

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

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Fran McCaffery

Men's Basketball

Q. Of your four conference wins, you've won a couple games where you've scored 70 and a couple games where you've scored much more than that. Seems like you guys have been able to adjust. What does that tell you about this team?

FRAN McCAFFERY: We have a better understanding of how games are going to be different. I think everybody realizes the intensity level and the physicality of what the games are like once you get to conference play. I think it oftentimes is stereotyped, they're not always a certain way. There's going to be high-scoring games, low-scoring games, games where both teams shoot it well. Sometimes neither team will make a three and you've got to grind it out, and you've got to be able to win no matter how the game goes. We always talk about the anatomy of the game, and every game is different.

Q. In your four-game winning streak, you've been behind twice at halftime and I think tied one other time. What's made you a better second-half team?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think maturity. We made a lot of mistakes the other night in the first half, maybe more so than any other game. We were behind, they scored at the buzzer essentially to end the half, and the maturity level that we showed coming out of halftime and recognizing what we didn't do, we've got to make some changes to be better than we were. It doesn't take anything away from how they played. They took the lead a couple times, but we just hung in there in a way that shows maturity and understanding.

Q. Since the ankle injury, Luka seems to be kind of on a mission here a little bit. What have you seen out of him?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I think he started that way. He was the MVP in New York. He was tremendous. He plays with that energy level all the time. You never want to see a guy get hurt. You never want to see a guy get slowed down when he's playing like that. But he did, and it was amazing how he was able to help us beat a really good Nebraska team, even though he only played a limited amount of minutes. It was very effective. He clearly wasn't himself, and he's more like himself. I still don't think he's 100 percent, but he's pretty close.

Q. You've been asked about Kriener numerous times this season, so I don't expect you to be repetitive, but what he's done the last four or five games, the consistency, everything, was this just a matter of playing time?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think it's a combination of things. Playing time is certainly a big part of it, opportunity and taking advantage of that opportunity, but we talk about last year and how he got slowed by injury, and you saw flashes of it, but there's a guy that really worked hard this summer, I thought, on his body, on his game. He's an intelligent guy, so he studies the game, he thinks the game, he understands the game, and he can make adjustments based on his experience, and you're seeing that.

But the other thing is he's got a complete skill set. A really good defender, really intelligent defender, always in the right place. He's kind of like Woodbury in the sense he's always talking to people, telling everybody where to go, what to go, in the back of the zone, in the back of the man-to-man, in transition. So he really can affect a game if he's not scoring.

But not a lot of big guys have an assortment of post moves and can step out on the floor and make threes, and he can do that, and he's very confident in his shooting ability, whether it be from 3-point range or whether it's 17 feet, high post. One of the best plays he made in the game the other night, he made a bounce pass to Luka -- I mean, that was as good a play as you're ever going to see from a big guy in a situation like that, and he did it instinctively. He didn't think about it, we didn't call it, he just did it, and that to me is more indicative of a guy who's a good player rather than somebody who did something that was scripted.

Q. He and Luka together, you've got two big men who can consistently shoot perimeter shots. How big is that for you as a coach?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, it's huge because when TC is out there, it opens things up for him. When Joe is driving the ball or we're in transition, they've got to find those guys. If we're in zone, they've got to know where those guys are. It's easier for Bohannon, for Isaiah, and the overall spacing is changed as a result.

Q. Ryan said he was recruited here as a shooter. Is that true? And what changed this year, because he seems more confident now?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I loved his game. I knew he could shoot, but like to me, he proved to me that he was a really good basketball player. Sometimes you look at a big guy, he's a banger, he's a shot blocker, he's a runner, but he's a skilled guy. He can run. He's physical. He can move his feet. He can space the floor with his offense. He can pass it. He's a willing passer. I always thought he was a good player.

I mean, for us to offer him a scholarship, I had to be sold on his overall game, and we were. We watched him a lot. We watched him grow up. I said it before, I remember the first time I saw him it was a barnstormer workout that I brought Connor to, and he was a young kid. I said, this guy has got a chance right here. I'm thrilled for him because he's really put the time in.

Q. The plays he made the other night where he took Watkins off the dribble, it's not something we've seen a lot of. Is that something new or that he's added?

FRAN McCAFFERY: No, he could always do that. He's got a really good handle. I'm comfortable with him handling the ball against the press, making those kinds of moves. Sometimes he fakes too many times. Sometimes I'm like, just simplify it, just go. Not too many people want to block your shot when you get to a certain point and you release it, with a 7'2", 7'3" wingspan, you're a hard guy to block, and you might get your shot blocked once in a while in this league, but sometimes it's better to go quicker. But he's got a pretty good understanding of that right now, and that was a big-time move, you're right.

Q. Have you talked to him about being more aggressive about his offense? Did you ever have a conversation about it?

FRAN McCAFFERY: No, I never had to because he was always a confident guy with his offense. He'd come in a game and shoot the ball. You throw it to him, he'll shoot it, he'll drive it. He never was a guy that, quite honestly, lacked for confidence in my opinion. And if you know him and you talk to him, he's not a guy who lacks for confidence.

Q. The way he played in New York and that Michigan game last season solidify in your mind what he could be for you this coming year?

FRAN McCAFFERY: No question. And not only that, but remember, we start practicing in June. He was really good in June, July, all summer long. So you could tell that he was going to be a major factor.

Q. That confidence on the edge he plays with, how

important is that for him?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, you have to have it in this league. If you don't, you're going to get outplayed by somebody. You might have a decent game once in a while, but you'll never be consistently good.

Q. Could you see that in him when you were recruiting him?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, a very confident person, very sure of himself. He's really funny, because he makes quick decisions, and that's just who he is. That's one of the things I love about him. I think his teammates appreciate that about him, too.

