

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

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Fran McCaffery Men's Basketball



Q. In a way, did Isaiah's tough night the other night kind of underscore how important he is for your team?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Probably, yeah. He's very important, especially with Pete's graduation. I think he has really stepped up subsequent to that and has played well. I thought it was his first bad game. I'm going back through the summer, he played great overseas, played well in all the exhibitions and other games I thought for the most part. He was trying to be aggressive, couldn't get anything to go. But you know, at least have some other options. I could put Nicholas back there. I think Maishe Dailey is playing well. Brady is a little out of sorts there because he's been thrust into the point guard position, doing a good job there for us. He needs to keep doing that. We need him to step up and start making some shots. He's not getting the ball in the same locations. It's not his fault.

We've got some other options, but Isaiah is the guy. He's going to start. He's going to play, and we're going to set him up. We're going to get him shots. I want him to shoot the ball. I have a lot of confidence in him.

Q. What do you think he learned from the way Virginia Tech played him?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I don't know. Other teams played him the same way in the past. When you're a good player they're going to crowd you. They're going to get up on you, stand a little closer to you. If you're a 3-point shooter that's going to happen pretty much to everybody. I don't think there was anything alarming in that sense. He'd better get used to it.

Q. You controlled the tempo in the first half. Is that as simple as you took and made better shots?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, if you look at that team, they only lost one game, drilled everybody except for the one team that beat them, and that was a slower game and Saint Louis controlled the game the whole time. Saint Louis played them both halves like we played in the first half. They went on a little run, we got a little three happy, instead of moving the ball like we wanted to and mixing up our post feeds and jump shots, stuff you've got to learn from. We didn't play with the same level of concentration we needed to in the second half

and started launching. Sometimes you can hit a few and get back in it quick, and sometimes it makes it worse, and that's what happened.

Q. What have you seen from Penn State in their development with Carr and Stevens in particular?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think when you look at that team that you saw them last year, especially with Stevens, Carr and Watkins in particular, those three freshmen doing as well as they did last year, I think Reaves is a guy that sort of nobody talks about, and I think he's a really good player. He plays both ends, plays with great energy, activity, good fit for those other three guys, then you add a veteran guy like Shep Garner; this is a team they were looking at as a team that has a chance to contend. They've got Bostick back. He didn't play last year. He was hurt. He's a good player. So he gives them another guy, almost like a sixth starter.

They also have the transfer, Pierce, so they've got a deep team of veteran guys now. Even though some of those guys are sophomores, they're veteran guys, with the opportunity that Tony Carr and Lamar Stevens had in particular last year to kind of come in and kind of take over.

Q. Who do you expect them to match up Isaiah with, Carr or Reeves?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I would expect it to be Reaves or Garner.

Q. Does it feel a little weird starting the Big Ten season now compared to in years past it's always around New Year's?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, it's different. When I was at Siena that's what we always did. We always had the tournament a week earlier, and we always played two league games in December. I'm used to it myself, but I'm not playing, so it doesn't matter. Our players, it's different. But it's like anything else, you just play the next game when you're scheduled. You don't think about it that much. Obviously it has great importance, I think greater importance being that it's a conference game. I don't think there's any question about that. We have great respect for that program and know we have to play well to win.

Q. I know a lot of fans have NCAA Tournament

expectations and are not as happy with the start.

How do you temper those expectations?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I don't really think about that at all. What I try to do is deal with what's going on. So if we're playing well, great, let's continue to play well, and let's figure out what we're not doing well. If we're not doing something well, we've got to fix it, and you go day-to-day with that constantly, whether you're undefeated or not, and that's kind of how I look at it.

Q. What was the biggest thing you took away after watching film of that Virginia Tech game?

FRAN McCAFFERY: We were inconsistent in a lot of areas. There was times when we did everything we wanted to do, and there was times where we didn't do anything we were supposed to do, and that's obviously concerning. You've got to get that straightened out. You have a game plan for a reason, and you can make adjustments to the game plan, but whatever the game plan is and whether we made adjustments or not, we've got to consistently perform to that expectation. There were possessions where we were really good, and there were possessions where we had breakdowns, and they're a team that I think really takes advantage well of the mistakes that you make with their running game and their speed. So if you took a bad shot, for example, that's a lay-up at the other end. Well, we addressed that before the game. Like if we're taking bad shots, it's the same as a turnover, and it's going to be a lay-up at the other end. We go 2 for 15 at the start of the second half, and didn't have great ball movement. You need good ball movement on the road against a team of that caliber, and we didn't have it.

