

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

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Fran McCaffery Men's Basketball



It's a great opportunity for us. We're going to play a really good team either way, and just looking forward to the opportunity.

Q. Do you kind of divvy up the pregame prep between the two teams you could be playing or just go right down the middle and spend an equal amount of time on the two teams?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, it's about what we'll do, split it right down the middle.

Q. How much more time-consuming is that than normal?

FRAN McCAFFERY: It's different, but we're playing two teams that we've already played, so there's already a certain knowledge you already have. We just try to look and see what are they doing differently later in the season, who's playing well and that kind of thing. That's the way we do it right now.

Q. What's the leadership like on the team right now and who's kind of taking charge?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Same guys you would expect, Baer, Bohannon, and Cook.

Q. Do they do it more vocally now?

FRAN McCAFFERY: About the same. All three of those guys are hard workers. They're conscientious with their preparation, and they're not afraid to speak up.

Q. How do you lighten their load mentally? I'm sure nobody is happy right now, but how do you get them to say, look, enjoy?

FRAN McCAFFERY: The first thing is when you lose a game like that one, you feel like everything was horrible, and there was certain things that were not good clearly, but there were a lot of good things in that game, and you have to be able to recognize that. We did some things that were better than we had been doing previously. We made shots. We moved the ball. Give credit to them, they made a bunch of shots coming down the stretch. We executed fairly well in certain situations, not so much in others, and that's what happens in the course of a long season.

You try to continue to have a businesslike approach. You want to enjoy the ride to a degree, but there's always that businesslike approach that you have to have when you're preparing to play games at this level.

Q. Do your players move on as easy as you do from wins and losses?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think it would be depending upon each person's personal makeup. Some probably easier than others. What happens in a game like that, everybody made at least one mistake at some point, and as a player, you remember that. Had I just done this in that situation, we would have won, that kind of thing. I always remember we lost to Michigan State, I think it was my third year, if we win the game, we go to the tournament, if we lose we go to the NIT, basically. Gabe Olaseni was bawling his eyes out on my shoulder after the game. Thought he blew the game. I couldn't remember the play that he was upset about, but in his mind, he blew the game. I think something happened like with 9:30 to go, he traveled or something, and he felt like it was his fault we lost. I said, no, it's not. He was great.

There's things that happen in the course of a game, and you can't obsess about one particular thing, and you can't let it linger. You've got to be able to get to the next play. And I think clearly we're better at that than we were last year.

Q. You had a good tournament last year in New York; going into it, was there anything noticeable, or is it that you just played well?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I thought we played hard, and you would say, well, isn't that what you're supposed to do. Yeah. But I felt like we were together. I thought our offense clicked better, and oftentimes when that happens, other things are better, whether it be defense or rebounding in particular. And we were locked in to the game plan, and obviously looking to do the same thing this year, play better, play better than we played last year even.

Q. Tyler has struggled the last couple games. Are teams playing him differently?

FRAN McCAFFERY: They're coming after him, they're picking him up early, they're doubling him, they're being physical with him. It's funny because you look at his numbers and say, well, he didn't shoot it well the last couple of games, but he still had nine and nine in the

last game. I thought he did some good things off the dribble to create shots for others, and that's not something you typically think about with Tyler Cook. It's like, we're supposed to be making plays for you, but when you're getting defended like he is, you've got to make plays for other people, and he's doing that. So proud of him for that. He did get on the glass, had nine rebounds. So if we can get him going a little bit more offensively.

Q. Jordan's performances earlier in the month, in February, against Indiana and Northwestern, does that give you an air of confidence that if you get in that situation he can manufacture --

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I think every time we take the floor, we know we have him, and that's an incredible weapon. Keep in mind, the teams were playing, they watch tape, too, so they're going to send two at him and trap him everywhere and beat him up off the ball, get real physical with him. So we've got to do a good job of freeing him up, taking some of the pressure off him with Connor, let him play off the ball a little bit, move him around. May be a little harder to figure out where he is.

But any time you have a guy like that, it's going to be a function of other guys performing, as well. If we can establish an inside game and a perimeter game. The other day, Joe was terrific, Isaiah and Garza were really good, well, that's going to make it easier on Bohannon. If not, then it's going to be even more intense for him. But he knows that. We just want to be able to continue to spread the offense around as best we can.

Q. Is the officiating in the tournament similar to -- do they change? Do they allow more?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think not so much regular season to postseason. I think it's start of the season to the end of the season; I think there's a difference. I think there will be more let go as you get to the end of the season than they did earlier would be my opinion.

Q. Should that favor you guys, if Tyler and Luka --

FRAN McCAFFERY: It depends. And again, you didn't really have to do a lot of analytics on it, who's reffing the game. We have got guys in our league that are established, veteran guys, and that's who's going to be reffing at the tournament. They're all good, and they're all professionals. So I don't really look at that component and say, okay, we have to adjust. No, we just keep playing the way we're playing.

Q. As quickly as you guys got into the skid, do you kind of remind your players that you can get out of it just as quickly?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, it's a long season, and

that's fairly typical for most teams. You're going to have times when certain things are working, certain players are cooking, and times when they're not. You've got to stay together.

Q. Is that easy or difficult?

FRAN McCAFFERY: It's always a challenge. Whatever league you're in, whatever team you have, it's not always a function of veterans versus young guys. This is a resilient group. We'll be okay.

Q. What would be your nutshell view of Illinois and Northwestern after 31 games?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Two different teams. Illinois plays a unique style. They were playing as well as anybody in the country for that one stretch when they won five out of six I think it was and beat Michigan State, beat Maryland, that kind of thing. They have some guys that are really picking up their game, a guy like Feliz, a guy maybe we didn't talk about as much when we played them the last time, but he's playing well, and obviously Ayo, Giorgi, and Jordan and Frazier. They've got some good players. Northwestern, we saw what Vic Law did getting 21 in the first half against us here. Taylor is a weapon, Turner is playing really well. Pardon is one of the best big men in the country. He's a handful. Chris is going to play defense and change defenses. So both teams are very difficult and different.

Q. Does it help your team going into this having played in kind of an NBA environment earlier this year?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, but I think we play in an NBA environment every night, to be honest with you.

Q. Do you see any commonalities with the struggles with some of the other teams that have hit a rough patch at the end of the year, whether it's mental fatigue, or is it unique this year?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think it's a function of a lot of things. We had three out of the last four games on the road. We obviously were in a position to win the last game, didn't do it. That's unfortunate. The other three games we didn't play well. I think that's a little more disconcerting. It's not that you lost, it's how you lost that's a little more, something that takes a little more analysis as to why that happened.

It's easy to look and say, well, we didn't make shots in any of those games, so at least we made shots in the last one. But I think you look at teams across the country, everybody -- with a few exceptions of a few teams at the very top -- they've all had winning streaks, losing streaks. We had that stretch where we were winning all those close games and then we lost one. That's part of it. It's a long season.

Q. Defensively you guys have had some breakdowns during the stretch as much as on offense.

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think a lot of it is when you're not making shots, you're in transition defense a lot more than you would be, so you're scrambling more than you would be. Teams have more opportunities to go, and there's more space, and you can't get into your press, you can't change defenses if you want to. So it's always going to be harder that way.