

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

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Fran McCaffery Men's Basketball



Q. What is the latest on Peter?

COACH McCAFFERY: I think he's going to try to go today; we'll see how it goes.

Q. Will that be his first practice in many days?

COACH McCAFFERY: Yes.

Q. Is it back spasms?

COACH McCAFFERY: You'll have to ask him. He's had discomfort in a lot of places.

Q. What's the timetable on when the medical staff will know if he'll be able to go Sunday?

COACH McCAFFERY: Probably tomorrow, but I don't know. I think he'll be fine. I think he'll play. I think he'll play well.

He's been diligent with his treatment and rehabilitation, been really smart with what he does with his body.

He'll shoot and do some running. He was in the pool with some no-resistance exercise. He's been really mature with that. I've been very impressed with him. But I expected him to be that way. That's the way he always is.

Q. How will you manage him during the game?

COACH McCAFFERY: If he's ready to go, I'd play him 38 minutes.

Q. Without him, did you learn anything about this team? Did you expect what you saw? Not really surprised?

COACH McCAFFERY: I'm not really surprised. What you saw is what you hoped to see. I think Isaiah and Brady were really good. Bohannon stepped up. We got quality minutes from Maishe Dailey. I thought Christian Williams was very good as well.

It's more opportunity for other people. Baer stepped in in the starting position. He's been outstanding. Kriener got more minutes. It's a great opportunity for those guys to just get more time on the floor and grow and develop.

What you don't want to see with young guys is when

they get their opportunity, they make mistakes. We didn't see any of that. They were really solid.

Q. Is there a chance Pete is even better coming back like this? Two games out, could this reinvigorate his drive?

COACH McCAFFERY: I think that was the plan. He could have kept playing the way he was. He didn't feel like he was playing up to his own expectations; I respect that.

The only way to do that is to get your body to feel better. We have a great strength and conditioning coach. We have a great athletic trainer. We have talented doctors. They've worked really hard with him.

It doesn't matter how good those people are, though, if you're not professional in your approach, and he has been.

Q. Your players seemed to play really loose the last two games. I thought, moved the ball well offensively. Is there ever any concern when you bring Pete in, deserving of every opportunity he gets, but now a natural deference to him?

COACH McCAFFERY: I think he'll assimilate right back in and won't be a problem. We did move the ball a little bit more because he's the ultimate green light guy, so he can pull whenever he wants. Sometimes others do the same.

But you guys have been around me. I've always done that. Marble, Gatens, Bohannon... you got good shooters, shoot when you're open. Shoot when you think you are ready to get a bucket for us. Don't overthink it.

Ultimately we're still going to do the same things. We're going to run. We're going to run motion. We're going to run some sets. We're going to run some continuity. We're going to swing the ball, throw it inside.

We've probably have, since I've been here, the best post presence offensively that we've had. We've got multiple guys that can score the ball down there. I think over time the realization of all of that has come together.

We can score in a variety of ways. Pete knows that and understands that, as well. The thing he has to continue to do is rebound the ball. He has been a terrific rebounder for us this year. There have been games where his assist numbers have been really good. There's times when his screening has been really good, which doesn't show up in the box score, but it shows up when you're watching the film.

Q. Pete posted on Instagram about the immigration ban. Seemed like a well-thought-out thought process from him. What did you think of that?

COACH McCAFFERY: I was proud of him. I thought incredibly eloquent in his remarks. Thoughtful, caring. I'm not surprised, that's who he is. Nobody in this room knows what it's like to be a refugee. He does. Can't imagine being six years old, being a refugee in Uganda. I applaud him for speaking up. I applaud him for how he spoke up.

I think everyone appreciates where he's coming from and supports his ideas.

Q. This new lineup of Wagner and Baer, what have you liked that last couple days with the different starting five?

COACH McCAFFERY: Those two guys bring energy. They bring defense. It makes us athletic in terms of our ability to rebound the ball. Both those guys can run. It gives us probably our two best offensive rebounders. So I really like that group.

Q. Has Jordan's green light gotten greener as the season has progressed or is that how it was?

COACH McCAFFERY: He could pull at any time from anywhere and shoot a good number.

I didn't want to have any deviation in that mentality for him. I just turned him loose. He'll shoot shots from great range. He'll force a couple. But he makes those sometimes. So you just let him go.

