

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

Wednesday, January 11, 2017

Fran McCaffery Men's Basketball



So you can't turn the ball over 18, 19 times and beat Purdue. You can't. You've got to take care of the ball and you've got to move the ball.

Q. When you hit the threes like that, it seems to add another dimension in there?

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, they're really difficult to beat then. Because remember in the first half they hit ten threes. In the second half the two big guys got a bunch. So you've got to stop both components of their offense, if you can. Playing good low post defense, but then also closing out and getting to the 3-point shooters. And their spacing is good, and their ability to move the ball and pass the ball and willingness to do that is really impressive.

You look at their assist turnover numbers collectively. They're as good as you're going to see. Mathias is 75/25, and Vince Edwards is 60/40, and you go right on down the line. Swanigan's numbers are good. He's a few over, but you've got a bunch of assists for a guy that's scoring over 20 points a game. That's a handful right there.

Q. What we're seeing from Isaiah, is that kind of what you saw in practice last year? Is it kind of what you anticipated the way he moves in transition?

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, he's always done that. Now, last year in practice, he was up and down. But you saw it fairly regularly in terms of his ability to score the basketball, make threes, finish in transition, drive the ball to the basket. Now what he needs to do is incorporate his ability to make plays for other people off the dribble. That's hard because I want him to be aggressive and score for himself. I'm encouraging him to attack and go score, go get buckets. So it's identifying that fine line between, okay, when do I get a bucket for myself and when do I move it all, and how are they playing me? Because he plays with kind of a reckless abandon, which is good most of the time.

Q. Do you change your approach defensively, or is it just about executing what your plan was last time a little bit better?

COACH McCAFFERY: I think it's a little bit of both. There's going to be a lot of similarities in terms of we thought we needed to do this, we still have to do that. But, both teams, even though it's not been that long,

Q. You looked at Caleb Swanigan last year, he was a terrific rebounder. Now he's become more of a complete player. In what ways has he improved?

COACH McCAFFERY: He's changed his body. He's quick. He's sustaining effort, running the floor. He's aggressive offensively, but he's really efficient with what he does. He's not forcing anything, and he's a willing passer. So teams that have tried to double him have problems because he finds people. He's a very unselfish guy.

Q. In their loss to Minnesota, he said it was ball screen and defending opposing ball screens is what they had trouble with. How do you attack that and get them out of position using that high ball?

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, what I would say, ball screens are part of it. The other part was Nate Mason. He had 31 points. He's playing as well as anybody in our league right now. So you can utilize ball screens for sure, but that can't be your only strategy.

Q. What do you make of the league so far?

COACH McCAFFERY: It is exactly what I thought it was. To me, this was really easy to see coming. I don't know why anybody else thought any differently to be honest.

Q. Does it put more pressure to win at home? Is that possible?

COACH McCAFFERY: For everybody, yeah.

Q. How do you take a step forward from that last game, and how much film do you watch from the last game to apply to this one?

COACH McCAFFERY: We watch the same amount of film for every game because even though there were a lot of things we didn't do, there were some things we did well. So you need to point that out. But recognize what we can't do. What we can't do the next time we play anybody, certainly Purdue, as well as they're playing. They have legitimate low post scorers. They've got multiple low post scorers. They've got multiple drivers. They can play fast. They can grind you in the half court if they want to, and they're physical both defensively and on the glass.

we're both different teams than we were that night.

So we make those necessary adjustments. We've adjusted our starting lineup, and even our sub-rotations are a little bit different. So you just try to reemphasize some of the things you think were necessary that maybe we didn't do or we did sporadically, and then you make a few adjustments that we think might be better this time.

Q. In the first half against Rutgers there were some lobs and they were able to get to the rim. You guys adjusted to that. Is that something you guys can use tomorrow night?

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, I mean, Rutgers drove the ball and they went high-low. That's what they do. And if they miss, they're going to go back and get it. It's a simple game plan in many respects. So there's a lot of things that we could have done better and we did better throughout the course of the game in terms of pressuring the passer and how we're playing the low post guy and things like that.

So this is a different combination of factors that we have to deal with with Purdue. You've got two guys that are pros, maybe three. I think Edwards is a pro. And then quick guards that all move the ball and all make threes, they all move without it. They all space it. They execute their set plays extremely well. They have a lot of them and they have a lot of counters.

So even if you had every play call, they run so many counters you still have to pretty much stay true to your rules collectively and make sure that you're playing not one-on-one defense, but five guys playing together.

Q. Do you consider it a good learning experience with these last three games, coming back against Rutgers, going to double OT at Nebraska and then going to OT with Michigan?

