

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

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Fran McCaffery Men's Basketball



Q. You probably explained this to us before, but how do you prepare when you don't know who the opponent is and then when you find out what happens after that?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: Whoever had the scout before will be preparing, obviously for Northwestern and Minnesota and then the next one after that. We'll just worry about ourselves today and tomorrow.

Q. Every year you say any team could win this thing. But this year it seems there's a lot more that could do it.

FRAN MCCAFFERY: I think so. I think that's true. The numbers would bear that out. Every game, who knows. Obviously the home team benefited this year, but we're at a neutral site, so, again, who knows.

Q. (Question about Connor McCaffery)

FRAN MCCAFFERY: I think he sees it the way you want everybody to see it. He plays at his pace and doesn't force anything, he waits, he analyzes. He starts with a knowledge of, who do we have, what are they doing against us. He will have watched a lot of tape prior to the game, how they're going to play certain guys, and he just knows how to feed the post, he knows how to hit guys that are shooters when they're coming off screens, he's going to read switches, all that kind of stuff is necessary. I think more and more you'll see him drive it a little bit more into some space. He's been shooting it with space, been shooting it well, so that's good. But I think he can also take some of that real estate and make even more plays. I think more and more he'll do that. He's kind of been doing that lately.

Q. Where did you first start noticing his competitive instincts?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: It was pretty young. He started young competing. And to be truthful, at that time, you just want the kid to have fun. You're not stressing the importance of wins and losses. It's not that important when you're in early elementary school. It's have fun, learn how to be part of a team, have some fun with your friends. But for him it was evident early on that if we're going to be in some type of competition, then winning is critical and I want to be the winning team

and I'll do what I need to do to help our team win.

It sort of never went away. I had teachers that at his elementary school say he has to slow it down here a little bit. And I guess at some level he sort of lives with that because of my job. Whenever we would go to games when he was younger, like after the game we're driving in the car we're going to go get something to eat, or if I was talking to him about a game that I didn't attend it, I would never say, Okay, did you win and how many points did you get? I would never ask him those questions. I would always try to ask if he had fun. And it became evident early on I guess it was only fun if you're on the left-hand side, I guess.

Q. I remember Margaret one time saying that he was that way about academics too. He competed against himself.

FRAN MCCAFFERY: Yeah, he's always been that way. Overall it's a great quality to have. I think there's always that part of you as a dad you just want to make sure that they're enjoying the ride a little bit. I think that's critical. But when you get to this level, if you don't have that edge, you're going to have a hard time. There's no way around it. And anybody that was in the building on Sunday knows exactly what that means. A lot of you guys were there. You had better have an edge to you in that environment or it's going to be a long day.

Q. With all the attention Luka's getting and will continue to get, what about the rest of the guys on the team, it seems like everybody's totally happy for him, totally into it. Is that something that you simply let happen or do you have to remind them?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: No, I think that if you had to remind them, I think that would be unfortunate. Everybody in that locker room loves him. So anything that comes his way they're absolutely a hundred percent thrilled for him. And that's exactly how it should be. If it's not, it would be the root of much bigger problems within your program.

Q. (No microphone.)

FRAN MCCAFFERY: I think he's gaining confidence, more experience he gets. You forget sometimes how young he is, because he's so good in some areas and he'll make a couple mistakes and that would linger on, which it usually does when you're young. Now he's able to get to the next play a little bit better.

The other thing is, his defense isn't predicated upon his success on offense, I think that's a critical component of any young player, of any good player, for that matter. No matter what's happening on the offensive end you have to be really good at the other end. So I'm really proud of him there.

