

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

Monday, October 16, 2017

Fran McCaffery Men's Basketball



Q. What kind of experience do you think you gained in Europe, and how do you think you can apply it to this year?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think the European experience was tremendous in so many ways. I've done this a number of times, and we've done it here, so I kind of know what to expect. I think the competition that we played against was a little better in the past than it was this year. It's always a function of when you go, which was always a function of when we start class. So you know, they did the best job they could of putting some teams together for us to play against.

But I think the biggest benefit was that we got our young guys together with our veterans and had an opportunity to practice 10 times in addition to the two hours a week that we're given by the NCAA which started in June.

By the time we came back, I felt like we were a veteran club, and I think that was the plan, at least that was the hope, that we would get to that point. We had a lot of players play really well individually, and quite frankly they should have. We were superior to the teams we played against, but we did what we should have done to teams that we were better than.

I think being together for 11 days, and we were in four different foreign countries, we did some educational things, we had some opportunities to explore and come together, so all in all, it was an incredibly valuable experience for any team that's trying to grow.

Q. What are realistic expectations for Garza and Nunge?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Very high. Both of them are tremendous players. They're incredibly versatile. They come ready. It's not like we have to develop them. They're both really good players. They have versatile skill sets. They can dribble, pass and shoot. When you have two 6'11" guys that can do all those things, then you have high expectation for them, and they're going to be right in the middle of it.

Q. You've got 13 players that could potentially see long minutes. What is the challenge in finding a

balance with so much depth?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, it's not going to be easy. There's no question about that. So you know, you just try to institute a sense of fairness the best way that you can. You try to identify who have been the guys that have elevated themselves to the point where you consider them to be starters, and where do you want to go from there. A lot of times you need size coming off the bench, you need guards, whatever. But sometimes you want offense. Sometimes you want to go defense off the bench. I think we have the ability when we go to the bench to go either way. We have size, we have depth in the backcourt, we have length, and we have guys that can score coming off the bench. And that's typically the biggest problem you have. When you go to your bench you don't have guys that can consistently score the ball, and your team goes down when those guys come in. And that's not the case at all with our team. We are equally good with whoever we bring off the bench, and I think that's exciting. I have complete confidence in those guys, and they know that I'm going to try to do the best job I can to distribute playing time accordingly.

That said, I don't think I've ever really tried to get 13 guys in. It's typically been 10 or 11, so it'll be interesting to see how that plays out. You certainly hope there's never injuries, but if we did have some injuries, we have the depth to cover it.

Q. How is this size going to help you guys defensively?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, you know, it obviously gives us a rim protector. I think you'll see a different shot blocking presence in Tyler Cook this year. Kriener was a shot blocker, Baer was a shot blocker even though he's only 6'7", and now you have two 6'11" guys that will come in there and protect the rim. That gives us some flexibility with our pressing. It also provides, if we play zone, the kind of size that you need to limit them to one shot and then trigger our break.

Q. Speaking of your rotation, what's your sense for your starting point for that right now? Do you have a lineup set?

FRAN McCAFFERY: No, no. Do I have something in mind? Probably. But I think we're only two weeks in. I think we have to give everybody a chance to kind of establish themselves. We'll identify who the five are,

and then six, seven, eight is typically where you go from there, and then nine, 10, 11. But even with this team, that could change. We saw that a little bit last year. We only had really one senior in Pete. I think you saw us have great runs against really good teams with varying lineups on the floor. Oftentimes it was not our starting five or it was a combination of players, and I think that's what good teams have, and so hopefully we can do that.