Q. Would you say there's still a learning curve with how young this team is?

FRAN McCAFFERY: No question, and with all the pressure that Jordan is getting without Connor. Brady has been solid, but he spent June and July, August, September, October making shots, and now you've got to play the 1, and he's a team guy, and he's smart, and he's good, and he's doing the best he can.

Q. Would you have expected that curve to be a little shorter given so many of your guys played a bunch last year?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, they did, and I thought at times performed extremely well. Even when Pete was out last year, that group played really well. And so far, that hasn't been the case.

Q. How much of this is learning how to play offense without Pete? I don't know if he bailed you guys out --

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, he did at times, you're right. He did bail us out sometimes with shots that were amazing. But at the same time, they defended him as

a guy who was capable of getting 35, and that freed up some other people in ways that they're not freed up this year. Any time you have the leading scorer in the league, he's going to garner attention. Are they doubling him? How are they playing him on screens? They would top block him, they would face guard him, and that's more space for everybody else.

Q. How would you assess your defense so far this season?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Very good at times and very poor at times. So clearly inconsistent. And that, again, goes back to the game plan aspect. I'm not talking about defending dribble penetration, whether we're supposed to front the post or not. It's walling off in transition, getting back in transition, fighting the post, being in the gaps when you're supposed to be, being over, when the ball is on one side and being locked in. We were really good at times all season long, but we have not been consistent.

Q. Was Nicholas maybe just a little rusty the other night, his first game back?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think a little anxious, too. Ahmad goes down right away with the collision, we put him right in there, and he was going to come in and play with great energy. I thought he was maybe a little overaggressive offensively, but typically he's really good. It wasn't like he took a shot and I said, boy, that was really a bad decision. I want him to shoot the ball. I want him to know that he can pull up and drive it.

Q. Has Connor been cleared or is there a different timeline for him?

FRAN McCAFFERY: He has not been cleared. What he does is he comes to practice and he does all the non-contact stuff. I think he'll be cleared to practice full next week. That was what I was told. So hopefully by Monday he'll be able to play with full go with contact without worrying about him getting hit.

Q. How about Ahmad?

FRAN McCAFFERY: He's fine. He practiced yesterday. He looked good.

Q. What's the biggest challenge with a one-day prep?

FRAN McCAFFERY: There's a lot of them. You're trying to flush all of the information that you spent three days absorbing while you're traveling and going into a very difficult environment, as we've all seen, and locking in. That's what you have to do, though. You've got to lock in to the next phase of the game plan, okay. Different team, different style, different coach, different players; what do we have to do to beat them.

Our guys typically have been pretty good at that. I've

been impressed. I'm talking about not only this year but since I've been here, because we require a lot of them to remember.

Q. Is it made more challenging by the fact that you're facing a team with a new coach?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think to a certain extent, yes. I think our guys had gone against Coach Crean so many times, they had a feel for that program and how they played. Now it's a completely different situation.

But again, with the one-day prep, you're still trying to get all that in your head, whether it's the same coach or not.

Q. How much of this one-day prep will you use to sort of show them for the others that you will have this year. How much time do you spend teaching them how to do it versus preparing for the next --

FRAN McCAFFERY: I don't know that it's that. You wake up and go, okay, we're playing Indiana, this is what we've got to know playing Indiana, whether it's one day prep, whether you have three days. You give the written report, you put it on their iPad, you show them film. You have practice, walk-throughs, let's go play. Like I always say, you look at it from our side and say, boy, I wish I had more time. There's no advantage. They're in the same boat we are. They're playing Saturday and Monday, too.

