

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

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Fran McCaffery Men's Basketball



Q. All the stuff Connor went through last year, strep throat, Mono, surgery, losing ten pounds, and then Patrick before that. How did you deal with that?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: You know, we dealt with it as a family. We dealt with it individually. You know, the first one was obviously much more traumatic, and it was awful to watch Connor go through the discomfort that he was going through, and knowing that it was going to leave us a little shallow in the backcourt.

But at the end of the day, with regard to that, it's, okay, let's make sure our guys are healthy, whether it's your son, whether it's one of your players who you are treating like your son. Make sure he's okay.

And once it became evident that it was going to take a while, when he had the setback after the surgery when he was bleeding in the middle of night and we had to take him to the hospital, and he was in the hospital at 4:00 in the morning, we kind of knew, his season was shot at that point.

He was struggling maybe to come back. You deal with them individually and you help them through it. I think we felt like, you know, at some point, Connor going to be better. It was going to take longer than we had all hoped.

It was unfortunate, the timing of it all, but I felt pretty confident that he would eventually feel better. He put all the weight back on and he's feeling really good right now, so I'm excited about him, very much.

Q. Speaking as a head coach, what does he bring to your team? We saw him a lot in high school but what are you looking for?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: He's a good fit for the rest of the pieces that we have. He adds something, another dimension. He's a point guard. He feeds the post. He gets rid of it.

We've got a lot of people around him who can score, and he'll find those people. We have an abundance of post players who can score, and I said this before, but I think we have more three-point shooters now than we

did last year, so we can spread the ball around offensively.

You know, it gives us a big, strong presence at that position, physical. Essentially provides a tremendous amount of depth because it's a long season, and you need that kind of depth. As good as he is at the things I just described, he's also capable of scoring. So he gives us another scorer.

Q. How will Bohannon be a better player? And how important are leadership skills going into his junior year?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: What he has to do is recognize that he's been our starting point guard for two years. His numbers have been phenomenal, as you pointed out, and he has to fulfill that role. I think if you were to analyze last year's team, we were a group that got along well together. But somebody's got to lead us.

Tyler Cook has been the guy who stepped up and said he wants to be the guy, but it's always going to be at some level your point guard. They are in the same class. They both have accomplished a tremendous amount of things in two years.

I've given Jordan the green light to be the guy. He can call plays. He can gather his teammates, whether it be in the locker room or at any given point in time in practice. I think he's earned the respect of everybody. So that if he does that, they will listen to him, and he has to understand that they will listen to him; that he has my support and the support of our staff.

What I think you'll see is a guy who is better in that area, and while at the same time, consistently putting up the kind of numbers we're seen.

Q. What you need from Tyler Cook this year?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: We just need Tyler Cook to do what he's always done, but maybe be a little bit better. I think you expect a guy to get better from his freshman to sophomore year; he did. He was really good as a freshman. He made the all-rookie team.

Last year his numbers went up. He had a great summer. Really putting the time in on his own, whether it be getting in early for lifts or staying late for shooting

or coming in on off-days. He's just a guy that really puts the time in, so you like to see him enjoy the benefit of that hard work and be essentially more productive.

You know, that said, he shot, what, 57 percent from the field and really improved his free throw shooting. His rebounding numbers went up. So, okay, let's look at his stat line. Maybe his turnovers go down, his rebounds go up, be more of a presence defensively. He's really good at moving his feet laterally. For a big guy, we can use him in pressing situations or in switching situations because he can move his feet and guard a point guard, a small forward or a power forward. Really stay engaged defensively and be more of a shot-blocker and we've seen that a little bit so far in practice. I think that's what he wants to do.

Q. Where does Luka stand right now?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: Luka just started running, so that's been a big step for him. He was excited about that. Really got his first sweat in over the weekend. He had been on the treadmill and riding the bike exclusively. So now he's running and shooting. But he's in a really good place mentally I think. Just have to be patient.

Q. A lot has been discussed about the defense, but the turnover margin is also kind of a big change from the last couple of years where Jok was able to get his hands on balls in passing lanes. Last year I think you were minus 2.3 per game. Especially more on the wing, what kind of attention have you paid to that and how do you think you'll get better?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: You know, it's really just a matter of being in a stance and being up toward the ball, being over toward the ball, and staying that way. You know, don't relax. Your man hits and goes away, don't relax. Don't chase away. Really, fundamental things.

If you're where you're supposed to be, you're going to get more deflections and more steals, and you're going to be in a position where you're anticipating more than you're reacting. Because if you're reacting, then you're not going to steal the ball. You're just going to maybe, maybe, get a closeout in time, or maybe you let him close out and the guy hits a three. That's the mindset that we are trying to master at this point in time.

Q. What have you seen with Joe so far?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: Joe's been terrific. Very professional in his approach to working, to listening, to figuring things out. Very competitive. Really locked in.

