

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

Wednesday, January 22, 2020

Fran McCaffery Men's Basketball

Iowa, 85 - Rutgers, 80

Q. How much was rebounding the emphasis tonight? How big was that for you guys?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think any time you play Rutgers rebounding is going to be critical. They're one of the best rebounding teams in the country; they're plus 9.

If they shoot the ball really well they're incredibly difficult to beat, but when they don't shoot it well they go back and get it typically. If you don't rebound the ball, they're going to get it and put it back in or get it and throw it back out.

Obviously an emphasis, and really proud of our guys for how they responded in that area.

Q. Connor hasn't scored a point I don't think in the last two games. He stepped up there and made some free throws; just talk about that.

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, he did a great job rebounding the ball. The other time, throw it in to C.J.

But big rebound, got fouled. Know they're going to double. Probably going to foul. You got to be strong with it. Stepped up there and swished four of them, so really proud of him.

I think he expects that of himself, and that's how you have to close a game out when you're -- it's a one-possession or two-possession game makes a big difference coming down the stretch with less than 30 seconds.

Q. Your team kept fighting after Rutgers took the lead?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, I think you're right. I think we certainly after the two turnovers had an opportunity to hang our heads, and we did not do that. We kept fighting. We executed on offense, to perfection, and then got the key stops.

You know, it's one thing to come down and score and get a stop, score, get a stop, make your free throws, and that was really impressive there.



Q. How does Luka continue to elevate his game?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I don't know if he's elevating his game. He's just dominant every night. You don't look at him and it's like well, I'm not surprised. 28-13. Johnson is really good. I think he's one of the bigger big men in our league and in the country. To do it against him -- and they were fronting and they were digging -- but I thought his decision making, when to go, when not to go, hit a huge three; that's the beauty of his game.

Maybe that's an answer to your question. Maybe elevating his game by really being able to step out and make that three ball as well as the face-up jumper as well as the jump hook off either shoulder as well as the and-1 and getting us into the double bonus.

Q. You talked yesterday about Toussaint. Obviously weren't down on him or giving up on him. You were going to let him play. Is he an X factor for this team when he plays like he did tonight?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think the way he played tonight is the way he should play. It's what I expect of him and what he expects of himself. He's really talented. He's got great speed. He can get anywhere he wants to get on the floor. He had a tendency in recent weeks to leave the floor and try to find somebody. Staying down on the ground. Defense was really good when we were man or zone, fighting over screens. Seven rebounds. I think he's going to stick his nose in there on the glass and come up with big rebounds, big, loose balls, and then he can execute our offense.

So that's what we need him to do, and I'm just proud of him. Didn't get down on him, he didn't get down on himself. He studied it, kept his head up, came back and had a great game.

Q. (No microphone.)

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, obviously creates a lot of confidence when you know you can throw it in there and get to the free throw line and get a bucket. He covers up. You take a shot that misses, he gets it, puts it back in.

He covers up a lot of things. I think defensively he's really in a good place. He was always an offensive player that rebounded the ball. Now he's protecting the rim, sliding his feet, seeing things, talking to his

teammates and impacting the game at both ends.

Q. (No microphone.)

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think it's decision making. It's ball movement and decision making. You can't come down on Rutgers and make one pass, shot. I'm just going to put my head down and go. You might be able to go all the way in transition; might be able to move it, move it, go. Move it, move it, go, or close it down, kick it. Now you have space. Shoot it, drive it again.

It's understanding that and not forcing anything. We call a set. Well, just because we called a set doesn't mean we have to throw the ball exactly where we thought it might go, because play sets expire into motion. Play sets have other options.

Wait. Look at that. All right. Look at this, look at that. Nothing is there. All right, goes into motion. Now we've got random ball screens, curl cuts, because they're trailing the shooters coming off the screen.

So it's understanding that you have to be able to play through that physicality without losing your composure. I thought that's what we did in order to get 85 points against this team, very good defensive team, as impressive a team defensively as I've seen on film.

Q. How receptive is this team to coaching?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Very receptive to coaching, but I think true students of the game. When they're watching film, it's not like, okay, coach we'll be done in 15 minutes, It's, okay, I got it. Okay. And then I'll ask questions. It's not like I'm talking and they're sitting there half asleep.

All right, what would you do here, Chad? What would you do here? Okay, what are they doing? What will work against that? So you got to get them thinking a little bit differently. So they're not being preached at, you know. They're a participant in the discussion. That's what coaching is. Get them to understand what's required.

And then if everything breaks down, somebody has to go make a play, especially when the shot clock is running down.

Q. How enjoyable is it to coach this team?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Probably as enjoyable as any I've had, and I've had some that were really fun to coach. I will say this: since I've got in the business, you know, I can't think of a team that didn't have character and didn't try to do everything I asked them to do. I had a few clunkers in there.

But this team kind of deals with whatever comes their way. No excuses. More importantly, we talk about

accepting coaching, that's important, but I think they really support one another. So if somebody does make a mistake, nobody is yelling at them. It's like, Hey, we're going to do this now. Get to the next play. All right? Next play. Got to get there. Forget what just happened. Still time on the clock. We're up one, we're down one, whatever. All right? We're going to run the play, we're going to execute the play. That's what they did.

Q. Luka seems like he's having so much fun out there. The crowd loved it. So enjoyable to watch that.

FRAN McCAFFERY: He's always been like that. I mean since the first time I saw him play sophomore year in high school he's been like that. He loves the game. I think his energy level along with that is what's infectious. Because with the big fella's, sprinting and attacking the glass at both ends and making plays and not taking a possession off, seemingly never gets tired, that's going to impact everybody else.