of that. He'll make a big three in a two-point game or a four-point game. He'll take it from 6 to 13 because he makes a steal and a three, and he drives and pitches it to the rim and makes three or four plays in a row that maybe they get lost when you look back. But at that juncture in the game, he's the guy that's making the winning plays, and that's one of the reasons why they've won 20 straight league games.

Q. Michigan State winning 20 straight games sounds crazy?

FRAN McCAFFERY: It does, Mike, because I don't have the stats in front of me, but it stands to reason, ten of them would probably be on the road. That's hard to do. Everybody wants to beat them. They're going to get your best when you play them. They seem to be able to fight it off.

Q. I can't remember them having a mediocre team to look back on. But this one seems to be unique. You look statistically in almost every category they are at or near the top of the list. Is it just every single player playing the position the right way?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, they have really good players. I think a lot of times you look at a team like this and say, well, they lost two guys that went in the top 10. They're going to drop. But Xavier Tillman is really good. He comes off the bench for them, and the key is he's willing to come off the bench for them.

He was a big-time recruit. Everybody wanted him. He went there. He didn't start his freshman year. He didn't start his sophomore. A lot of guys leave. No. I'll

come off the bench and we'll win. If you need me to play 34 minutes, I will. If you need me to play 18 minutes, I will.

Like I said before, they got complete buy-in on whoever they have. Nobody really recruited Goins. Seems like he gets 15 rebounds every night. So they understand what they can do, and they actually get it to perfection. There is no slippage, no excuses, and you either do it or you don't play. So those guys do it, and that's why they've been successful.

Q. Nick Ward was 10-of-10 in the last game. What are the lessons there?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, again, a lot of it was in transition, and some of it was on the glass. Some of it was against the zone, again, against a smaller guy. But 10 for 10 is still pretty impressive.

With him, you've got to fight him the whole time. You look at his numbers, 18 a game, very rarely you see a guy average 18 a game that plays 24 minutes a game.

So when he's in there, he's sprinting and they go to him. So if you're jogging and you're not ready, he's going to kill you. It's not complicated.

Q. Anybody have a sprained ankle in practice?

FRAN McCAFFERY: That's probably a good question. Thankfully, no.