Scoring the ball, you know, taking good shots. Understanding the offense and how he fits. Very mature for a young guy, but I think not unexpected.

Q. What can translate most immediately to the college level, that we've seen in high school?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: His game translates well. You know, he's a guy I think most known for his ability to score and put up incredible numbers, but he's a really good defender. He's a really good ball handler.

So if you're playing him at small forward, it gives you another handler, somebody who can make a shot but make a play for somebody else who makes a shot.

He can guard a number of different positions, so it gives us some flexibility there. You know, so I think he kind of views himself as somebody who can really help our team, even if his shot is not falling on any particular day. And that's because he's got such a complete game.

That's what we need from him. You know, yes, he's a terrific shooter. Yes, we've seen him make eight 3s in a game and he's got the ability to do that. That's going to be hard to do at this level. He'll make a bunch, no doubt about that. But I think he'll impact the game with his competitive instincts, his defense, his rebounding, his ball handling, and most importantly, his versatility.

Q. Cordell seems to have transformed himself physically. How do you think that's going to translate this season?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, you know what, it remains to be seen. He looks terrific. I think what you're going to see is a quicker guy. He's moving really well. A little more explosive off the ground. More aggressive offensively facing the basket. You know, more so in the past it was with his back to the basket.

So let's see how it manifests itself in games, but I think he feels really good about himself.

Q. How humbling was last year for the younger guys; the expectations and just the way everything transpired?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: I hope it was very humbling. That's the plan. I mean, couldn't be satisfied with it, anybody.

And the things that I've said before are, you know, the critical thing is to take ownership of it and recognize that change has to be made to a man. That's coaches, players, everybody, starters, subs. We all have to be in it together and recognize that every day, we've got to be better.

We can't have complacency for any possessions on either side of the ball on a daily basis. That's a mindset that has to be developed. It wasn't there last

year, and it's got to be there this year.

Q. Bohannon averaged 32 minutes a game, 34 in Big Ten play. Would you like to see those numbers lower for the length of the season. Can Connor and someone else alleviate that?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: We have some flexibility there. I mean, I typically don't like to play him that many minutes. I mean, he's proved that he can play that many minutes. It's been said before, but he did that some days on a bad foot. He's a tough kid.

But I think for him to be at his best, especially the way teams are going after him, you know, he was a marked man last year; was not the year before.

So, yeah, we're excited about him. We're excited about his ability and his capability of putting up 30, but at the same time, we want to keep him rested, especially for the end-of-game situations.

Q. Where have you seen the most improvement out of Jack Nunge?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: Physically he looks a lot different. He looks better. So therefore, he's much more effective inside, and we're playing him there a lot more. He played both in and out last year because he has the ability to put it on the deck and make 3s. He's I think developed a much quicker release on his jumpshot. He's already looking for his shot. No hesitation whatsoever.

I think the thing that has also been impressive about him is his consistency. If you look at his numbers, we stat every day, he consistently has put up really good numbers regardless whether he's on one team or another.

Q. You talked about players taking ownership and being less complacent. Have you seen evidence that that's happening already?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: I would say most of the time. I want it to be all the time. But I do think there has been a concerted effort to make those changes, and remember, we started working out in June.

So it's a little different than it has been in the past. You know, so the other side of that is, you know, the good news is, you start practicing June. Sometimes the bad news is, sometimes you start practicing in June, you know, because it makes the season seem really long.

I think we really tried to guard against that. Here it is, it's June 15, and we're going up-and-down; we don't have a game till November 8, and we hope to be playing our best basketball in March.

So I think we have to be a little bit cognizant of the uniqueness of that situation, and then not overreact one way or the other and try to identify, you know, what you pointed out, that, hey, there's a concerted effort to understand that this is what has to be done.

Q. As a coach, how do you get out of -- you don't want complacency. Are you harder on them this year? How do you handle getting the best out of them?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: You know what, I haven't been harder on them this year. What I've tried to do is coach them the way that I typically coach them. A lot of times, people see me maybe lose my temper in a game, and it's really not the way I coach.

If you come to practice, it's not the way I am. Occasionally I'll get that way if I think, you know, we've got a couple bad calls and I try not to, but sometimes that happens. If we're going through the same thing with a particular player, over and over and over and over, and they are still doing it wrong, well, that's going to be a source of frustration.

But for the most part, I treat these guys like professionals. We're going to work hard and we're going to put a game plan together and we're going to have a practice plan that really makes sense for our team, and we're going to understand and explain what needs to be done before practice, during practice, after practice, and we are all in this together. So we are all participants in what the end game is going to be.

So that's -- so I'm going to -- this is what I need you to do and treat them with respect and hopefully they will perform at the level that's within their capability. I don't expect them to do what they can't do.

