

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

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Fran McCaffery

Men's Basketball

Q. Fran, with regard to Jack Nunge, what did his year away as a redshirt do for him and his game, and what do you expect out of him this winter?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think it did for his game exactly what we all hoped it would. Number one, he got after it in practice and went against Cook and Garza every day. He went to an accelerated weight training program, which clearly changed his body, and when you see him, you'll see what I mean. Physically, he is in a completely different place, especially as it relates to his ability to do things in the post. He was always a good post player, but he was on the thin side. He's not on the thin side anymore. He's finishing plays. Defensively, he's always had tremendous defensive instincts, so now you have a bigger body to combat talented players in this league.

I think it also helped his confidence level. He's making shots at a high percentage. He's running the floor. Physically, he's really in a good place, not only in terms of size and strength but also in terms of stamina. When you have a skilled big man like that and his strength and stamina are in a good place, you end up with somebody who's productive.

Q. Does Nunge match up better with Brian and Luka?

FRAN McCAFFERY: They're all up right around 250. Kriener is a little heavier, Luka is right around there, and so is [Jack Nunge]. It gives us three players that are big and strong physically but also each of them can stretch the floor and make threes.

Q. Now that you've had Joe Toussaint here, is he what you expected? Is he doing stuff on the court that has surprised you?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Joe has done really well. He came in with a tremendous attitude. He wants to get better. He pushes the ball. He's got great speed. He gets in the lane, creates opportunities for his teammates, great vision on the floor. But, he's also a guy who can score. He's not what you would call a pure shooter, but he can make threes. He can make pull-ups. He finishes really well getting to the rim. He's making good decisions. Not a big mistake guy.

I think in time, he'll be even better, in particular with his ability to impact the game defensively with his speed, but he defends ball screens really well. In our league, there

Q. How has Joe Wieskamp grown as a player this off-season and as a leader?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think Joe does need to be more vocal. He wants to be more vocal. He's always led by example with his work ethic and his productivity, but he has to understand that he has a voice that in the locker room, at crunch time, people are going to listen. As you become a veteran, the communication that you exhibit on the floor is also something everyone is going to listen to because they know you know what you're talking about, and he's got to be that guy, as well. Last year he just kind of fit in as a freshman. Even though he's only a sophomore he's a veteran guy and he's a guy that we're all going to lean on.

I think he's really worked on becoming a little more versatile off the dribble. He could always do that, but he was kind of a rip-and-drive, drive pull-up, catch-and-shoot guy. He's always going to be terrific at those three things, but I think you're seeing him do more off the dribble, not only for himself but for other people.

Q. You have like four point guards if Jordan is healthy. Can Connor McCaffery and Jordan Bohannon both play the 2?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, certainly they both can. I think Jordan [Bohannon] in particular, we played him a lot there last year, we played Connor [McCaffery] a lot at the one and Jordan at the two, sometimes coming down the stretch and to get Jordan [Bohannon] going. Connor can also play the three. He's 215 pounds and really strong at this point. He's always been a good offensive rebounder. He can guard threes and fours, gives us versatility there to get more guards playing time. Bakari [Evelyn] has been playing both spots, shooting the ball well, but also, a very good point guard, good decision maker, very good in pick-and-rolls, as is Joe [Wieskamp].

We have versatility there. We have depth there. The critical thing as we found out two years ago, we need depth in the backcourt. We had none.

Q. CJ Fredrick, what does he bring to the table



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after a year off and do you see him fitting into the 2-3 rotation?

FRAN McCAFFERY: He's really more of a two, two/one. I don't know that we'll need him at the one this year with what we have, and it depends on Jordan's situation, but he can play the 1. CJ is shooting the ball extremely well. He's a big-time scorer. He's a bucket getter. He can create his own. He can get baskets within the offense.

The thing that really makes him difficult to guard is he's really good at getting rid of the ball. You look at him and say, well, surely he can play the 1 because look at the plays he's making off the dribble, and that's a weapon. He moves without it, curl cuts, fades, shot fake drive, shot fake rip-and-go, one-dribble kicks. He sees the floor extremely well and gets the ball out of his hands quickly when somebody is open.

