

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

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Fran McCaffery Men's Basketball



freshman in particular -- if we can get him up to a decent weight, he'll be ready to go.

Q. Kind of off topic, Patrick becoming West High's all-time leading scorer, is that a proud moment for you? Connor I think is third --

FRAN McCAFFERY: He's third now, yeah. Patrick, passed him about 10, 12 days ago. You think about it, his journey was a little different. I think you're proud any time your child does anything special like that. But under his circumstances, it was just a lot different.

Looking back, it seems like it was yesterday. It was five years ago. But his freshman year, he was up and down. He was on a really good team. I think that benefited him. But his numbers were, as a lot of freshmen are, up and down, 14 one game, then he wouldn't play as much or play as well. He was trying to figure it out. He was a skinny kid. But just kept listening to Coach Bergman and the older guys, his brother and Devonte.

He was around some pretty good players while he was at West, and I think that really shaped him. Fortunately he had some really good AAU experience with his Barnstormer teammates and then also his D-I Minnesota teammates.

It was an exciting night for us, but more importantly for him, and I think Glen Worley has been great. They've been in contact with each other, and going back and forth, and that's great to see another Hawk. We're thrilled for him.

Q. What do you see for him at the college level? Is he a guy that could come in and impact right away?

FRAN McCAFFERY: He clearly has the ability to do that. The only difficulty he'll have is how strong can he get, will he be physically ready. His game is clearly ready, but we'll see where he is physically.

Q. I mean, at 6'8" -- even in the Big Ten, his quickness, it's going to help him.

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, exactly, and he'll continue to get better as he gets stronger, but he can shoot it, he can drive it, he can pass it, put it on the deck, he can block a shot. The physicality of this conference in particular is challenging for anybody. But for any

Q. When you watch his games, do you compartmentalize between parent and future coach?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Probably, yeah. I think parent first always. When you're watching him play on the AAU circuit and you're out there evaluating other players, you're figuring out who are we going to sign, who are we going to look at in the next class and the next class, who did we lose, what do we need, now you're looking at him, okay, can he step in, what role can he have. Obviously first of all, is he good enough, and then a lot of times you recruit players that are enough enough but they don't fit for any particular reason, positionally, based on who you lose and who you have back, you don't want to stockpile a position. We have a need for that. Nicholas Baer graduates and we have a need for his skill set. He is a versatile guy. He's more of a hybrid, which is kind of the way the game is going. The 6'6" to 6'9" player that kind of plays every position.

Look at this weekend; you need a little more bulk and girth than maybe another team you might play. So you know, he can play the 4, he can play the 3, he can play the 2, he can bring it down. He's got really good feel. And I think his experience at West High and in the summer, he's been in winning programs his whole life. He's won, and that's what you want. You want guys who understand how to win.

Q. I'm assuming players get here different levels defensively and probably different training defensively. One thing from watching West High a lot, I know you don't play defense there, no matter who you are, you're not going to play. How much does that help him coming to you?

FRAN McCAFFERY: It helps greatly. They really stress defense at West High, and Coach Bergman has always done that. There's times when at the high school level the best player will rest a little on defense and save himself for offense. Patrick has a tendency to do that sometimes. When he wants to lock down defensively, he's really good at it. He can slide his feet laterally against a quick guy. He can space his man. He can contest. He doesn't go for unnecessary fakes, and he uses his strength to his advantage, and he rebounds in traffic. The skills that he's been taught are what he

needs when he gets here.

Q. Any update on Nicholas Baer's injury?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Nicholas is proceeding well through the concussion protocol. I think he's got a chance to play. But that won't be decided for a while.

Q. I know Joe also was having some back problems --

FRAN McCAFFERY: A little sore, yeah. I think he'll play, but again, we'll see as we get closer to it.

Q. Anything you've seen from Rutgers?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Rutgers has really been impressive because as Steve has had a chance to build it, they've got more players now. They always had some good players, but now they just have more of them. So they have depth. They have the ability to overcome one guy having an off-night. Somebody else can step up. They have that kind of team. They've got a really good guard, and they've got a really good front court guy. They've got a core group of young bigs that are really big with Johnson, Carter and Doorson. They've got some good young athletic guys that can play in transition, that can play fast, that can play half court. They can defend. They've always defended. So there's a reason why they've got five wins in our league and have been real close on a few others.

Q. I know you've said that the Big Ten is stronger, and that's obviously the case. What's different this year do you think, if anything? What's maybe the single most reason top to bottom it's so strong across the board?

FRAN McCAFFERY: It's just one of those leagues that -- every program emphasizes what they're doing. They have a good coach. They have facilities. They recruit. You know, we're all selling the same things from a TV perspective. We all have great venues. So consequently, each team has good players top to bottom. You look at Penn State, they beat Michigan, and everybody was like surprised. They have three players that are as good as any three players in the country. And you look at Rutgers' talent now compared to what it was three years ago, it's really impressive. Steve has done a great job. We all know that, so we say that and it sounds maybe different than it should. I'm just pretty matter of fact about it. I know who's on each team. I know the coach that they have, and every team is really good, and every team can beat you on any given day.

Q. Do you think it's as strong as it's been in your nine years?

FRAN McCAFFERY: No question. Now, there have been some years where a couple teams at the top were really, really special, and that can happen in any

Power Five league. You might have a team that's very capable of winning a national championship. I think we have a few this year, as well. So sometimes there's a little bit of separation because one or two teams are that special. This is one of those years where we have some really good teams. We have some teams that they've got veterans, they're physical, they defend, so they're different. Like Rutgers is a different kind of team.

But you watch that Rutgers-Illinois game last Saturday, that was a war. Those two teams got after each other, overtime, game was in the 90s, and that speaks to what we deal with every day in this league.

Q. What happened to Baer? I looked at replays --

FRAN McCAFFERY: If you can figure it out, let me know. We looked at everything. I didn't see anything. We look at different angles. J.P. had a bunch that we looked at, and we really tried to zero in. When, where. The only collision we saw was going in one direction and he was holding the other side of his face, so I don't know if he got hit earlier and didn't realize it. As you know, there's a lot of contact. Any time you're in traffic at this level, you can get hit in the head. And it's not necessarily malicious or intentional. Just happens. Everybody is going for the ball.

I'm happy to report he's doing a lot better. If we played a game in the middle of the week he wouldn't have been able to play, but he's got a shot now.

Q. Looked like ear was bleeding?

FRAN McCAFFERY: It wasn't. Yeah, I think everybody thought that, but it wasn't.

Q. He doesn't remember what happened?

FRAN McCAFFERY: No, he doesn't remember -- like let's say it happened eight plays before when he went down, he doesn't remember that, and it's possible that he wouldn't, if, in fact, he got hit. But you know how he plays. He's all over the place. So he's going to get hit.

Q. Three straight games, Luka has had two fouls in the first half and had to sit. Are they attacking him differently or is that something that's just bad luck? What are you seeing there?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think a little bit of all of that. He has to really do a good job of anticipating what's going on and move his feet and get where he needs to get to and tall up and not get a cheap one. I think he's done that before. He's really capable of doing that. A couple of those were difficult calls for him, especially in light of the fact that that particular foul put him on the bench. So he's just got to learn. He'll be fine.