Q. Sometimes he shoots, are you like, Whoa?

COACH McCAFFERY: Like the last bucket of the half the other night. He was way, way out. But any time he pulls, I feel comfortable. Just make sure our guys go back and get it if it doesn't go in.

Q. Look at Jacobson for them, a sophomore from the Des Moines area. What do you remember about him scouting? He seems to be really impressive.

COACH McCAFFERY: He's really playing well. He's one of the better rebounders in our league, maybe one of the better offensive rebounders in college basketball. He stays within himself. He's aggressive at times offensively. Other times he's moving it on. He doesn't

make a lot of mistakes. Tough guy. Smart. Got good feel.

It hurt them last night when he was in foul trouble. They need him out there because the other guys are coming. McVeigh, Tshimanga, Horne. Those guys are coming. They're playing well.

But even though he's only a sophomore, he's that experienced front-court guy that has established himself in our league as a guy who's really good.

Q. You always look to the narrow. Such a long season, you don't want to get into March because of the task at hand. Is it even more important when you have a young team like this to keep the focus on this practice, this game?

COACH McCAFFERY: I would say this to you. I think it's important no matter what team you have, young, old, in between. You can't look down the road. There's too many good players, too many good coaches, too many good teams really in this league to look anywhere other than who your next opponent is. That's how we view it.

Q. Those struggles of a couple weeks ago, do they seem farther away now, given the way you've played?

COACH McCAFFERY: I don't think they're farther away. To me, that's who we were at that time. You hope you're not that again. But that was us. We have to be better. We've been better. We want to continue to be better. You want to be better individually.

What can we do to help each guy be better? What can we do better as coaches? What can we do better collectively with different lineups or different defenses?

You just hope that when you struggle, which we did, that you learn and commit to one another to being better and figuring it out, and keep believing that you are better than that.

I think we all can agree that we were better than that. But that's what the journey is.

Q. Stark difference between Illinois and those two performances. We aren't privy to your practices. Was there anything that you saw that changed drastically?

COACH McCAFFERY: No. I think there's a combination of things. I mean, I always go back to let's give Illinois some credit that night. They played really well. They were locked in defensively. They were locked in offensively. They really shared the ball. They were physical. They defended. They outplayed us.

That's how you have to play if you want to win. We have played more like that since then.

Q. How good has this team been in learning from those lessons?

COACH McCAFFERY: As individuals they want to learn and get better. They accept coaching. They're in the gym. They study film. They try to help one another.

It's funny, because at times they almost talk too much to each other and stop listening. But it's only because they're trying to help each other and communicate on the floor. As we all know, communication on the floor is incredibly valuable.

Everyone has to work together and be as one unit. You can put great ball pressure on. But if everybody's slacking off, you're not up toward the ball, you're not up on ball screens, doesn't matter what kind of ball pressure you have.

You need ball pressure. You got to play ball screens. You got to have your defense over. You got to rotate on dribble-penetration. You got to know where the three-point shooters are, where the drivers are, who's posting up. Then you have to cover for each other when somebody makes a mistake.

That's why longer possessions sometimes are good on offense because the longer you go, the greater chance that somebody breaks down. So what you're seeing is a team who is communicating more on the floor, defensively in particular. We have been better in that area.

Q. This is the third team you've seen twice and the team has made a big leap between the first time you saw the others the second time. Is that a sign of learning from mistakes?

COACH McCAFFERY: I think familiarity helps. Knowing personnel, knowing kind of how they play. But I still think it comes down to your total and complete understanding of what we typically try to do, especially on offense. What are we trying to do? What's our philosophy? Can we get as close to that as possible?

Let's face it, teams are going to try to not let us do that. Then defensively, who are you locked in on? The last time we played them, two guys got 57 points. You're not winning that game typically if you give up 57 from two guys.

That's part of the journey. What can we do better? Those two guys are really good players, but we can't let them get 57. Granted, it was a 50-minute game. Nonetheless, it's that learning curve that has to take

place. You hope when you play that team the next time, you're a little bit better.

Q. How much of it comes down to making shots? Seems like with Michigan State, they made shots.

COACH McCAFFERY: Yes, it makes the game a lot easier. They make 11. Nebraska makes four. That's a lot of points to make up. We make 11 threes the other night and the game looks easy. None of us expected an easy game. It was an easy game because we made 11 threes. That has completely changed the game.