COACH McCAFFERY: Yes, is the basic answer, but it's always a learning process. The journey, you're always learning what to do, what not to do, and how to get better, and that's our job to break that down as simply as we can and then teach it effectively. Then have them affect change with what they're doing, maybe, incorrectly.

When you have character guys, they're going to try to listen and do what you ask them to do. Nobody's fighting us and saying my role should be this. They're all buying in, so we're getting better.

Q. What do you envision for Dale Jones, and if he does fit into the rotation and plays a little bit more, are you reluctant at all because you have younger players who want to grow because their future is

really important as well as the present?

COACH McCAFFERY: It's hard to figure out exactly how Dale's going to fit in because of how difficult his journey has been for him. He was six games into the season last year, he was really starting to come and blew his knee out and couldn't play in the summertime, couldn't practice in the summertime, couldn't practice in the fall. I can't imagine any worse luck.

He's in the game two minutes and he breaks his wrist because some kid fell. But the thing that Dale Jones can do is he can score the ball. The hardest thing for him is going to be, now I have to feel like any time coach puts me in I've got to make ten threes in a row or else I'm never going to play again. It can't be that mentality. It's got to be, okay, what does my team need for me to do today? Because he will rebound, and he will move his feet, and he will communicate defensively, and he can make shots. He's also a willing passer.

So just come in and contribute in any number of different ways, and you'll have those nights where you make multiple threes and maybe blow a game open for us and then play more and more. It's hard when you've missed that much time. All these other guys have had opportunity. Cordell had a great opportunity when Tyler got hurt. Other guys have had opportunities because Dale got hurt because he was going to be in there. So we'll welcome him back and see if we can fit him in the best we can.

Q. When do you envision getting him back?

COACH McCAFFERY: He's close. I think we are looking at around the 20th of January. So he'll participate in practice, and 50 or 60% of what we do. He hasn't gone live yet, but anything that we do, five-on-zero, he's doing.

Q. In this class of freshmen a lot of people are justifiably excited about Tyler. And talked about a ceiling. Two guys that are a surprise are Bohannon and Pems. Where do you see they're ceiling?

COACH McCAFFERY: Both of those guys will continue to get better. It's rare to be able to step in like Jordan did to step in at that position and be effective as he is, that's because he's smart, and tough, and talented. So he'll just learn from the experiences that he's having. Same with Cordell.

As I said before, with Cordell and Tyler together, they've got to figure out how to play together because when they were both playing before, they were the low post guy. Now they both want to post up. But they both can play on the perimeter. Tyler is quick, and Cordell can dribble it and pass it and they've got to get comfortable doing that.

So I think all three of them had a chance to be special.

To be truthful, I feel the same way with Kriener and Maishe Dailey, who aren't playing. They haven't had an opportunity because some guys are ahead of them right now. But they're working and those guys are going to be good too.

Q. Has Tyler been able to get a rhythm this year? I know he had an injury and some foul trouble in the last couple games?

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, I thought he was. Certainly early on in the Seton Hall game he was phenomenal. What he did against Memphis was nothing short of spectacular. He had a broken finger, he gets 17-7. He misses that time, comes back. First game back was at Purdue, tough place to play. He had 14 in that game. So pretty amazing stuff when you think about it. I thought he was pretty good in a pressure-packed environment at Nebraska.

When you look at his body of work, considering what he's been through, I think it's been pretty impressive.

Q. Ahmad Wagner played only four minutes the other day, was that just the circumstances of the game?

COACH McCAFFERY: In the Nebraska game, I went with him in the second half, and I sat down Dom Uhl the whole second half, and I thought Dom had really good play and I went back with Dom. And like I said after the game on Sunday, the reason we beat Rutgers is because of Dom Uhl. I think that's fairly obvious, not taking anything away from anybody else that scored or had a rebound.

The reason we beat Rutgers is because of Dom Uhl, and sometimes that means somebody else doesn't get as many minutes, and Ahmad understands that. He's working hard to be effective when I do put him back in.

Q. The challenge a few years ago when you had an incredibly deep bench, but sometimes a guy on the bench, and someone else will play well, next thing you know you look at the stat sheet, and he's only played seven minutes.

COACH McCAFFERY: It's hard. You want them all to be able to play. But the only thing you can do is meet as a staff and try to be as fair as you can. Hope that you have a team of guys that don't get hung up on who is starting or who is playing. They all want to play. They want to play 35 minutes, and we get that.

We start with the guys who we think deserve to start, and we put in the guys we think deserve to go in first, and as the game goes on, it becomes obvious to you, and me, and everybody else in the building so and so is playing really well. He's probably going to play a lot more today. And that's the hardest thing about coming

off the bench.

When you look at guys that can continually come off the bench and score the ball, that's pretty hard to do. That's why Baer has been so spectacular for us this year. He scores and rebounds and defends and does the intangibles, and at the same time doesn't make mistakes. That's why I love bringing him off the bench, it's made a great impact for our team.