Yesterday's practice, he was on fire, and he's been like that a number of times, but there's times when he won't shoot as much and just make plays for other people, and that's what I love about him.

Q. You haven't taken a graduate transfer during your career, but now a couple months in, how has that experience gone for you, and what has Bakari Evelyn brought to the team?

FRAN McCAFFERY: It's gone about as well as we would have hoped, and it's one of the main reasons why we wanted him. Bakari is really mature. He's somewhat well traveled in terms of the fact that he went to Nebraska right out of high school and then transferred to Valpo, so he's played in two different leagues already. He's had different roles already. He comes in, and while he's new and we have new faces, he's just a veteran guy in terms of how he prepares, how he thinks, how he performs on the floor.

I've been really impressed with him. A lot of times you bring a guy in and you think he can play both spots and you find out he really can't, but he can. And that's not only from an offensive standpoint, from a defensive standpoint, as well.

Q. What do you see in terms of your team chemistry? You lost four of your top six guys, a lot of new faces.

FRAN McCAFFERY: It's a much different team than I think we had thought it might be. I kind of thought we'd lose Cook, knew we were going to lose Baer, expected to have Jordan. Felt like we had enough depth with Isaiah's departure. But you have essentially three new players and three players sitting out, so six new bodies. Three of them have been here, they know the offense, they know each other, so it's not that bad. Patrick has been around, he knows these guys.

The toughest adjustment has been for Joe Toussaint, but again, he picked an institution where the style fits his game perfectly. It's a group that I think off the floor gets along well and doesn't seem to have many issues there. It's always been a team that shares the ball, and our offense is predicated on that. Moving the ball, moving the ball side-to-side, getting it out of your hands, catch, turn and face, look at the post. A lot of times, I think offenses have become very perimeter-oriented in terms of shooting a ton of threes.

We have players who can score in the low post. We're going to go in there and throw it in there and go in and out a lot, but then also utilize those guys as perimeter shooters, as well, to set up opportunities for our other players to drive the ball. Joe Toussaint, Bakari Evelyn, Connor McCaffery, Joe Wieskamp, Patrick McCaffery, they can get the ball in the lane and make plays off the dribble, as can CJ Fredrick. He's very good at it.

Q. We know what's not coming back and possibly what we think is not coming back, but where do you think you should be better this year just in what you do?

FRAN McCAFFERY: What you'll see is a team that plays like a veteran team, that's not a turnover team, that's not a mistake team. We're going to push the ball. We're going to get good shot opportunities. We're going to defend.

A lot of times a team's inability to defend is not so much that they're not good at it, it's they're showing some fatigue and they're resting on defense as opposed to saving themselves on offense. You have a team that will defend because we'll have enough fresh bodies to put out there to play the way we want to play consistently on offense, and it's a team that will rebound. That's another way that I look at this team and say, this should be a really good rebounding team, which limits the other team's opportunities and keeps them at a lower percentage and gives us more fast break opportunities.

Q. If Jordan doesn't play, do you have any concerns at all about on-court leadership or where that comes from?

FRAN McCAFFERY: No, we have plenty of guys there. Obviously it starts with Connor. It starts with Joe Wieskamp, Luka Garza. Those three in particular. And I said this earlier, while Bakari Evelyn is new, he's not young, and he commands the respect of everybody. When you meet him and get to know him, you can understand why and what that means.

Joe Toussaint has always been a leader. It's hard as a freshman. We all know that. But if you're performing

well at that position, then you command a certain element of respect, as well.

Q. Ryan Kriener has given you some good moments his first three years. What does he have to do to maybe get more minutes and become more of a guy that helps you win?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I think you look at Ryan's career, it's been a little unique because he played some his freshman year. We thought about redshirting him. His sophomore year was really good but then he had the two concussions so he missed a lot of games, so you sort of forgot about him maybe from the outside because he wasn't there. But once he was healthy, we saw it, especially in the Big Ten Tournament, late in that season.

Last year he was terrific, had a great summer, toured with the travel team overseas. I thought he had a great summer on the court, has had a great fall.