Q. Baer is basically a starter; do you still lean towards maybe bringing him off the bench because of the energy?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I'm still thinking about that. He probably deserves a start, and that's typically what I've done. I've said that to you guys before. We've got some other guys that are really playing well, so we could give ourselves that instant spark off the bench in Nicholas Baer, who was clearly the best player in the Big Ten in that capacity last year. He earned that award for a reason. He comes in the game and he impacts the game in every facet, and that's what you want from that guy. He'll be the first guy in no matter what. He can come in at any position essentially, certainly a 2, 3, 4 but not so much 1 and 5, but he can come in for the 5 man and move somebody else to the 5 spot. So he gives us that kind of flexibility. He can make threes, he can make plays off the dribble he's not a mistake guy. He sticks his nose on the glass, he blocks shots, he gets every loose ball. And he knows our offense inside and out. He knows our defenses. He's a talker defensively. So he communicates well, and he has incredible respect in the locker room and on the floor, and especially at crunch time.

You know, it might be something that we still do. We still decide, okay, Nicholas, you're still going to be the sixth man because you are the best in the league at doing that, and that is what is best for our team.

Q. How do you think Bohannon has improved his game, and how will he handle the increased scouting emphasis?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, it's going to be a different challenge for him because he'll be a marked man. They're going to chase him around. But they did that some as the season progressed. He certainly saw that in high school. They chased him everywhere. So it's not something he hasn't seen before, he's just going to have big, strong athletes that are going to wear him down. But he's got that relentlessness about him. He's smart, he's quick, he's tough, and he's got an incredible ability to make shots, especially under pressure. So I'm excited about him in that process, to take that next step and see where he ends up.

Q. What's the next step in Tyler Cook's

development?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, Tyler Cook, the next step in his development is really simple; it's just consistency. He was phenomenal at times. Sometimes his turnover numbers were a little bit higher. But I think what you're going to see is a guy who has much better pace to his game right now. He's really matured. I've been very impressed with him. He's an incredible worker. He's got the frame, obviously, to dominate a game. Well, we saw him dominate games last year. But now I think what you're seeing is a guy that's shooting the ball better from the outside, handling the ball and passing it really well. He always had that skill, but sometimes he would go too fast or go too soon and turn it over. He's not doing that. He's rebounding out of his area a lot more. He got anything that was anywhere near him, but he's going out of his area now, so I think you'll see his rebound numbers go up. As I said, I think you'll see his shot block numbers go up, and I think his perimeter shooting has gone to the next level, which is really good.

Q. Is the consistency the same thing you need to see from Isaiah?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, and the thing about Isaiah is last year Pete was there, and Isaiah started, and it was really good. A lot of times I'd play Nicholas Baer down the stretch with Pete and Jordan, and he wouldn't be on the floor as well. Well, this year Pete is not here, so he's going to have to be on the floor. He's a defender. He's a terrific shooter, high-percentage shooter from three-point range. He's got a pull-up game. He's a tremendous finisher in traffic, on the break, and I think now with Pete gone, he understands that his responsibility is different, and I think consequently his confidence level will be much improved, and I'm excited to really see where he ends up, as well.

Q. Is PemsI still catching up after the hernia surgery?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I don't think so. I think he's fine. I think he's playing the best basketball I've ever seen him play. He's 235. He played last year at 256, so he's a lot thinner. A lot of times when guys trim down like that, they don't maintain the strength that they had or the physicality, and he's done both. He still plays strong and tough and physical. He's able to hold his ground against guys that are heavier than him, but he's running better, he's obviously always been incredibly skilled and intelligent with when to go, when not to go, when to screen, what angle to screen on. He's got great feel. So I'm really impressed with where he is. I wish he would have gotten to play a little bit more in August because he didn't play at all over there because he wasn't ready, but he still benefitted from the experience and has really made up for it.

Q. The Big Ten is one of the two probably best conferences in the country. It's our understanding the next year you'll go to a 20-game schedule. How do you feel about that, and how will that impact your non-conference schedule going forward?

FRAN McCAFFERY: It really depends. You know, it obviously will change some things. If you look at 20 league games, two challenge games, you don't have opportunities to play games like we do this year against Colorado. Those other opportunities will present themselves, which we want to take advantage of. We're always going to be in a tournament somewhere. Next year, for example, we're going to be in New York. We all know that. It's going to be Oregon, UConn, Syracuse and Iowa at Madison Square Garden. Those are the kind of things we want to take advantage of.

