

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

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Fran McCaffery Men's Basketball



Q. Luka's taken that next step to where he's putting up like All-American type numbers. In your perspective, what is he doing now that has allowed him to take that step?

FRAN McCAFFERY: He's making some perimeter shots and threes, which we always knew he could. It's kind of that we're going to him more. I don't think there is anything that he hasn't done before except that we don't have Cook.

So we're really going to him. Jack got hurt so we're playing differently and going to him. So he's taking a lot of shots but he's making them inside, making them from mid-range, making threes, and getting to the free throw line.

Q. What's CJ's status?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Doing better. He didn't practice yesterday. We'll see what he does today.

Q. And Cordell?

FRAN McCAFFERY: He hasn't practiced either.

Q. Because it's his back is his recovery a little more unpredictable?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, probably. It's one of those things. See how he feels tomorrow.

Q. The adversity that the team has faced so far, what are you most pleased with regardless of wins and losses?

FRAN McCAFFERY: The guys have stayed together and embraced the opportunity that some guys got to play more. Okay, I'll play more. I can do more. They're confident in themselves. Players are confident in each other.

We haven't had a lot of games where four guys played as many minutes as they played the other night. I thought Toussaint and Bakari and Riley Till, were spectacular in that game.

May have to be more of the same. We don't know. Moving forward, hopefully it won't be. Hopefully get some guys back healthy. But if not, somebody has to step up.

Q. Zavier Simpson looks like a Player of the Year candidate. How would you describe what separates him from the common point guard?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think he plays with tremendous confidence and he's very talented, got great vision. He's versatile, but he really plays with a tremendous amount of confidence in himself, in his teammates. And his coach, whether it's John Beilein or Juwan Howard, he's out there competing.

He's an aggressive guy offensively so he's coming at you. Puts pressure on the defense in a lot of ways. He's been a good player in this league for a long time.

Q. What are some of the differences between Coach Howard and Coach Beilein's system?

FRAN McCAFFERY: It's interesting. I think one of the things I always was impressed with with Coach Beilein's teams is how they share the ball, how they move the ball. And it's exactly the same. Juwan's running good stuff. Players are playing with confidence. Got a guy like Eli Brooks, who was pretty good player for two years, but now he's playing like an elite player.

So clearly coach has built confidence in him. Teske is really one of the better big guys in the country. Another guy who can play in the post and at the 3-point line.

Q. You see a lot of Phil Martelli's influence in the Michigan team?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I don't know you can say that. Obviously Juwan will talk to Phil and Phil has been one of the better college basketball coaches in the last 30 years. It's great that he has him on the bench, but looks to me like Phil has had some input.

Juwan is pretty sure of what he's doing. He played in the league for a long time and worked for some pretty good people in the league.

I think more so than what they're running is how they're running it. The ball is in the hands of the people that make plays, and I see no selfishness at all. They play defense. They rebound. They compete. They have got some depth.

Q. The Big Ten won the Big Ten/ACC Challenge. What happened last night in particular was

sensational. What do you think about what's going on around your conference?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I'm not surprised. Our league is that good. I've said that before. I think people expect me to say that being from the league, but I don't think I would've been as outspoken about it if I didn't believe it.

We have some really good teams. I think you look at the Virginia-Purdue game. When you think about how last season ended for Purdue, that was a situation where they were ready for that one. You could tell right from the beginning how hard they played in that game. It was incredible to see.

Every night you're going to go against somebody who is a really good coach and team that has really good players.

Q. Almost every night you're going against a really good big man. It seems like almost everybody has a dominant...

FRAN McCAFFERY: That's true, which is interesting if you think about it, because so many teams are going small. But there are some really good bigs in this league, all of whom can score. They're not just rebounders and defenders. They do that, too, but they can score.

Q. The smaller lineup has really produced the last three games --

FRAN McCAFFERY: Obviously it makes us different. Presents some challenges at the defensive end. It presents some challenges with guys in different spots they haven't been in before to make sure they're where they're supposed to be.

I think they're getting comfortable with it. We really need Ryan to step up like he did the other night. He was terrific at the beginning of the game and then got in foul trouble. That was unfortunate, but I thought he was really good when was in there.

Without Cordell, we really need him.

Q. Will the next three games and 10 days or so determine Jordan's future this season?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Pretty much, yeah. We'll see how he does tomorrow and Monday, and Thursday we'll go from there.