I think I do a really good job, and so does my staff, of understanding the strengths and limits of each particular player; so that I don't put too much of an expectation on one person, and then when they don't achieve that, then I jump all over them, because that's unrealistic and I try not to be unrealistic.

There are and might be days where I feel like, maybe I've got to rev it up a little bit based on what I'm saying and what my staff is seeing. We'll talk about that. I've got a very experienced staff that's not afraid to say, hey, we've got to get after it today or, you know, not.

When you have a veteran group, you'd like to think that I don't have to walk into practice and really get on them on a regular basis. They need to rev it up themselves and come with a mindset that's necessary. These guys were on a team that won 19 games. They were on a team that lost 19 games. There's a big difference.

Q. You talk about a veteran team but your oldest senior is Nicholas Baer. Where do you see him this year?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: Playing really well. I've been really impressed with him. He's back shooting the ball with great consistency, which he did two years ago. He's been healthy. He worked really hard this summer.

He's also a fifth-year senior, so his body has changed. He's a lot stronger than he was before, but he's also incredibly knowledgeable and confident. I think right now, and understands what our team needs.

In all likelihood, he'll be a guy that plays a lot, probably off the bench. I think he's best suited coming off the bench in that role.

Q. Do you think your players feel any pressure to win this year and what can you do as a coach to relax them?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: I would think that they would feel pressure to win every year, and I think that's the plan. You start the season, you feel like you have a good team; we're supposed to win. Let's go win. Let's put it together. Let's compete together. Let's understand how each of us can help the other.

So we're helping them. They are helping each other. They are getting better. We're getting better. I'd like to think it's not every possession has to be won, or else we're completely failing based on what happened last year. I don't think you want that mindset. There's got to be a comfortability and confidence level that's developed and I think we're working towards that.

Q. Do you feel any, oh, I don't know -- did you question yourself last year, a losing season, or was that sort of an aberration for this program? I realize you had injuries and you had a young team, etc., but, do you stop and say: I've got to look at myself?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: Absolutely. I think you have to. Because if you don't, what you're saying is, it's everybody's fault, and I think that's foolish and unfair.

So you have to analyze everything; what did I do, what can I do differently. You know, what do I need to demand out of my staff. How do we plan practice. How do we run practice. What's the role of our graduate assistants, our student managers. How are we doing recruiting.

And then make sure the players know and understand that that's our part, and now they have to do their part. Okay, what did they do well; what didn't they do well.

So you have an end-of-the-year meeting. We can look at the numbers, and we can tell who did what and who was turning the ball over and who was making 3s and who wasn't making 3s and who was consistent and who was inconsistent. It's not that we're picking anybody apart. We're being realistic as to what happened and what we have to improve upon.

Essentially it starts with me to do that and most importantly, the players need to know that that's what I'm doing, and I'm not putting it all on them. You know, I don't think you want to, as a coach in that situation, make excuses for anybody, for myself, for players.

We could come up with plenty of excuses as to why it happened, but if you were to look at every other team, most of those teams have injury and experience, a tough schedule. I mean, some, it kind of all falls together, but most everybody has those things. And you can start listing them if you want to, but I don't know if it does anybody any good.

Q. What did you decide that you could do differently?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: I've always been an offensive coach. We're going to put points on the board. We're going to run. We're going to attack, and essentially, we're going to out-score you.

Most of the time, that's worked. If you look every year that I've coached, we've scored the ball. We've attacked the rim. We've gotten to the free throw line. We've gotten into the bonus, gotten into the double bonus.

My players play with supreme confidence. I always have guys up in the scoring leaders, all-league guys, because they play with confidence, and I let them play. That's great, and our offensive numbers were really good last year. I mean, tremendously good.

But our defensive numbers were not. So, okay, we have to spend more time in practice, whether it's breaking drills down, one-on-one, two-on-two, three-on-three, four-on-four, and then ultimately five-on-five. Okay, how do we transition defensively; what have we been teaching.

We have to reorganize how we teach that. Ball screen defense; you could go staff-by-staff throughout the country and you might have staffs that spend four hours a day talking about ball screens. It's just one of those things.

So many teams are running ball screen offenses, whether it be continuity or late shot clock, and depending upon who their point guard is, and depending upon who their 2-guard is.

We really have spent a lot more time talking about defense, and defensive drills, and emphasizing defense, and trying to hold them accountable.

Some of the other stuff will be pretty similar, but maybe a little more subtle changes, little differences. But maybe nothing too major.

Q. Do you also have to make sure you guard against overreacting way you did last year; that maybe it was an aberration and stay the course?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: I don't think you can just say it's an aberration, you know, because it's a fairly large random sample of data. You know, an aberration is what happens maybe in a week, but not a season.

