

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

Wednesday, December 14, 2016

Fran McCaffery Men's Basketball



Q. I'm guessing Peter (Jok) will likely be matched up against Jeremy (Morgan) most of the game?

HEAD COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: I think there's going to be times when they will be guarding each other, and times when they won't be. Both are having spectacular seasons. And in a number of different ways we knew they would both score. But they are both doing so many other things in another area to help their teams, and that's kind of who they are.

Q. Unique challenge, you went from one of the most experienced teams in the country to one of the least experienced teams in the country. What's the unique challenge with this group and these kids?

HEAD COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: Getting them to understand how to prepare and how to work and how to put it together because from the very beginning they've been really good most of the time. And there's been times when they've not figured it out and made mistakes and broken down. And that's what the experience factor is, knowing and understanding how to compete every possession in practice, every possession in games. And how to execute a game plan every possession throughout the course of the game; five playing together.

And that's always the problem, because if you have more experienced players on the floor they're more apt to break out at some point, not bus they want to, they're trying not to, but it's just a function of -- you've got to go through it. And you've got to understand the speed of the game at this level and the intensity level that they face night in and night out. You have to be patient.

Q. You were challenged by having only one scholarship that one year. How difficult was it, you looked at Jeremy just down the street --

HEAD COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: Jeremy has always been a terrific player. I saw him as a young kid. I really wanted to have him badly, but we only had one scholarship. And as you recall, we needed a shooter in the worst way in that class. And Jeremy was always a great player and always a great scorer. He's become a terrific shooter. He was always a good shooter. But we felt like Pete was the best fit at that time. If we had

two or three scholarships he would have been offered without hesitation.

Q. Is this what you envisioned of Jok, has he exceeded what you thought he was capable of?

HEAD COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: When we signed him we felt we had something special because when you evaluate a player, you're evaluating more than their character. And I think the way that he responded to everything that came his way from the injury to the uncertainty of a 16-month rehab, not an eight-month rehab, to getting all kinds of attention, to getting no attention, not knowing where the journey was going to end, considering how difficult the journey was before he even started playing basketball is pretty amazing.

I would say that based on my evaluation of his character I'm not surprised at all with what he's doing.

Q. What makes him a good rebounder?

HEAD COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: It's rebounding instincts, knowing and having a sense where the ball is coming off, is it coming off long, short, left, right, and being there at the right time. You need some length and athletic ability, as well, but he just always seems to be right there when the ball comes off the rim.

Q. In that game against the packline defense, do you feel like you've improved from the first couple times facing it?

HEAD COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: We face it all the time. It's almost America's defense now. So people are going to be in the gaps, that's where they're going to be, and explode out and take three point shooters. You've got to move the ball and be intelligent with your screening, posting, and transition.

Q. Is it different facing a team that's run it for a long time --

HEAD COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: They do it well. You're right about that. Certain teams do it better than others. We played one, Virginia. They do it. UNI does it as well as they do, in my opinion.

Q. Some really good shooters in your coaching career, where does Peter rate in that list?

HEAD COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: He's got to be up near the top. I had a couple of really good ones over the years, but he has the ability to consistently perform.

Yeah, he has to be near the top.

Q. A lot of the guys said because of the number of Iowa guys, it's almost become even bigger of a rivalry. Have you noticed a change? Do you feel like it is a large rivalry?

HEAD COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: I look at them equally.

Q. Cordell, the way that he's shooting from the field, it's unbelievable the numbers that he has. How far is he along compared to any other freshman the way that he is able to score? He's talked that if he doesn't have a high percentage shot he'll pass it?

HEAD COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: That's the key with him. He is making an incredibly high percentage of shots because he knows what a good shot is for him. He doesn't force anything. He doesn't put his head down and go into a pack of people. He always has his head up. He likes to pass the ball. He's good at passing the ball and finds open teammates. He's good at recognizing when I'm not open, nobody else is open, I've got to dribble it until I find somebody, and there's nothing there and he doesn't do anything, just moves it on.

Those qualities are rare for a young guy. It takes a while, typically. Fortunately he came ready with that package.

Q. You have a bunch of time early to try to get your team acclimated for a young team, in October. Then you play games over three or four weeks where you don't have a lot of time to work on it. Now you've got a week here to work on yourself a little bit. Has that been helpful for you guys to kind of iron out a few things?

HEAD COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: I think it's helpful to a degree. But it's also a very intense time academically. You practice at different times and some guys aren't here. And you take advantage of this time. You've got a couple of guys that are banged up, you give them an extra day off. So, yes, to a certain degree it is, but it's not like it's preseason when you're grinding three hours every day. It's in and out.