Will it change the non-conference scheduling? Yeah, it will. To what degree, I don't know.

Q. Iowa State still remain part of that?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Oh, yeah, of course, Iowa State, yeah.

Q. How much do you welcome the outside expectations with all the returning depth? It seems like it's building among fans.

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think you want expectation. You want your fans to be excited about your team. It's not something that ever concerns me. It's not something I've ever shied away from, and I don't get up here and try to present a doom and gloom so that if we do win games then we create the perception that we somehow overachieved. I have an expectation for that team. I think they have an expectation for themselves, and I'm excited about it.

Q. The maturity level of this team given those expectations and the roles they have to take --

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I think there's a certain maturity level that we have based on the character of the individuals we're talking about. You know, at the same time, I would say we had the best first week of practice I've ever been associated with. Our second week of practice was not so much. We had mistakes, and we took a step backwards, so that's part of it. So now we have to come back in week three and do a lot better.

Q. The last four years you've had a first-team all-conference player. Do you see somebody maybe filling that role --

FRAN McCAFFERY: I see a lot of players that have that potential. You know, I know at this time of year everybody likes to pick that. There's magazines that make money trying to figure that out. There's websites, et cetera. The great thing about this league

is there's so many players that fall into that category of potentially being an all-conference player, first-team. I think we have a number of different candidates, and we'll see how it plays out.

Q. Knowing how close you are to the Children's Hospital with your own experiences, what was your first thought when you saw the Kinnick wave over to the Children's Hospital throughout this fall?

FRAN McCAFFERY: You know, it's been interesting. It's incredibly moving when you see it, but the people that reached out to me that see it for the first time that aren't from here are just kind of really just blown away with the compassion. It's one of the coolest things we've ever seen. And it's gotten -- and necessarily so. It has gotten the attention it has deserved because it's really been phenomenal. And you're right; Margaret, Patrick and I could have been sitting there watching the game, depending upon when that happened.

You know, I just think it's just phenomenal, and to see the incredible generosity of our football coach, one of the finest people that I know, Kirk Ferentz and his wife Mary, to give a million dollars, that's just something that I think adds to who we are as an institution and as a state.

Q. Is there a rotation, Coach, set this early in the season? A lot of new faces --

FRAN McCAFFERY: No, I think we've got some work to do with the rotation. I mean, obviously we have three starters back, so you pretty much start from there. I don't see those guys losing their starting spots. Baer, we talked about him, does he start, do we keep him in the sixth-man role, that means we'd have another starter, and who's the other starter after that. And then Baer would be sixth if he doesn't start, and we'll go from there. But we've got a lot of guys who can play, and that's the most important thing.

Q. I know you saw it in high school, but with Bohannon did you wonder how it would translate to college?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I didn't see why it wouldn't. He reminded me a lot of Steph Curry when you watch him play. He can pull the jumper right in your face. He's fearless. He's got unbelievable range. But he can go by you and he's a really good passer. He's a much better athlete than people think. He's a much better defender in terms of physicality than people think. But he always played well under pressure, and I think that's what impressed me.

The games in the Big Ten are so intense and so physical, and there's such incredible emotion that goes into them, especially when you travel on the road, you need somebody with those kinds of qualities, and he's

got them. The fact that he performed so well really was not a shock at all.

Q. After Jordan at point guard, how is the rest of that position shaping up?

FRAN McCAFFERY: We have plenty of candidates. Christian Williams is playing well; Brady Ellingson is playing well there; Connor is planning on redshirting. I mean, obviously if we had to play him we could. He's really a terrific player at that position, so we'll see. We've got plenty of options. I'm not worried about it at all.