Another guy that you forget about him as a leader because he hadn't been a starter, but if you know him and what his makeup is, he is not afraid to speak his mind, and he is a team guy in a every sense of the word. As another guy, to go back to the previous question, that could really command the respect of everybody in the locker room and be a leader, as well.

Q. Your comment on Bohannon to me seemed optimistic that maybe he would have a shot. A week later how are you feeling?

FRAN McCAFFERY: About the same. You know, he's at practice. He is not practicing, but he is doing things on the floor. He is running. He's shooting. Not doing a lot of cutting, a little bit. Certainly with no defense, no physical contact. We certainly don't want him getting knocked to the floor on a drive to the basket, anything like that. So we're being very careful with him. Maybe another week or two he'll be back out there I think trying to go full tilt, and we'll see where it is at that time.

Q. Is there a chance you could use him in a few games sort of like Pemsl last year?

FRAN McCAFFERY: The answer to the question is yes, we can. The bigger question might be is that the smartest thing to do. Yeah, we can sneak him in a few games and maybe he gets 18 and we win a game. I think he's got to decide are you playing -- are we going to give it a go, really going to give it a go and see if it responds the way that we hoped it would, because remember, we said it's a five- to nine-month rehab, so all of a sudden he starts to play and then he's realizing I'm still in pain and I can't move the way I wanted to move, I want to shut it down, and then we can do that.

So I think if we go in that direction, that's how it will play

out.

Q. Do you think Pemsl will be back?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Pemsl, he took care of his legal part of his issues. He's got some other things he's got to work out. If he stays on top of things, maybe by next week we could have him back at practice.

Q. At Big Ten day you mentioned Patrick was really hitting well. Is there a chance he'll play or is there a possibility to redshirt him?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Right now the plan is for him to play. You know, he's been playing really well in practice. He's gotten stronger. He's been consistently performing at a high level. The thing about Patrick is he can score. He's always been a scorer, and he's very efficient. He's a guy that -- granted, it's high school, we have 25 a game on very few shots. He moves without it. He's going to shoot 9 for 12 and get to the free-throw line, and it's kind of been the same way -- he's been at all our practices; he's been a double-figure scorer in practice on limited shot attempts, shooting the ball well from three, gives you some length. If we're going against a team that decides they want to go with a non-traditional lineup, maybe with a four-guard set, we could play he and Joe at the 4 positions and still have tall, long, athletic guys because maybe we have to take one post player out, and we would prefer to play with two traditional posts.

So it gives us a lot of flexibility, so we'll see where that goes and make a decision later. But the plan is for him to play.

Q. When Luka Garza came on campus, I think you kind of compared his style of play to Kevin McHale. Has he kind of elevated his level of play, not to McHale's level but as a player like McHale where he makes everybody better and does everything well?

FRAN McCAFFERY: The thing about Luka that I think is probably different than that comparison that I made, he can stretch the floor and make threes. I mean, that wasn't Kevin McHale's responsibility in those days. Different game.

So we can throw the ball inside and run our offense through him, Luka, that is, but we can also set ball screens and we can pick-and-roll or pick-and-pop him because he can make that three. Now, his percentages the first two years were just okay. But he is killing it from there now, and he's always been a three-point shooter, and we're going to consistently give him the green light to do it out there, and especially if he's playing with Kriener and Nunge, those two guys can really score in the post. So you can't leave a guy somewhere and not worry about the other guy. You've got to play them both, and that's going to stretch the

floor.

Q. When you went to see CJ Fredrick play in his championship game, the player you watched, is he like you envisioned right now when you watched him?

FRAN McCAFFERY: The thing about CJ is I watched him a lot. Sometimes you recruit a player that you see and you really like and you watch him on tape and you get to know him and you think you know him, but the reality is with CJ, we started recruiting him early, got to know him really well. Obviously I had history with his family anyway. We watched him practice, we watched him in AAU, we watched him for his high school team. He is a guy that understands the game. He's a winner. So the interesting thing about that -- I went to the state championship game, but that weekend, what he did in the quarters, the semis and the finals and against the teams he did it against was really impressive. He carried that team to a state championship, was in the 30s all three games and just played with a determination and a confidence that I think really separated him from a lot of other players in those games and clearly established himself as somebody that could be an impact player at this level.