Q. Baer is so full of energy, and he comes in and affects change right away.

COACH McCAFFERY: He affects change and he affects the guys next to him the same way. You can't help but want to play hard when he's out there. He's talking to you all the time too, that helps.

Q. Do you feel there is any correlation, a couple years ago you talked about you had 10 guys and you could have had two starting fives. Is that sort of the same case this year?

COACH McCAFFERY: Sort of, yeah, that's probably a fair way to put it. But if you think about that team, we had a lot more veterans, and we had Clemmons and Gesell, each one of them could have started. We ended up starting them together when they were sophomores and when they were seniors.

You had Zach McCabe and Basabe who had been starters early, and Zach wasn't a starter, and Basabe wasn't a starter, and he became a starter when Woody came in and Aaron White came in and then Uthoff became eligible. So we had a really good collection of guys at that time all of whom fit.

That was a fun group to coach, because nobody ever got hung up on that stuff. There wasn't a line at my door complaining I should be starting, I'm not getting enough shots, you're not using me right, I'm transferring. There was never any of that, and that's a fun group to coach.

Q. When you moved Isaiah into the starting lineup, you didn't have a lot of game samples. What was it? Was there any one thing? Did you just want to reward him for working hard?

COACH McCAFFERY: We needed to shake it up at that point. We needed to shake the lineup up, and he was playing extremely well in practice. And in the small sample of minutes we gave him, he was doing well in games. So you never know if a guy's going to have it in him unless you put it out there. So we put him out there. He's proved that he deserved it and he's earned it. Literally earned what he's gotten. He appreciates that, and I certainly have a lot of respect for him for doing that.

Q. Isaiah is a man of few words with us; is he the same way with you and his teammates in practice or is he different?

COACH McCAFFERY: No. You've got him read right.

Q. Does he need a little bit more of Nicholas Baer in his game?

COACH McCAFFERY: He's never going to be like that. That's just not in his personality. But what he is doing is taking the game at a different level than he was a month ago, three months ago. He reacted to everything in the past, you can't be a reactionary player. You have to anticipate and think beforehand. If he improves in that area even a little more, he'll be that much more special.

Q. If you could project where you see Nunge and Garza fitting in with this group next year?

COACH McCAFFERY: They're both special players. They're both putting up great numbers on winning teams. But that's who they are. They're winning people. So they're both going to play. They both can score. They're big. They're versatile, and they're going to create problems for the defense without question.

Q. With where these guys are in their development, how important is the first five minutes on both ends, seeing things happen and getting them engaged?

COACH McCAFFERY: That's important. Obviously, that's important every game. You never want to fall down. We were down 11-2 down there. You certainly don't want to do it on the road. We never really got it back together after that. Sometimes you have to have that happen to you to make sure it doesn't happen to you again. So, obviously, we want to try to come out and be better at the start of the first five minutes of each half.

Last five minutes of each half, we didn't do a good job of that on Sunday. We had a six-point lead and then tied. Those kinds of things are game changers, so hopefully we'll avoid that too.

Q. The Isaiah story is different, but it kind of reminds me of Sapp a little bit where perseverance paid off. Isaiah is a guy who had challenges getting here. He redshirted. Lot of guys would have done something different, and that he fought, practiced, played, and now he's playing at a pretty good level. Did he provide a lesson for anybody, I guess?

COACH McCAFFERY: As a coach, you've got to understand this. Everybody wants to be the starter. Everybody wants to play. Everybody wants to be a lottery pick. But there are very few guys that you say, okay, that guy's a lottery pick, and everybody agrees

and he plays for four months and he's a lottery pick. You have to work to be who you become. And that's what he's doing, and that's why I really respect him.

And sometimes it's not even the player himself getting antsy. Maybe it's his family members, maybe it's his coaches, maybe it's his AAU coach, a cousin, an uncle, and they get in his head. He's just comfortable in his own skin, and he comes to work every day, and he prepares and he gets better. Gets a little bit better every day. Then what happens is he ends up getting a little more confident every day because in the beginning, because of what you just referred to, I'm not sure he was a confident player.

It was a difficult thing just to get here. And then to figure it out, he was behind everybody else. They already know stuff that he doesn't know. You can only imagine how that would make you feel. He stuck with it. We stuck with him, and that's one of the reasons we wanted to redshirt him so that he didn't feel incredible pressure. Okay, I'm not playing because I don't know exactly what this is. Well, don't worry about it. You'll figure it out. There's no pressure, and you don't lose any eligibility.

So I think as he got to the middle of the last season, he figured this is the best thing that ever happened to me is I didn't play. You're seeing the benefit of his hard work.