

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

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Fran McCaffery Men's Basketball

FRAN McCAFFERY: The bye allowed us to give some of the guys who have been banged up them a couple of days off so they could recover and then work on ourselves. I think that's important. And then today we'll start locking in on Illinois.

Q. What do you focus on the most in working on yourselves?

FRAN McCAFFERY: You work on everything: Transition, offense, defenses, rebounding, pretty much everything.

Q. Anything different with Illinois since you guys last saw them? It wasn't that long ago.

FRAN McCAFFERY: It wasn't that long ago. They're playing (Kipper) Nichols a lot more. He had only played, I think, five or six games before our previous game. He was started a little bit, and then Lucas started against us, and he's pretty much assumed that role as a starter at that position. But other than that, no.

Q. The other day you were 4-of-21 from 3-point range. That seems uncharacteristic for your team.

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, we would hope so. We think we have a good shooting team, and I thought we had real good looks at it in that game and just didn't make any. Baer made three and the rest of the team only made one. Hopefully we'll be better on Saturday.

Q. Jordan not making a shot in the last game... you've talked about his short memory before. How helpful is it in a situation like that?

FRAN McCAFFERY: It's absolutely critical. He hasn't had too many nights like that. He kind of had one the first time we played Illinois last month -- probably shouldn't even have played that night (illness), but he wanted to give it a shot. We ran him out there, showed his toughness. You learn from it. I don't think he'll have too many more of those in the future.

Q. It's been kind of a weird year in the Big Ten, actually a lot of road teams have won games, but you guys have been able to pretty much protect your home court. Why do you think that is?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I don't know. There's times when



I've felt like we've played pretty well on the road. We seem to have played better at home. Most teams do. There's clearly a lot more parity than there's ever been in this league, so you're going to see home teams lose when that happens.

But I don't focus on that at all. We just try to figure out what we need to do, okay. We haven't shot it as well on the road. We've gotten behind a few times on the road, and sometimes you just have to kind of grow and learn how to compete on the road. Illinois shot it well against us last time we played them. They battled, they defended. They were really good at the start of that game, and we were not.

And we fought back, but we spotted them too many. So you've got to play better at the beginning of the game, and hopefully we'll do that.

Q. That game was in the midst of that three-game series where you really started slow. Is there anything that you can see that's different now or better that you're able to do --

FRAN McCAFFERY: The funny thing about that game is we got the ball to the rim early in that game multiple times, and we just didn't get it in. I'd be more concerned if we were jacking quick, early threes and they were horrible shots and giving up transition baskets because of poor shot selection and poor decision making. We had it right to the front of the rim in that game. Should not have been 10-0, but it was, so you've got to deal with it.

Q. What's the biggest growth you've seen from Tyler the last month or so?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Reading situations defensively, reading situations offensively, slowing the game down in his mind so he can make plays, cut down on his mistakes. His effort level has been really good. He's been running the floor, flying to the glass. His rebounding has improved, needs to continue to improve. But I just think slowing the game down in his mind has been absolutely critical.

Q. How long do you think it took for him to get back to being Tyler in game situations?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, it took a while, because as you progress through the league, teams are studying you and studying your team, and he's never been

scouted like that before. So not only did he not have the experience in those games that he missed, he's going against veteran guys who are watching him on film, so he's got to be able to make adjustments throughout the course of the game, and that takes time.

Q. The rotation after the Michigan State game, you said you were thinking about revisiting that.

FRAN McCAFFERY: I've thought about it a lot, but again, I go back to the one thing I said to you guys after that game. There's always going to be a sense of fairness with me. It's not going to be, okay, well, I need to shorten the bench, so you two guys aren't playing. If they deserve to play, then they need to play, and that might mean that others don't play as much, and we can say, well, maybe they need to play a little bit more, maybe they would develop quicker. But I'll still probably lean towards playing guys that deserve to play. I'm having a hard time not playing Dale Jones and Maishe Dailey to be honest with you.

Q. Is there anybody you look at that you can definitively say this guy needs to be on the court more, anybody you've seen?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I would say probably a lot of guys that fit that -- Cordell, Tyler, Kriener, Moss, Christian Williams. There's a lot of guys that fit into that. You think back to the Minnesota game, Moss is on fire, then Brady comes in, he's playing well. We've got a lineup that clicks. We're down 13 points. We take the lead. I'm going to leave that lineup on the floor. Then they get exhausted. So now you put those guys back in, but they've been sitting a while, so they're not quite as comfortable.

But that's what happens when you get into games. You try to make the best decisions you can make at the time and hope it works out. If you get a team that's clicking and erases a 13-point lead as quickly as we did that day, you're going to leave that team on the floor.

Q. You've always had an appreciation for this program and the past. You look at this weekend with the Kenny Arnold tribute and the players coming back, what are your thoughts on that, and do you remember Kenny and that team back when you were --

FRAN McCAFFERY: I remember that team well. I think I told you guys before, they won it in Philly. I was at both of those games as a fan. I was playing college basketball at the time. I enjoyed watching that team: Vince Brookins, Bobby Hansen, Ronnie Lester, Kraficis, Steve Waite. I remember watching that team play, and that region had some pretty good teams, Maryland, Georgetown, that they had to beat. I think

it's great that when you look at it, how that group of guys has continued to sort of take care of Kenny, especially Mike Henry, but so many guys, and just think about how frustrated you'd be if you couldn't really communicate for 20 years, when you were fully aware of what's going on around you. So the fact that it came to be that we were able to figure out through technology and the advancement of technology to allow him to communicate, how great that is. It's unfortunate it didn't happen sooner.

But those guys sort of loving him the way that they have and sort of continuing his legacy and making sure that people remember him and wish he could be here has helped -- it doesn't look like it's going to enable to him to do that, but he was here a couple years ago. He got a standing ovation. That was terrific. He was in the locker room with the guys.

