

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

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Fran McCaffery Men's Basketball



Q. Cordell is shooting 74 percent -- can you see him sustaining that?

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, he's very efficient, so I see him sustaining. I don't know if he's going to shoot 74 percent for the rest of the year. That would probably be a record.

But, teams will start defending him differently, I think is probably what you were getting at, whether they double him or try to front him, whatever. But I think you're right. He is a crafty guy.

The thing that I really like about him is, even if he's not scoring, you can still run your offense through him because he's such a good passer and I think he'll start doing that a lot more when he starts seeing more attention.

Q. Did Cordell feel any starting pressure?

COACH McCAFFERY: I don't think there's anything that we haven't discussed before in terms of his skill set. When you look at guys that struggle early in their careers, typically they are not ready physically or the speed of the game is too fast, or they don't have the necessary skill set that has to be developed and that's not uncommon.

But he can dribble, pass and shoot. He's 253 pounds. He doesn't rush. He doesn't panic. He plays at his pace. And he's smart; he can be effective. He'll have some games where he's not as effective, but even then, he's not a big mistake guy. And consequently, then you look at him as say, well, he doesn't really play like a freshman. Well, I didn't really expect him to.

Q. The pace seemed to wear them down a little bit against Notre Dame. The pace you want to play with at both ends, is it just game reps that are going to get the guys in that shape or what is it?

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, the only thing you have to do is rotate personnel a little more. Sometimes you stay with guys, like Pete and Baer, they were tired at the end of the game. I'm probably not going to take them out in that situation.

Q. Were you happy with 75 against Notre Dame?

COACH McCAFFERY: Really happy with that group. I thought it was a big step for Isaiah. Cordell obviously handled it really well. I wasn't surprised with Jordan. Jordan, he had been playing really well in my view.

But the thing that he took great pride in was that he wasn't going to allow our team to turn the ball over like we had been. Not that that was Christian's fault by any means. That was a collective effort. We turned it over 18 times, and that's a lot of different people. But I think he settled everybody down, and we only had one turnover in the second half, so that gives you a chance to win.

Q. What did Isaiah do in that redshirt year? What kind of progress did he make to get to this point where he's a starter?

COACH McCAFFERY: I think he just kind of figured it out. Remember, he didn't come in the summer, so that put him behind. So he needed extra time to learn the offense, to figure out what's the motion game, how do we run it, how do we run our break, how does it fit.

And then, also, he has to know more than one spot, which is not easy, especially if you don't get that jump and start learning those things in June. You start trying to learn them in October and you play your first game in November. It's pretty difficult.

Q. Can you see the confidence -- seems like he's starting to take shots and do some different things.

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, I think that's true, but he has taken his game up to another level in terms of aggressiveness. And I'm not talking about physicality. I'm just talking about an aggressive mind-set. You know, he moves his feet well defensively. He's making more plays off the dribble.

I think like I said the other night, five assists, no turns to, me, was the biggest. He hit a couple shots in that stretch where we needed buckets.

But his decision-making, he didn't start going to hunt shots after that because he made a couple. He moved it on and threw the ball to open people. Shows you he understands how to play.

Q. He looked active defensively early, too. Did you like that out of him?

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, I did, in particular, because of, you know, they start a big lineup, but they play a small lineup most of the time. And you're right, he was really effective there. He's one of those guys that could make a mistake in terms of what he reads and recover because of his speed and quickness and his length.

And that's good to see, because you can tell that he's processing information on the fly, which is what the good players have to do, because so many things are happening, especially if there's ball screen, roll replace: Who is treated rolling; who's got the ball; who is replacing. Where are the other two people: Is one high; are both wide on the interchanging.

All of that is happening simultaneously, so you have to read that quickly. Are you the guy that's going to pick up the roll, or are you the guy that's going to get the next pass; are you the guy guarding the dribbler. That's usually where he'll be, in one of those three places. I'm just proud of him and I told him that after the game.

Q. Start the same line-up tomorrow?

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah.

Q. Christian and Dom, how did you address the lineup changes with them and how have they reacted to it?

COACH McCAFFERY: They reacted extremely well as I expected they would. I addressed it collectively. I said, we haven't been playing as well as I think we're capable of playing. We're going to shake things up.

And those of you that are coming out of the starting lineup are going to play. Be ready to play. Be ready to come in and produce, and I thought they did. I wasn't disappointed with either of their energy levels or their attention to detail, their understanding of scouting report, and I thought they really tried to come in and pick us up.

Q. What's the next step for the starting five? What do you want to see them do that maybe they didn't do at Notre Dame?

COACH McCAFFERY: I don't know that you would look at it just in terms of the starting five. I don't know that I would do that. We played really good defense for a good portion of the game.

We did not play really good defense for 40 minutes, and that's what's going to have to happen. Our ball screen defense was really good, really good, and then all of a sudden it wasn't so good.

And again, you know, it was -- when you watch the film,

there was a little bit of fatigue. Especially with Pete, the way they were chasing him around, and he was always guarding a really good player, whether it's Beacham or Vasturia, he's guarding a guy that's also running around and can also go off the dribble, make threes.

So that was a lot for him. Same with Baer. I keep going back to those two guys because I trust them and I have them in there a lot. I have to be careful and get them a little bit of rest so that they are fresh for the stretch run.