Q. Did you watch Indiana-Duke, and will there be any difference --

FRAN McCAFFERY: I watched a little. I don't typically watch a lot of other stuff. I typically focus on the next team we're playing. Occasionally there will be a game on, you'll watch a little bit of it. I did watch the end of that game, and it was very reminiscent of the end of the previous two games that Duke played. I watched like the last seven minutes of those other two teams when they were seemingly dead in the water and came back and won. Amazing plays by some really talented people that they have.

But you talk about managing the game, that's what Duke did in those three games that I saw. They were to the point where they had no more room for any mistakes. There's no time left. Any mistakes, any bad shots, any turnovers, any defensive breakdowns they were going to lose, and they did everything right. So that's what we're all trying to do.

Q. How are you managing Luka and Jack knowing that they're going to have some ups and downs as freshmen?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I don't treat them any differently than anybody else. I stay positive with them, and I'm pretty positive with everybody. Occasionally you'll see

me get after somebody, but most of the time, like I've said, I'm really positive. Those guys need positive reinforcement. Jack has played extremely well. He did not play well against UAB, but other than that, he's been spectacular.

So then you're really trying to pump them up. You put your arm around them because I knew he was down. Luka has been in foul trouble a little bit. I think Luka is a really good shooter. He hasn't shot it well. I encourage him to continue to shoot the ball. It's not like, okay, you've got to put the three ball away. No, we recruited him to shoot threes; if you're open, shoot the three. Eventually I think those will go in. So I think from that standpoint it's staying positive and making sure you don't assume they know something that a junior or senior would know, so you repeat things a little bit more to them to make sure that they know what we're doing.

Q. A couple of the guys said after the game Tuesday that they thought it was a mental thing that they need to get over and respond to some adversity better. Do you appreciate their honesty in that in being self-assessing, what they think is wrong?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I'll be honest with you, I'm not big on that it's a mental thing. You compete. That's what you do. You know, it's not in my head. I don't like that personally. I don't agree with it.

Q. When you were a player did you ever have games where you weren't ready mentally?

FRAN McCAFFERY: No, I'd like to think not. You might have to ask Coach Weinhauer if I had any (laughter). But you often don't realize how few opportunities you get. You've got four years. You really don't have that many games, and you don't want to let any of them pass by.

You look back, and it seems like it's taking a while, but you look back and it's over, and you can't believe how quick it went. Having gone through that, and I actually played -- because I transferred, I was actually playing for five years. It still seems like it was quick. I just try to get them to understand that. Let's recognize the opportunities before us and maximize them.

I think for the most part, our guys have been pretty good at that. I think what you have to do is honestly assess. If we don't play well and you don't play well, and we've all been there, I had some stinkers. When I played -- guys have stinkers. I think you've got to figure it out, why were you bad, why did you play poorly, did you not follow the game plan, did you take bad shots, did you break down defensively, did you not run back on defense. What was it about your game that didn't

connect in that game and help that team? I don't think you can dismiss it by saying, oh, it's a mental thing. No, it's not mental. It's mental, physical, and it's all about competing. That's what you've got to do.

Q. How are the guys in the group -- you talk about being able to honestly assess themselves. How do they compare to some of your other teams in that regard?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, they accept coaching. I think Tyler Cook is the best example. If he doesn't play well and you get on him, he doesn't fight you. He comes back, he grinds in practice. He's a guy that has a reputation, and he doesn't expect the superstar treatment. He doesn't get it. We hold him accountable in film session like everybody else, and he reacts positively. He responds. That's what you want. You want a group of guys that have the character to do that. It's not a standard for everybody else and not me. No, it's a standard for everybody. We're going to hold you to the same standard and identify what they are and make sure that before we even take the floor that that's the case within this program, and our guys are pretty good at that.

The film session wasn't a pleasant one, but it wasn't so unpleasant that I'm screaming at everybody because then it becomes the blame game, the coach is blaming us. Like we lose -- if we have a stinker, we're all in this together. I'm taking the blame. Okay, maybe we're not doing a good enough job teaching it, coaching it, drilling it, whatever, and then I think they appreciate that. I'm not going in there and throwing anybody under the bus. We did not play well in the second half. We did not make the necessary adjustments. It's one game. Let's go on to the next and do better, all of us.