Q. How comfortable are you playing Kriener and Garza together?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Very comfortable. There's times when teams might play four guards, and one of those guys might have to guard a 6'4" guy that's bullet quick. All right, well, we can still play them together because now you're going to have to deal with them at the other end. We're might have to play a little bit of zone, because they're really good together in the zone because Garza will play the 5 spot and Kriener will play the back, and he can get to the corner and he can keep guys in front of him and still talk back there.

Q. Seems like ever since Bohannon has gotten here, he plays fearless, always wants to take the last shot, just no mindset about it. What allows him to be so clutch and to live in the moment, and as a coach can you teach that or is that something you just have to have?

FRAN McCAFFERY: He had it when he got here, and it's one of the main reasons we recruited him, and just been encouraging him to continue to do that. You know, you just see a guy that has that ability, and I've watched him for a very long time. You don't even discuss it, just go do it. That's a good shot. If he misses a shot, shoot it again. That was deep. Yep, that was deep. Go ahead, shoot it again.

Q. So when he shot that -- did you think it was going in, because I did. I think a lot of people did.

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, I think we all thought it was going in, and it was kind of a weird play. They were up on him, and then we moved it, and everybody kind of settled back for a second, and then he was open. You know, but he was so deep, I think they thought he was -- he won't pull from there. But he did. And we all knew he would.

Q. Illinois the other night, they look like based on what they've been doing the last few weeks a team that's down and out, but they go and do what they did. What does that say about them in specific and major college basketball teams in general?

FRAN McCAFFERY: There's a lot of things in play there. I think a lot of times you can look at a team's record and make a determination on who they are. Maybe you can do that at the end of the year, but not at the beginning of the year. You know, they have a lot of new players. They have a lot of freshmen, they've got some new guys. But if you watch them play, they battle, and they were in some really close games. They could easily have won -- how many games? Indiana, Northwestern and Maui. They play a certain style. And you knew that in particular, you knew how good Ayo was. That kid is special. You knew how good Frazier was last year. Now, they had to get used to playing with each other. And then you get a new center, they played three other guys last year, now they've got Giorgi and De La Rosa, the transfer. That's two new guys, but they're both good. Now De La Rosa is a fifth-year guy and Giorgi is a freshman, but it just takes a little while for those guys to blend together. Kipper Nichols is a really good player. He's always played well against us. Jordan has always played well against us. He's a terrific shooter. So once those guys got it figured out and a couple of those other freshmen started playing well, you could see it coming. Yeah, their record was sub-.500, but they were in every game, they battled every game, and you knew they were going to put it all together at some point. It's one of those things you always hope, it's not against you, the other night, that was really impressive because Minnesota is really a good team, very good team. They have really good players, and to beat them by 30 says a lot about where Illinois is right now. They have a really good team. They've got really good players, and they're putting it together.

Q. Their calling card seems to be defense. Is it just kind of in-your-face, get-up-in-you type?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, they play a little bit differently defensively. They're in denial. They deny, nothing easy, and they challenge you at the rim.

But offensively they're going to go. They're going to come at you. They run really good stuff, a variety of options from it. They have the ability to throw it inside and score. They have the ability to take you off the dribble, they can make threes, battle you on the glass. There's a lot of ways they can hurt you.

The one thing that sticks out is if you watch them play, they're going to compete. They've established that.

Q. This year marks 40 years since Iowa has last won a Big Ten title. I know that's probably not conversation during season, but does that ever come up with you and your players? I think you were a sophomore in college the last time. Does that ever come up, and do you ever think about

that?

FRAN McCAFFERY: No, it's not something you really talk about because that would mean you're kind of looking down the road. We've got a lot of games coming up, and right now we're focused on Illinois, and that's it. There's so much that goes into a game plan for a game in this league, any other game, any game on the schedule, but in particular in this league, especially when you're playing teams that we all know each other. You've got to be locked in about that and you can't be thinking about what if we do -- you just can't go there.

Q. But does it surprise you at all? You've only been here for less than a fourth of it. I mean, does that show you how hard it is to win a Big Ten regular season title?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, we came close a couple years ago, something we thought of kind of coming down the stretch that last weekend. If we had beaten Indiana, we had a real shot. Pete had the shot at the buzzer, and then we beat Michigan on the road. That would have been great.

But we're obviously trying to win a Big Ten championship, and we thought we'd like to advance in the NCAA Tournament, as well, and I think as much as we all want to win a Big Ten championship, I think the NCAA Tournament is something that a lot of people focus on maybe a little bit more.

Q. Do you think Big Ten conference regular season should be an automatic bid to the tournament? What's your thoughts on that?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Probably. It's not the only league I've coached in. It's obviously, I think, more reflective of your body of work clearly. So probably, and I was happy to see more than a few years ago now that the NIT started granting automatic bids to regular season champions, because a lot of those teams were 22-, 23-win teams that didn't have anywhere to go, so I was happy to see that.

But I don't know how much interest there would be in a conference tournament if a bid wasn't on the line there. I think that's what kind of makes it exciting for the players, for the fans and for TV.

Q. What do you see as Maishe's primary value to the team?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Maishe is a versatile guy. He can bring it down for you. He came off the bench in that one stretch at Penn State, we were struggling and makes a huge three. He's not a one-dimensional guy. He can score, he can defend, he's smart, he can play more than one position. And he's going to give you effort.

Q. Is Tyler a game-time decision?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I feel a lot better than I did in the last one. He's going to try to go a little bit today, so we'll see how that goes. He worked out yesterday on his own and said he felt pretty good.

Q. Was he close yesterday?

FRAN McCAFFERY: He was close. He didn't have the explosion. If you're not able to go make the plays that you want to make, it's hard to make that decision to go. And the last thing he wanted, the last thing we wanted is for him to have a setback.