Q. You guys went on the road, beat Maryland, beat Wisconsin, rallied from a really tough early part of the season. What do you think of the mental toughness of this team?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think we grew a lot. The interesting thing last year, you mentioned that we had a very difficult start to the season, which we did. But what was rare about that is a lot of young teams don't score. We were scoring. We were scoring in the 90s, we were just giving up too many. So we had to figure out if we don't start stopping people, this trend is not going to end. We were losing close games to teams we had an opportunity to beat. We lost to Seton Hall. We could have beat them. We lost to Memphis. We could have beat them. We lost to Omaha. We could have beat them. They were all good teams, and finally we beat Iowa State, who was a really good team, because we defended. So I think that's the challenge, can we defend. That's part of the maturity and the growth process that you expect. I think we're going to score the ball pretty much night in and night out. We have too many weapons not to score the ball. But if you want to win a championship, you've got to guard people.

Q. How do you assess your quality defensive play? Do you have analytical numbers? How do you and your staff assess a good defensive performance?

FRAN McCAFFERY: You can overanalyze it anyway you want to, but you're looking at shooting percentages and creating any turnovers because when we create turnovers that creates offense with our defense. You look at the rebounding numbers. You don't have to go analytical. You can look at the stat sheet, okay, what percentage are you giving up, are you getting out-rebounded, are you turning the ball over, are you getting them to turn the ball over, and that'll pretty much tell you -- if you're giving up 90-plus points, you're going to have a hard time winning. We scored over 90 a bunch, and we lost some games where we scored over 90. You know, in terms of that, I think we've got to solidify the point of attack. We've got to eliminate second-shot opportunities because especially in today's world, second-shot opportunities lead to

made threes. You know, and those are back-breaking possessions because you're digging in hard for 30 seconds, now you've got to play another 30 seconds, now you give up a made three, and you've been on defense for a minute. That's not what you want.

I think our guys understand that, and if we can eliminate second shots with the size that we have, we can really get our break going.

Q. Do you think the ability to rebound will be what gets front-line guys in the rotation and in the game?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, that would be a great place to start. Obviously are they scoring the ball, are they executing the offense effectively. We run a five-out motion most of the time, so are they all posting up together, are they all getting in each other's way, or are they setting screens at the proper angle and slipping and picking-and-popping and making post feeds and skipping the ball and taking it to the action and fighting guys off flare screens and then attacking the offensive glass. There's a lot more to it. So I think that's where experience comes in. The more that they understand that and the more reps they get in practice and the longer they're here and the more they get reps in games, the better they'll be at that.

Q. Do you like what you've seen defensively so far this year?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Some days, and other days not so much.

Q. Your thoughts on the FBI investigation into college basketball? What are your thoughts on what that says about the game?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, in many respects, everybody panicked when they first heard about it. I think they thought that everything is wrong with everything, and that's just not the case. There's some isolated cases. Maybe there's more to come, we don't know. Any time the game is cleaned up, it's better for all of us. We do things the right way. We do things a certain way. We have a certain expectation here as to how we're going to react day in and day out and how my staff is going to function. So hopefully moving forward they'll find whoever was guilty of those transgressions and react accordingly. We're just going to be business as usual here. Nothing changes for us. I don't think anybody ever thought the FBI would get involved in that kind of stuff. I think that was a little bit of a surprise. And I think the NCAA knows more. Everybody asks, why doesn't the NCAA do something. Well, they don't have the authority to do with the FBI did. I think they would have. I think they know more than people think they know or give them credit for that. So we'll see where it goes from here.

But as far as I'm concerned, it's business as usual.

Q. What does college basketball have to do or is there anything it can do to self-police itself better?

FRAN McCAFFERY: What you can do is when you know something is going on, turn that team in. Who does that? Not a lot of people do that. I do it. I've turned programs in, and I'll continue to do that when I know that there's stuff going on. But a lot of times you don't know what's going on. Can you police yourselves? Only if you know something is going on, but even then it's hard for the NCAA to do something.

Q. When you do that or have done it I should say, what are you up against when you -- for instance, when you call the NCAA?

FRAN McCAFFERY: You're not up against anything really. They're interested in getting to the bottom of it. But they can't wiretap your phone. They can't run a sting operation. They can't have insiders. So maybe this is a game changer with regard to the FBI's involvement.

Q. Have you ever veered away from recruits because --

FRAN McCAFFERY: Every day.