Q. (No microphone.)

FRAN MCCAFFERY: It's a little bit different for him because you can tell that if you have an opportunity to see a young man a lot. As I said to you all many times, I could take any one of you with me and if we go watch a kid play 10 or 15 times, you wouldn't make any mistakes. It doesn't always work that way in recruiting. You see a guy play three or four times and sometimes you have to make a decision. For him we probably, by the end of that summer, had seen him enough to know that he had that in him. But I think you look at a variety of factors, the quality of AAU program that he played for, the quality of high school, the history and tradition in both of those areas, the coaching that he received, where he grew up, you're going to have a level of toughness about you that it doesn't have to be coached, it doesn't have to be taught. And then you're looking at the sophistication of his basketball IQ. And sometimes for guys it's really critical, for others, for him in particular you want him to kind of play with a little bit of reckless abandon anyway, that's when he's at his best, but then there's that fine line between going too far with that. And he's figuring that out. I'm really pleased with him.

Q. We talked a lot about how the season went, what will the next four games be like, not just physically but mentally that you guys have to prepare for?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: It's no different. We're going to play a really good team on Thursday. We know that. Hopefully you can win and advance. You have to prepare. Today, we are working on us. It's not like you can look at Thursday by playing some guys less minutes so they're ready on Friday and Saturday. You can't do it. You have to go and try to win Thursday and then survive. And you're playing somebody really good, who is physical and big and strong and has talent and you'll do the same the next day.

Q. Is this one of the toughest Big Ten brackets you've seen?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: Oh, it's by far the best since I've been in the league. When you think about what happened over the year and the quality of teams, the number of teams we're getting in and the number of really good players, it stands to reason. And that's why it will be a great tournament for people to watch.

Q. With the heightened awareness going on

regarding the coronavirus, certain tournaments are being shut down, recommendations to shut down entire arenas. How much communication have you having both with your team and team officials and then with the university and with the Big Ten about that now?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: I'm sure there is communication going on, but I haven't had any. It's business as usual as far as I'm concerned.

Q. Your team this year has shown, with a few exceptions, a high level of grit, especially in close games. When did you first notice or think that that might be part of the MO of this team?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: I would like to think that part of the recruiting process is you recruit guys that would innately have that in them, so you wouldn't have to figure it out, you wouldn't have to address it, you wouldn't have to try to bring it out of somebody. Recruiting a guy who has never been in a fight, he's probably not going to be the guy you need on that Sunday at 6 p.m. It's that simple. If you play basketball growing up you're going to be in an altercation multiple times. Can you maintain your composure when that happens. You have to hold your ground but you've got to be able to maintain your composure, you still got to be able to think. And I think this team has that because individually our guys have it. I don't know that I can take credit for it, other than maybe I saw it or my staff saw it in the recruiting process. Like this guy's not going to back down. When you go to Rupp Arena and you watch CJ Fredrick drop 33 in the state championship game, okay, I think he's ready. So people say, were you surprised he did so well as a freshman, and he's done well, considering he's had three different injuries. No, you're not, because I've seen it and I knew it was coming. And you always hope to be right in recruiting and we all know we're not always right, sometimes you get it wrong. But hopefully you can have enough guys that can understand that, especially in this league.

Q. In conference tournament weeks, coaches and/or announcers will say, it's so hard to beat a team three times. Is that true in your mind and if so what would that mean?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: Well I think the numbers tell you that that's false, so I don't worry about that at all. If we end up playing somebody three times that we have already beaten twice or vice versa. I don't really put much credibility into that at all, we're just going to go to the next game, put a game plan together and try to win.

Q. Going back to the strength of the Big Ten. The last two years with 20 games, potentially getting 11 teams in the NCAA tournament here. How do you think that the new schedule has helped the Big

Ten?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: Well it's helped it dramatically. And that's the whole reason why we did it. We didn't -- it was not a secret, we did it for that reason. You start talking about, okay, this team has more Quad 1 wins than anybody else. Well, guess what, you're not going to have Quad 1 wins unless you play Quad 1 teams. And so if you're in a league that doesn't have any Quad 1 teams, you're not going to be getting any Quad 1 wins. So we have got a bunch and that's helpful, so do other teams in our league.