Q. How important has Connor been with his flexibility?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think that's critical because we have guards that we really like in Toussaint and Bakari, and Cordell being out in particular and we need somebody to step up there. As I've said many times,

I'm comfortable with Riley Till as well. He was really good the other night, especially on the offensive glass.

But Connor, it's kind of a different component. Different dimension. He can still feed Luka from the wing. He can make plays from there. He can score.

Recognizing we have other guys that he needs to get the ball to, whether it's Joe, J-Bo, CJ, Luka. Still knows what his responsibility is.

But physically he's in a good place I think to be able to do that for us.

Q. How much does his height and size now give you flexibility? Seems like you can do so much with it.

FRAN McCAFFERY: He always played guard his whole life and Bergie was one of the first ones to use him in that capacity. We brought him into this league and he was obviously a lot thinner and really wasn't planning on that.

But as he got stronger and as the need presented itself, I knew I could move him there because he literally knows every position on the floor. Not only kind of where you're supposed to line up, but the nuances of what we're trying to accomplish, which is the key if you're running sets or out-of-bounds plays.

It's one thing if I line up up here and I go there. What if the guy is over here? What if they play it this way? What do you do? Where do you go? If that do that, how can we get the ball to this guy or that guy?

He's got that all figured out. Clearly makes an impact in the game when you have people out there that really understand it that way.

Q. Tuesday night, for example, what happens with five guys when they know that they're going to be on the court together for a long period of time?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, it's interesting, when Kriener got his foul and then Toussaint got a foul, I went with that last group for 12 or 13 minutes straight. I hoped that they would play that well together, but I was planning on going back to Ryan and Joe at some point.

I stayed with that group because they played so well. And like I said, played so well together. It was a smaller lineup, so you're worried, Can we rebound? Can we defend? But they all really attacked the zone and moved the ball. When they did press us they handled the press with no problem and we really defended in particular their three best perimeter players, so that was important.

Q. What did you like about how you went at the zone the other night? What was the key for you?

FRAN McCAFFERY: We had composure the whole game. No panic. You move it, you move it, you move it. Sometimes you're long into the possession and don't feel like you got anything accomplished. As long as you got people in the right places and guys ready to make plays, you're going to get a decent shot.

Even in the first half when we didn't shoot it that well, except for first couple minutes where we had four turnovers, we got good shots. So you're talking as coaches, there are other things we can go to offensively, different actions.

But we just kind of said, You know what? We're getting good shots. Just keep shooting them, and you knew JBo wasn't going to be 1 for 8 in the second half; he made 4. That was a big help. Connor makes 1; Bakari made 1. Joe hit a couple jumpers. They were flying at him. Luka hit a big one out of the corner.

That's how we have to be.

Q. How impressive was it that Michigan beat Iowa State, North Carolina, and Gonzaga to win the Battle 4 Atlantis?

FRAN McCAFFERY: That was pretty impressive. Having played in that tournament, a lot of those tournaments, Mike, those three-game tournaments, there is a day off in between. You play two, day off, play one. Play three games in three days in that tournament, and that's not easy, especially with that level of competition.

And having watched all three of those games, all three teams were different. I think that's what's impressive about what they did. The challenge of one-day prep and then beating teams that have different pieces says a lot about who Michigan is.

Q. How is Patrick coming along?

FRAN McCAFFERY: He's hanging in there. He's a little frustrated. Would like to be playing and trying to figure this thing out, but it's going to be a slow process and a long journey. We'll get it figured out.

Q. Thinking redshirt there?

FRAN McCAFFERY: It's a little early yet for that. We'll see.

Q. Even though he has missed these games, how important has it been for him to travel and be around the team?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, it's important, and I do this with all my guys that redshirt. I'll go up to them at halftime, Okay, what did you see? What did you think?

If you were in the game, what would you do? Just make sure they're thinking properly when they're sitting there. They're not just sitting there as a fan, whether it was C.J. or Nunge or Connor two years ago, I want them to be at the front end processing the game plan. He's on the scout team so he kind of knows and been in all the meetings and read the scouting report so he knows what we're trying to do.

When the game starts, sometime the best plans don't work and you got to make adjustments. You have to think that stuff through and you got to maintain your composure at the same time being aggressive. So it's oftentimes a much more mental as it is physical.