Q. What kind of player do you envision Isaiah Moss to be?

HEAD COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: He's got unlimited potential because very few people that are that quick and athletic have that kind of stroke. So that's what I think -- when you look at him down the road, once he settles down and really just trusts his own talent and kind of develops that same exact mindset that Pete has, he's got dribble moves that he can get by his man, he's got size and length. He can move his feet. He

can guard a guy smaller or bigger than him and he makes threes. That's a valuable offensive weapon. He's also a willing passer.

It's now figuring out when to go, when not to go, when to pass, drive, shoot. He's still not a hundred percent in all of those situations. And I think that will come with time and with confidence. And once he really believes he's as great as we think he should be, then he'll become that great.

Q. Still a couple of weeks away for Tyler. What you've seen with the two games with the other freshmen in the start up lineup, are you excited with the mixture that you're going to have?

HEAD COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: You get Tyler Cook back, you're getting another impact player that gives you another post threat, gives you another rebounder, gives you another shot blocker, and the thing that is upsetting is that he's missing this time to develop because he needs it. You get excited because he put up numbers. But what I envision for him is another guy that can be great. And the only way you do that is to experience success, failure, and to figure stuff out as the game is going on. You can figure something out watching it on film and you can do it in practice. But there's no substitute for going through it on the court. And that's why I'm disappointed that he hasn't had that opportunity. But I'm glad that his finger is doing well and he'll be back soon.

Q. Other than Morgan what open UNI's other guys?

HEAD COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: That's the thing about this team, it's not a one-man team, it's not a five-man team. But you look at they've changed their starting lineup, played different big guys, played different guards. They've made 20-3s in a game, and beaten high major teams. They've come back. You beat Oklahoma, down 18, come back and win. Tells you a lot about the character of that team. But you watch one game to the next, and it's a different lineup on the floor that's really getting the job done and that's what makes it hard to prepare for because they're really a deep club.

Q. Isaiah was really kind of under the radar in high school. Was there a moment where you saw something that you made --

HEAD COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: We started watching him early and really liked him. And he transferred schools. And we went down a couple of times, we were recruiting Ed Morrow (Nebraska) at the time. And a couple of times we went down there where they've got at any given year they're going to have six Division I players on the floor. And 12 guys that are going to play in college. And two times in a row we went down there he was the best player.

Q. A year ago, Nicholas was the star of The Hy-Vee Classic for you guys in a way, break out game type of playing. Are you more proud of what he did before that moment or maybe what he's done since then?

HEAD COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: I'm proud of what he did from the day he got here. His first year he was really impressive. And I said this to you guys before. He would have played on that team if he didn't redshirt. And the redshirt year helped him, gave him a chance to figure everything out, gave him a chance to get a little bit stronger. But his attitude and professionalism is infectious with everything that happens in the locker room, on the floor, in practice and in games.

So you're right, he was terrific that day. But to me that was just one day of many that he's going to be terrific.

Q. Do you encourage the guys to tap into personal connections when preparing or do you ask them to shy away from it?

HEAD COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: We don't even address it.

Q. You look at Nicholas, he was the center in high school, I'm sure Kirk and he worked a lot his shot. But that's rare from going from a center to being a forward?

HEAD COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: It is, but he's always been a scorer. It wasn't like he was a hammer guy that became a 3-point shooter. He could score. He had touch. He had low post moves. He could shoot the ball from the free throw line and in. All he had to do was extends his range four or five feet. There wasn't much wrong with his shot.

And he has worked with Kirk. But he just decided he was going to be a great 3-point shooter. I told him his freshman year, we need you to stretch the floor a little. He said okay, worked on it, and pretty simple. Pretty much does everything you ask him to do.

Q. What's the next step for you?

HEAD COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: Consistency. We have not been consistent with the exception of the Iowa State game. We've won some games because we played really well at times in those games. And we lost to good teams who could score, because we didn't play well at times in those games. We couldn't get the stops that we needed. You think about the Seton Hall game, the Omaha game, the Memphis game. We couldn't get stops at crunch time. Scored a ton of points in all those games, probably scored enough to win, if you play defense the way you're supposed to play it. But that's part of the journey.

Q. Nine days between the games, obviously after a performance like Iowa State, is it a bad time for a break or is that good?

HEAD COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: I would say I don't think breaks are ever good. Whether you're playing well or not playing well. You want to keep playing. So we'll see. I think my guys have been mature with how they've handled it.

Q. Peter is an emotional guy, but playing in his hometown, do you address the emotion of that?

HEAD COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: No. I would expect him to be professional, like he always is. He's a gamer. It's an important game. The next game on our schedule which makes it the most important game. I expect him to show up and compete like he always does.