So I think you have to be realistic with yourself and your staff and your players and say, okay, we've got to fix this. Change has to be made. Changes have to be made.

The hardest thing sometimes is for everybody to do a self-evaluation. It's easy to say, I do what I could do. Our guards were there; we didn't rebound; our post didn't block any shots; our coaches didn't have us ready.

There's any number of things. The food was bad at the hotel; there's so many excuses that you can make, but you know, you go that route and you're not going to make any progress, in my opinion.

Q. You've got a deep bench here for most of your career, and a lot of times you've got guys with maybe equal, not skill sets, but equal abilities, maybe at different positions, and sometimes that's challenging that one guy will have a great game and then he won't play well the next and somebody else will. How do you go forward with setting your rotations when there may not be a lot of separation, at least in how they can accomplish?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: That's a good point because you have some teams now that are only using ten scholarships, and they have got their eight guys that they are going to play and that's it.

You know, we use our scholarships and we bring guys along and we develop them and redshirt a few of them. I think I've been around long enough to know that sometimes you have a rash of injuries at any given time and you'd better have depth. You'd better have depth when you play in this league. We've got 20 games in this league. It's physical. It's grueling, and I like to have fresh players on the floor at any given time, especially when you play the style that we play.

I think you're right in the sense that you can come to practice today and the second team would beat the first team. Okay, there's the first team; I can see that, but the second team wins, all right, does that happen a lot? Certainly happens enough, and certain guys are really playing well that aren't on the first team.

And that's challenging for me, for myself -- and I've said this to you guys before many times -- there's a certain element of fairness that you try to employ as a head coach when it comes to playing time, the dispersal of playing time. I don't like to say, okay, I made a decision, I'm just going to play this guy and that's that. Somebody's playing better, that guy's going in.

And it's incumbent upon the guy that's in there first to consistently play at least at a maximum effort level. I don't expect him to make every shot and I don't expect him to be perfect.

We do have a lot of pieces and you say, well, maybe this guy is really playing well, maybe you should play him more. The only thing I can do there is play him and hopefully get out of him what we think we can. So it's possible that we could redshirt somebody this year, depending on what the injury situation is like between now and the first game.

Q. When you look at your defense, do you think that some of the challenges, the evaluations and the analysis that you put together was more physical and tangible detriment, or was it more about intangible and maybe even just schematics?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: It's always both. It's never one.

So you might have a matchup that just isn't in our favor from a quickness standpoint or a size and strength standpoint. Okay, well, then what do we have to do? We have to get in the gaps and we've got to help.

Schematically, well, you know, we thought this would work; it didn't work, so let's change how we do that. And we think that will help our players, the players that we have. So I think you look at both, both sides of that.

Q. Who is your best defender right now? Is there anybody that sticks out?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, Luke hasn't been playing. I think Cook's much better. I think Joe Wieskamp has been a really good, consistent defender. Baer has been substantially better.

I think Bohannon and Moss have been getter. Those two guys are scorers, that's what they are. They also give it up easy, but they are more offensive-oriented.

But I think Kriener and PemsI have been showing that they can guard, too. Nunge has been blocking some shots and playing his more natural position, so he's been much more effective.

Q. Do you have any redshirt freshmen in mind?

COACH FRAN McCaffery: I think it's too early to have in mind, because you never know what's going to happen between now and -- we saw it last year. You hope nobody gets hurt, and you say, okay, well, who makes the most sense.

And then I always say this: It's going to be like, who is willing; is there anybody that wants to do that. Some guys flat-out don't want to. Always go back to Jarrod Uthoff, wanted him to redshirt at Wisconsin. He didn't want to redshirt.

So you have to be able to assess your players' intentions as it relates to that discussion, even bringing it up, quite honestly.

Q. What is it like to have your top nine scorers back? That simply doesn't happen in college basketball.

COACH FRAN McCaffery: I think it says a lot about them as individuals. They love each other. They love being a part of this program. They believe in each other. They believe in our ability to be better.

You're right, there's an epidemic of transferring. It would have been easy for some guys to transfer. That's where it's headed. But you know, it just speaks to how they -- I guess what their experience has been. Even though we had a losing season, the experience was positive for them. That's why they are still here.

Q. What's the most important thing for PemsI to do to become the player you want?

COACH FRAN McCaffery: He has to make the adjustment to being a different body type. I think he's excited about doing that. He made a decision to drop that weight. It wasn't like we went in and said: Okay, you have to get to this weight.

He just felt like after being in this league for two years, he needed to be thinner, quicker, quicker off the floor, and maybe in his mind, a little more versatile.

So now he's got to see if that is really what makes him the most comfortable and he feels like that's the best, because he may end up feeling like he's got to put a little more weight back on. I don't think he'll ever be 257 again. He might get to 235 and be a little bit of both, play a little smashmouth and play a little finesse.