You look at the stat line. Nebraska out-rebounded Michigan State. They turned them over 15 times. But they made seven more threes. That's a game changer, especially when you make them in a row like that. It was a four-, five-point game. Webster misses a three, it goes in-and-out. They go down and hit a three. Instead of being tied, it's six.

Those kind of momentum shifting plays in a game have an great impact on the ultimate outcome. Two guys go three-for-three, one guy goes two-for-three. As a result, Kenny Owens goes five-for-five in the post because now they're running around chasing three-point shooters. If you can spread the floor like that making threes, it makes you hard to guard.

Q. What kind of adjustments did your post players have to make from November and December to now? Tyler and Cordell especially.

COACH McCAFFERY: They've been pretty good as post defenders. The toughest thing is ball screen defense because of who is typically coming off the ball screen.

Watson and Webster are two of the best in our league. A lot of teams have one guy. Some teams have more than one. They have two that are really special because they both can stop and shoot behind the screen. They can both get in the lane and have a pull-up game. They both can get all the way to the rim. They're both willing passers. So those are the toughest guys.

You don't see that night in and night out in high school, you just don't, dangerous weapons like that. When you're guarding a guy who is also really good, and I have to get back to him... Yeah, to some level you have to get back to him.

It's all about rotations. Somebody's got to help you. I can't expect Tyler Cook to guard at the top of the key and block at the same time. Nobody does. It's unrealistic.

Somebody's got to help. You got to rotate back, figure

out exactly when to leave, how long to stay. You got to move your feet without fouling. Couple that with time and score and who else is on the floor. They have the three-point shooters on the floor, other guys on the floor. That takes time to figure out and learn.

Q. Then there's probably not asking them to do something they're not capable of doing or not ready to do at that point?

COACH McCAFFERY: Right. That's the number one thing I try to get them to understand. I'm not asking you to be all things to all people. You can't jam up the point guard and guard the low post at the exact same time. You have to be able to identify quickly what's most important right now. Once you do that, then it becomes easy.

I always go back to Adam Woodbury. He had that all figured out. He was the best I've ever had at that understanding. He was always in the right place. He was always communicating information to his teammates. He was either helping them or was asking them for their help. That way, the help got there in time.

Sometimes our guys are really working, they're conscientious, they're trying, but they're a little bit late. If you're late, it's a foul or a bucket. That's part of it.

Q. Both Jarrod and Adam are now on the same team. Have you been able to watch them or talk to them?

COACH McCAFFERY: I've been communicating back and forth with Woodbury with text messages. I really need to give Jarrod a call because I spoke to him a lot and then haven't spoken to him in a while.

But those two guys, they'll be fine.

Q. Sometimes there's this expectation that if a kid is a top 100 guy, there's a bunch of them all together, the team should be really good right away. The level of expectation is going to take time. Everything you were talking about with post defense. Where should people's expectations be with that, not necessarily with your team but in general, with letting guys mature?

COACH McCAFFERY: You got to look at it this way. Everybody wants the team to be good all the time, not to have any dip. You're a Final Four team one year, you should be a Final Four team the next year. NCAA team one year, you should be an NCAA team next year. I don't care how young your guys are. You have four years of guys. You should have enough experience, enough youth.

The thing that is interesting, some freshmen come in,

they got all that stuff we're talking about, they got it all figured out. Aaron White. Not one time did I have to tell him to be in the right place. He was already there. He was already in the right place. I've had guys over the years like that.

Others need more patience and more film work. Who knows why. They don't see it right away. Well, how were they coached in high school? What were they asked to do in high school? How many tight games were you in? Were you on a team that just blew everybody out?

The sense of urgency on a defensive situation on a ball screen wasn't that big a deal. We're up 28. Every ball screen situation here is a big deal, especially when Glynn Watson has the ball.

It's different for everybody, every team. I think what we have to be able to do is appreciate the good things they're doing and be more understanding of the young guys. As coaches, we do the same thing. We have to be patient and teach. It's our job.

Q. Do you expect Morrow to be back Sunday?

COACH McCAFFERY: I don't know. He didn't play last night. He's been practicing, I've heard. I don't pay attention to that. Obviously, they're better if he plays. He's a hellacious offensive rebounder that can score.

Tshimanga has been playing well, he had 15 and nine last night. Big body. He's scoring the ball. Horne is making threes. McVeigh is on fire, shooting 45% from 3-point range. He's gotten more of a shot since Ed has been out. So we'll see.