Q. It seems like Bakari Evelyn is in the game a lot at the ends of games lately --

FRAN MCCAFFERY: Experience, versatility, he seems to play well with Connor, because Connor can bring it down, Bakari can play the 2, when Bakari brings it down, Connor plays the 2. It's a little bit different with those two guys. Bakari has been really good coming down the stretch and I like those guys on the floor together. But that said, I've had Joe on the floor at times too, he's been really good, especially lately, I've been really impressed with his studying of the opponent and studying of himself and continuing to try to get better.

Q. How would you say guys are guarding Joe Wieskamp this last stretch of games?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: Is that what you want to call it? (laughter) Maybe you're better than me at phrasing what it is. I'll let you come up with the proper terminology. (laughter)

Q. Is there a way to counter that?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: Yeah, I guess. It's just not like it was when I was playing, there was an easy way to counter it in those days. (laughter) Now they'll be talking about it for three weeks on TV, so there's other ways.

Q. Is it the same with CJ?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: Pretty much the same. Yeah.

Q. What do you tell those guys, Fran?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: Tell them to keep grinding, keep moving. You got to tell the guys that are delivering the ball to be a little more patient, because it's easy to look and say, okay, he's not open. Well he might be open later, a second later, two seconds later. We might rescreen for him, screen, rescreen, because they're attached to him. There are ways to handle that. You got to go one way and then go another way, and at some point, if their hands are on you, you got to get their hands off you. We have so many guys that are particularly good at that.

Q. Is that unique to them or is this, you see stuff

happening more of this in the game today?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: It's across the board. And it has to stop.

Q. Do you think next week you'll have officials from different conferences in your game. Do you think they will call the game differently?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: Probably. I'm not saying it's easy, it's a very difficult job and our league is incredibly physical, tremendously big, strong athletic guys. And there's a fine line between letting guys play and calling what needs to be called. It isn't easy and we have some of the best in the business. So you just got to, you got to plow forward.

Q. You coached at three different one-bid leagues and today the Ivy League decided to shut down its conference tournament. In the Big Ten most teams that are going to be in the tournament are in it, it doesn't really matter. But for a team from a one-bid league that's the crescendo to the entire season. What would have been your thought process had you been in the Ivy League?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: I wouldn't be happy. The irony of that is the Ivy League didn't have a tournament until about four or five years ago. So when I played in it we all, the regular season champion went anyway. They only instituted it, is it, it might only be four years. But I think if you're sitting there and you're Tommy Amaker or Stevie Donahue or Mitch Henderson, you're not happy. All due respect to my good friend James Jones at Yale who is a terrific coach and has had a phenomenal year, they're the No. 1 seed and they probably were going to win it anyway, but Harvard just beat them. You look at a team like Penn who started the season beating Alabama, and then they beat Providence. They stumble a little bit, come back, finish strong. That's what we always talk about, right? You want to finish strong and go into the tournament. In that league they only bring four teams, so have to win two games. So, I'm quite certain that I would be outspoken about it if I was coaching in that league right now.

Q. Realizing you're moving forward, and you probably got tunnel vision, but are there moments or a moment in this regular season that will stand out for you and I don't necessarily mean a game or games, but something else?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: I don't think there would be a moment, there would be moments that I think sort of identify who you are. For us we started okay, we didn't play well against DePaul, they did. You go to Vegas -- and I have a lot of respect for Chris Beard and the job that he does, a terrific game, we won, it was a big step. I knew then how good San Diego State was. But that's one step. And then you have your, you're on the road, the ACC Challenge. Playing at Syracuse, that was one.

Iowa State is always going to be an intense game, especially on the road. So we took care of business there. So there's various steps and throughout the process I think the quality of wins that we got within this league, I think it speaks a lot about who we are. We beat some really good teams. We lost to some really good teams. But through the process we learned and we grew and you hope to be able to take advantage of those lessons at this time of year and be at your best. And the other thing is, we all hope to be, is healthy. Obviously we had our issues there, not only at the start of the year but throughout the year. You're always this time of year, you guys' first question was, well what are you doing now? Well we're trying to get to Thursday with a full roster as best as we can.