Q. Kids playing AAU ball, have you seen stuff like what we've read about in that arena?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah.

Q. How hard is that to deal with, again, just as a father?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, you know, you see it. I'm in a little bit of a different position because Connor and Patrick were good, so they were invited to some events and so forth, and you hear some stuff that kids are saying. But again, I go back to, I think, they're isolated incidents. We know some of the organizations that are inclined to be that way, and we shy away from them.

But I think if you go to some of the events that my boys went to, I think a good percentage of those if not the majority are legit. There's a handful that are not. That's just the nature of the business.

Q. When you were a young assistant, did anybody shape kind of your -- the way you do things in terms of --

FRAN McCAFFERY: I've always been at institutions where it was really important. When I started at Lehigh we had four winning seasons in the previous 65 years. So really nobody paid any attention to anything that we were doing, including the people there, quite honestly.

So then I get to Notre Dame, and that's a different

story. The day I was hired, Digger Phelps hired me and I met with Dick Rosenthal, our athlete director. Dick welcomed me and put his hand out and shook my hand and he said, we'll do everything we can to help you the whole time we're here, he said, just don't ever cheat. That's all he said.

And you know, when I was hired at UNC Greensboro, the chancellor said to me, I have openings for the chairman of the economics department, and I get a few phone calls. I have a basketball coaching position open and I get a million phone calls. Everybody tells me you're a good coach, that's great, but I'm going to tell you one thing, if you don't graduate your guys, we'll have a new coach.

So you know, I think in a lot of respects, I worked for really good people at Lehigh, Peter Likins was our president, he ended up going to Arizona, stand-up guy all the way through. Digger Phelps prided himself when he was at Notre Dame, he was there 20 years, there was never one NCAA rules violation. Not one in 20 years, which is pretty impressive. So it was kind of how we lived. It wasn't like we got up and made a conscious effort, okay, today we're going to abide by the rules. It's like, this is the rules we follow, and we grind, and that's how you do it.

So I think it's very important who you have on your staff.

There's other ones that are in the trenches, as well, so I'm pretty lucky, I've got the same three guys at the top who have been around and have seen a lot, so that's been good, and then I've been friends with Al Seibert and Courtney Eldridge for a long time. Courtney played for me.

If you surround yourself with really good people that have the same outlook on things that you do and the directive comes from Gary Barta, and it was Sally Mason, Bruce Harreld, it's pretty clear. We have a very involved compliance office here. They're on top of everything. You know, that's just business as usual. Everybody seems to think that a couple weeks ago the whole college basketball landscape has been rocked. No, not for us. We do things a certain way, and that's it, and we'll just keep doing it that way.

Q. You mentioned the way the NCAA has -- in some ways it's almost I am potent in how it's adjudicated certain cases. We've seen that recently. Is this maybe a healthy change for the sport in that now there can be subpoena power?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I hope so. I hope you're right. I hope that's where it's headed because I think they'd be able to do a lot more.

Q. Do you have your finger on everything that happens in your program? Would one of your assistants do something like this without you knowing?

FRAN McCAFFERY: It could always happen. I don't see that happening. I really don't. We talk regularly, we meet regularly. We know who we're recruiting. We know who we're close to getting. We know who we can't get. We know who's visiting. And whenever that's the case, then you know their families and their coach and the AAU coach and who's involved and who were the decision makers in the process.

You know, on the other end, the whole agent stuff, that's a different animal. They just -- if you have a good player, they just hover. It's legal to have a conversation if you're a really good player with an agent. They come to games. They recruit just like we recruit. We go to a high school game, we want to know who are the parents, who are the coaches, who are the decision makers. They're the same -- they're recruiting talent, and they're doing the same thing; who are the decision makers. Maybe it's the fiancé, maybe it's the girlfriend, maybe it's the mom, the dad, who knows, but they do the same thing.

Q. Where does Riley Till fit in your rotation?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Riley Till is playing really well, but he's behind the scholarship guys right now. He's in the 14, 15 area.