We had a little bit of a logjam last year so we decided to redshirt. If he didn't redshirt, he would have played a lot last year. He's that good. But I think it gave him time to learn the offense in a situation where he didn't feel pressure, and he got stronger. When you take a look at him, you think about where he was a year ago physically and what you look at now is two different people, and I think that's enabled him to become a really incredibly effective scorer.

Q. Do you think such a tough non-conference schedule will help a team with so many uncertain parts, or will it be a growing process the first few months?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think when you look at the schedule that we put together, clearly it will prepare you for 20 league games because we're kind of jumping right into it. We don't have a lot of easy games at all, nor should we. We should challenge our team, especially when we have some veterans, and the thought process obviously is on Selection Sunday you'll be rewarded for scheduling like this.

At times you've got to be careful because you can schedule yourself into a bunch of losses early when your team is really not playing that bad, you're playing pretty well, you're just losing to good teams early, so hopefully we'll play well enough and get some wins.

But the mindset that you need to get ready for every game is going to have to be evident right from the

beginning with the schedule that we have.

Q. How do you think the new three-point line is going to impact things, or is that just going to have to play out over time?

FRAN McCAFFERY: It hasn't affected us as much yet. Now, let's be honest, as intense maybe as our practices are, the games themselves will be a lot different in terms of closing out into people's space. Like we only can expect the three-point percentages across the board, our team and every other team, to go down a little bit, not only in terms of makes but in terms of number attempted because it was really going in the wrong direction. You had guys that were shooting 49 threes in a game, and I think it was taking away from maybe the post, the traditional post game.

The good thing for us is the players that we have that make threes can shoot it out there. From Wieskamp to Bohannon to Patrick to Garza to Fredrick, Nunge, Kriener, it doesn't seem to be an issue at all. The percentages have been good. We chart everything, right from June until now. So it'll be interesting to see how that plays out eventually, and does it affect how teams defend. Will more teams play zone? You're seeing a lot of pack line defense anyway. Will everybody play pack line defense? We'll have to wait and see how that plays out.

Q. Do you feel like you've got what you need to at least be somewhat of a contender in the Big Ten, to have a good NCAA Tournament seed, to go deep in the conference and NCAA Tournaments?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, absolutely. The thing that you look at in terms of that is the quality of our league top to bottom, and I said this before, and I'll say it again, it's without question the best this league has been, and this is my tenth year. Not even close. We had some great teams, some great players, but our league expanded in the time that I've been here, and everybody is really good. And so can you stay healthy? Can you win some close games? Can you develop some confidence early?

But we have the makeup of a team that can contend in this league and contend on a national level.

Q. Where does Till fit in this year?

FRAN McCAFFERY: He's been great. Physically he's in a terrific place. Really smart, really tough, incredible defender. He's gotten a lot of reps, whether it be because Bohannon is out, because Pemsil is not here, Connor is not here, Ryan Kriener is nursing a little bit of a tweaked ankle right now, will miss a day or two. Till is out there every minute. He is really good defender, incredibly smart player on the floor. We're thrilled to have him.

Q. Patrick was in Albany accepting the Fighting Spirit award. What does that mean to you and kind of the journey that he's been on, especially over the past few years?

FRAN McCAFFERY: It's an amazing thing for our family on so many different levels. We started that event, ironically, 13 or 14 years ago, and we started it with a prominent businessman in town by the name of Ken Raymond, who's a dear friend. The first year we had the event, we laugh about it now because it's raised well over \$2 million, but we didn't know if anybody would come, and a lot of people came the first year. Since we started it, we started it kind of together, his daughter died of cancer, and my son, or Marg and I's son, had cancer. So for him to receive an award in her name was incredibly emotional because of the relationship that both our families have. For him to receive an award at that event that we started and also to see how that event has grown, it's really an impressive one with the cooperation of both Division I schools in town. Both coaches were there. The Siena coach was on my staff before, and I'm thrilled for him. And then of course a lot of people in the room are friends of ours, and he was not somebody who liked to talk about that very much. I think he said that in his speech. But he's recognized now that it's important that he tell his story for other people. I was really proud of him.