Q. What did Peter look like in practice? Obviously he blamed himself -- but what did he look like?

COACH McCAFFERY: He's been great. You know, I think you're right. He really took that one hard. You know, I don't remember, ever -- I've been watching him for eight years, see him shoot 4-for-20, you know, and I would never want him to think that you shoot 4-for-20, that's why we lose. He was moving without the ball. He was really trying. He missed some shots he normally makes. He battled I thought.

He did one thing in particular that was effective. He was screening for other people: Isaiah's first three, Baer hit a big three. In that one stretch, I think it was 13:01 right towards the end of first half, he was right in the middle of that by screening. He screens twice, we get threes, and then he hits a three.

So he did a lot of good things. He was disappointed, for somebody who prides himself on his shooting and who spends as much time as he does getting better in that area, none of those guys ever want to have a night like that where they shoot 4-for-20.

We made sure that we let him know that clearly was not his fault. We made enough other mistakes. We didn't rebound the way we should have. We got out-rebounded. But again, we had a chance to win because we took care of the basketball.

Q. What about Omaha?

COACH McCAFFERY: Really impressed with Omaha. Twice they went to California and won, which as you well know is really hard to do. They played really well against USC. I thought they played really tough against Kansas State, and Rice, quality programs. They have depth. They have a tremendous point guard. They have a great post player. You know, this is a really good team; not unlike the team -- that we had a couple years ago when they came in here.

Q. Jordan going up against Hollins?

COACH McCAFFERY: Nation's leader in steals, four a game, you don't see those kind of numbers very much. Great instincts he has. He's good on the ball. He's really good off the ball, as well. So he's constantly kind

of wreaking havoc with your offense. Great feel for how to play, he has.

Q. Different role for Christian -- end of the season?

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, we put him off the ball because they had essentially four guards out there and we thought with his size, 6-6, they had a lot of 6-6 guys. We left him out there; experienced guy playing the wing position. So we will play him there some. He played a lot of small forward in high school. He played a lot of point guard for his AU team. So he's done both.

The next thing for him is to show that he can score the ball, because he can. He can score. What he's doing now is he's trying to do what our team needs him to do to win. So he's playing defense, he's pushing the ball, he's feeding the post, he's active.

But I would like to see him be a little more aggressive offensively. I think that will help him in terms of getting minutes at that other position.

Q. With Jordan, Cordell, because you are familiar with the Mississippi Valley Conference, do you have to remind yourself that they were playing there just a year ago?

COACH McCAFFERY: It's interesting with those two, because I've been watching them since they were in eighth grade. My perspective on both of those guys is a little bit different. I've seen them in enough situations to know what they are made of, more so than what their game is.

So I don't look at them as young. I just look at them as two guys that I know can really play and I trust them. You know, my responsibility is to get them to trust themselves, and they both do. And to know and understand that if they do make a mistake, you've got to have complete amnesia and just come right back and do something positive for your team, and they both do everything they can to make that happen.

Q. With Cordell, was it the all-around game --

COACH McCAFFERY: When he was in eighth grade, he was a big kid, and you had no idea what he was going to end up. And then his freshman year -- in a really good program at Dubuque Wahlert, he put up some serious numbers. You don't see freshmen put up numbers like that typically. I went and watched him and said, he's real close.

I wasn't ready to say definitely then, and then as we watched him in his sophomore year, it became evident. He's made the necessary strides. Took a little detour with the leg injury, but what really impressed me there was when he came back from that, I think everybody

thought he would take a step back and he really didn't. I think it's been said that he did, but he didn't. He was terrific when he came back, and has a really good approach to everything he does.

That said, I think he's still going to get better.

Q. Those are hard injuries to come back from. What does that say about him?

COACH McCAFFERY: And he was out a long time. Ryan, Jordan and Cordell played together, and had that great summer; they lost in a championship in South Carolina, they won the Championship in Florida. Well, Cordell didn't play in any of those games.

That was really when Ryan made his jump. He had a terrific summer before his senior year. And you know, started getting all kinds of national attention, where prior to that, it was just local.

So I think it was unfortunate. I think that team could have really -- as special as it was, could really have been special, had they had Cordell, as well. And so I think that's what kind of put everybody -- put some doubt in everybody's mind as to where he was going to end up, but they lost in a state championship game. He had a terrific senior year, and good the his explosiveness back. He's not a high flyer, but he will show tremendous athletic ability at times.

Q. Tyler's injury, what's been his response, and what's the response of the team in the locker room, talking about that absence and how you filled it?

COACH McCAFFERY: What's funny about that, he hurt his finger on Thursday, and he played twice, and then all of the sudden, it's like he's not playing. And they are looking, like, he was playing yesterday. He's just a tough kid. We trust him, even if he has to play one-handed.

But they love him. He's one of those people that you just -- you're talking about the locker room. He's as good as it gets in there. He's got an unbelievably positive approach. He's constantly trying to get better.

So it was nothing more than, hey, we feel for him. We are getting ready to go play Notre Dame. We'll fight without him and look forward to seeing him when he comes back. He was at practice yesterday, doing everything he can.

The good thing is, with a finger injury, he's obviously got to take a couple days off. He had surgery; they put pins in there, but he'll be able to run and go on the bike. He'll be in great physical condition when he comes back.

Q. Are you looking at bringing him back before Big Ten play starts?

COACH McCAFFERY: I'll just bring him back when the doctors say. They said three weeks. As you well know, is it three weeks exactly; is it three weeks and five days; is it two weeks and five days? Who knows. We'll see. But he'll be ready. He'll put the time in.