It's important that your players not only know and understand, but like you said, appreciate those who came before, and we're going to have a packed house on Saturday, but the reason those people come is they've been coming for generations to watch this team play. And that's what it's all about.

It was great that -- when Coach Olson was here for the Iowa State game, they all sort of came together again. A bunch of those guys were at my house the night before the game, and we talked about it, and we're just glad to be able to pull it off.

Q. Back to shooting, how important is ball movement and getting those open shots?

FRAN McCAFFERY: It's critical because the ball movement is in conjunction with screening and driving it and kicking, maybe it's a one-dribble kick, maybe it's two or three dribbles, flare screens, back cuts, whatever. We always say screen and cut and move with a purpose, so you want guys to have open shots, all five guys have to screen and cut and move with a purpose. It's really hard when a team is athletic that you're playing and they're up into you to be able to just create a shot. It's really hard to do. So you've got to get it moving in order to do so.

Q. You mentioned earlier how well Illinois shot the ball the first match-up, especially from three. Is that a key to defending the perimeter against them?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, the thing about them is they shot the ball well from three, but they also shoot the ball well mid-range. Black, for example, he can really shoot the ball. Maverick Morgan really shoots the ball extremely well. You think of those guys as big, strong guys, they're going to score inside, but they're face-up jump shooters, too, so your close-outs have to be

better, whether it's at the line or beyond the line. And we were not as quick and as connected as we needed to be in that game. It's always easier to shoot the ball when you get up 16, so we can't let them get away from us like we did.

Q. Seems like they play better when Finke plays better.

FRAN McCAFFERY: He's playing as well as anybody in the league right now. I think he's 52 percent from three. But he's also more complete than he's ever been. It's year three for him. He redshirted his first year and really got in the weight room and then played last year, played well, was a little up-and-down. This year he's been much more consistent, but he's much more physical, and like I said, much more complete.

Q. You wanted him, didn't you?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, we recruited him.

Q. That team a couple years ago won six straight to end the regular season. What kind of went right for that team, and what has to kind of go right for that to happen in this conference?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, there's a lot of things that went right for that team, starting with Aaron White. He was just spectacular, and everybody came with him. So that was important. Our rebounding and our defense was really good, and we got our running game going. Our ball movement was terrific. We played with a confidence that you need to play with. So we'll need to do the same.

Q. How's Pete doing health-wise? Has this been a good week for him?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, he's been good. He looks really good. He's spent a lot of time in the training room, and with Bill Maxwell, our strength coach, and he's going hard. He'll go hard again today.

Q. Is there any more you can ask out of Nicholas?

FRAN McCAFFERY: No. You know, the thing with him, and we keep going back to this... you sort of want him on the floor all the time, but he just gets tired because he goes so hard, and that's what you love about him. So we've asked him to play on the wing. We've asked him to play in the post. He's played essentially 2, 3 or 4. He's really smart. He'll inbound the ball in tight situations. He'll play bigger guys, smaller guys. But I've also asked him to assume a bigger role in terms of leadership, which he's done. So he's much more vocal, obviously, than he was last year. It was his first year playing, so it's not the time to be vocal, but this year he's been much more vocal, and he has the respect in that locker room to do so.

Q. Are you surprised at all he's blocked as many

shots as he has this season?

FRAN McCAFFERY: No, because he's one of those guys that is just really gifted at anticipating the play, the action. A lot of guys sort of react to that, and if you're reacting to something, you're not going to be a shot blocker. I mean, if he sees the play develop, then he's always in the right place. Now you're in a position to block shots. And he's long. He's about 6'7", but he's long, and he jumps pretty well. I'm not surprised.

Q. Is that reaction something he's always had?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, that's a gift. Or he played so much growing up that that's a -- we always say you've got a feel. He's got feel for what's getting ready to happen. That's something we look for in recruiting. It's not always as easy to see. You can tell that he had it, but he's as good as anybody I've had in that area at just having just tremendous feel for both sides, offensively and defensively. And then being able to also take the scouting report information, assimilate that into his mind, and then be able to go play. That sometimes, too, as you get -- you get some guys that just get bogged down with that information that they forget to go play basketball. So you've got to be able to do both: Take the information we give you, but then trust what's going on in front of your two eyes and make the necessary read and get your body where it needs to get to. And the guys that can do that are the guys that were special.

Q. Uthoff had a lot of blocks and a lot of them were on the perimeter. Do you see any similarities with that, the way they block in the post, block shots in the post?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Jarrod was a unique player in that respect because Nicholas gets most of his shot blocks coming from the weak side. Jarrod would block your shot when you were shooting it. He had the ability to stay back and wait and then time it up. Now, he did go for a few shot fakes, but he didn't get burned on shock fakes very much, Jarrod. I think -- what was the stat -- he blocked more threes than like 250 teams last year. That's a guy who knows when you're getting ready to shoot the ball.

Very few people block threes, and he did that. Nicholas is a little bit different. He knows where to come, when to come, and if he's leaving, he's not leaving anything open, and that's important, too.

Q. Have you gone out to see Luka and Jack this year, and what are your thoughts?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Absolutely. I saw Luka this week. He was tremendous. It was a terrific game. They were 8-1. The team they played was 9-0, and he hit 24-13 and they won by 15 on the road. He was outstanding. Very intense atmosphere, as you would have expected.

I saw Jack a while ago. I went down to see him. It was right before Christmas. They were in a tournament, and he was -- it was kind of like a showcase deal more so than a tournament, and they would pick an MVP of every game, and he was the MVP and he got like a 28-15 or something like that. Both those guys are playing well. Both those guys are on teams that are winning. They're winning players, so we're thrilled that they're coming.