

# University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

Wednesday, August 2, 2017

## Fran McCaffery Men's Basketball



### **Q. What's it mean for somebody like Dom to have a chance to play in front of his home crowd?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: He's really excited about it. His family's going to get to see him play. I can only imagine it will be very similar to when we took Gabe home a few years ago. His family was beaming, literally, from the first second we got off the plane. We walked through customs and there they were.

He played really well in a game where we had 6,000 people, and I don't know if we'll have 6,000 people at a game this time. I don't think we will. But I think having all his buddies with him, where he's from, having his family there, I can only imagine it's going to be wonderful. And that's kind of why we did it.

### **Q. You get ten practices. How many have you had?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: We have had seven. Today will be eight, nine on Friday, and ten Saturday.

### **Q. What do you, as a coach, what are you trying to see in practices?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: The first five practices we had were in July, and we didn't really focus on the foreign aspect of the trip. We sort of addressed FIBA rules, but we didn't really pay that much attention to it. We're trying to get Jack and Luka and Connor ready to go and just kind of put some things in. Okay, what do we want to put in for the trip? We aren't going to have everything in, obviously, nor should we. But it was great to be able to get everybody together because we were able to utilize the other time given to us for skill development.

So then we had practices and then we had skill development sessions, and I think that was incredibly beneficial because even though we had a lot of guys back, we still have a lot of young guys, so I think that's important. So, once we came off the road, we started focusing more on the trip itself. Paid way more attention to the FIBA rules, and even then it's going to be hard for them.

They call timeout, and you can't call timeout in a live-ball situation. There are certain things that are dramatically different. Will they ever really figure out

that you can goaltend, what we consider goaltending, they don't. What's a travel over there is not a travel here, and we run, so you're susceptible to more travels. Can you get your mind to where you can understand that. There are games over there that we've had seven travel calls and not one of them is a travel, but it is there. So you deal with it.

So that's kind of what we've been doing this week.

### **Q. The guys mentioned it's really been a struggle getting used to that European ball?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: They've been playing with that pretty much all summer, both in practice and the skill development sessions. It is a completely different feel. It's kind of like the balls back when I was playing. They didn't have the wider seams. They were much smoother, a little slippery.

But it's funny. Some of the guys really like it and some of the guys don't. But that's all we've played with for two months, so they're getting used to it.

### **Q. Did you have to educate them on their style of play over there, too, that it's much more physical?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, that and maybe more half court. Some of the teams we're playing are essentially All-Star teams. So we'll want to run, they're not going to want to run with us, typically. So we'll deal with it. If we can play and grind it out half court or play fast, we'll play fast no matter what.

### **Q. How much do you know about the level of competition and what would you compare it to?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I would have had a better feel in the past. If you're playing club professional teams is one thing. So I think maybe the talent level of these teams we're going to be playing might be higher than some of those teams because they're essentially All-Star teams. But they're also -- they've also not had much time to be together. So maybe it's harder in one sense, easier in another for us.

But, truthfully, I won't know until we get there the quality opponents that we're playing. We're just going to try to really, truthfully, focus on what do we have to do to get better? Actually, we're going to try to win. But it's not -- if you win or lose, nobody will even remember it, so it's not as critical as getting quality playing time for our

young guys, looking at different combinations, trying some different things on the court. Just work on our motion game, work on our press, and work on our running game.

**Q. What are some of the other stuff, the experience with the guys, the camaraderie, how important is that?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: It's really important. And my experience in the past has been the teams that have had this opportunity have always gelled and played well the following year. They just come together. You know, so that's probably as important a component of this opportunity as anything, maybe more important.

Just the practices here, be together, travel, you know, play some games, but also experience a culture. And oftentimes you go to one or two countries, we're going to three. I think that's really good. And they're all different, you know? So I think from that standpoint it will be terrific.

But also I want it to be something they'll remember for the rest of their lives. You get to do this once when you're in college, and we want to make sure, and fortunately we're very thankful to Mr. Barta to make sure we're doing it right. It sounds great, but it's expensive. We're making sure that we provide the optimum experience for these guys, and we're not cutting every corner to save a few dollars. We're going to do it right, and I'm very thankful that in a place that wants that for our guys.

**Q. You have a very deep team. I think 86% of your minutes are returning. Guys from 1 to 14 could legitimately play. A couple years ago you had a deep team too, but this one may be even more. Have you been able to kind of use some of these practices to maybe identify maybe a little growth in one person and separate?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: No, I think truthfully it's probably gotten worse from that standpoint. It's become harder. But, you know, I'm a firm believer in over time that will manifest itself. What I'm going to try to do on this trip is a completely fair dispersal of playing time. Not get into this is my starting lineup, this is my next three, this is my next three. These guys aren't going to play as much. That's not the case because nobody is in that last group that I can see.

So what we'll do is we'll take the games and okay, this game, these four guys aren't playing. These guys are. And then that will change. Obviously Dom's going to play all the games in Germany. We'll mix the others up, and when we come back it will really be a pretty even situation in terms of who played how many minutes.

**Q. Luka and Jack and their size, they look like big-ten bodies already. How do they compete right now?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: They've been phenomenal. Yeah, they've been really impressive, both of them.

**Q. How is Cordell through his surgery?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: In the beginning he wasn't doing anything, and then the last couple days he's been tremendous. So we've been careful like -- he's practiced the last two days. He hasn't practiced the whole time. But when he's been on the floor, he's been spectacular, explosive. His game, he just knows how to play. He's not a mistake guy. He can score, he can pass it; he can dribble it; he's smart; he knows where to go. So it's not like whatever we're doing, he's confused or he's a day late. He's where he's supposed to be.

He's got a great attitude about it. I'm really happy for him because it was a tough spring and early summer. You're trying to figure out, okay, what does he have? What are we going to do? Where are we going to go to get it done? He's sore, obviously, but he felt better maybe a little later than he hoped to, which was not uncommon. That was frustrating for him.

But we just said, hey, you've got to slow it down. There is no rush here. If he plays on this trip, it's great. If he doesn't, I don't think anybody cares. He's coming. But based on how he's done the last few days, he'll play, and he'll play well.

**Q. When was the last time you coached Connor in a real way?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I only did it once. I coached the Albany City Rocks AAU team. It was a fourth grade group. We used to practice at Siena, and he was on the team, so was Patrick. Patrick was in second grade. It was fun. I mean, it was not stressful in the sense that we're living and dying with every win or loss.

But you're trying to bring them along and trying to just have a great experience. It was fun. I enjoyed it. He's always been a smart player. And so far, he's performed well. There were some tough days for him. I mean, there was one day where he got up and he lifted with us, and then he hit with Iowa baseball, then he went to West High practice, then he came to our practice and then he played a doubleheader. So that was probably a little too much that day.

**Q. Will Connor be going on the trip?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yes, he is, and he's really excited about this opportunity to go on the trip. The baseball team, of course, is going to Taiwan, and he was

wondering, and Coach isn't taking too much freshmen on that trip. I have a lot of respect for that because they're going to miss the first two weeks of school, and I don't think he wanted any of his freshmen to miss the first two weeks, academically, of their college career.

He might have to take a couple guys for need purposes. But I thought Coach Heller did a great job of making Connor not feel conflicted like. But because their season went so late, he didn't really have much opportunity to compete to make that team anyway because they just lost Saturday night or Friday night.

**Q. Obviously a low-pressure year to coach him in some ways if he's redshirting. How do you approach that?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: It's easy. Because like everybody else, if I need to say something to him, I say it. If I need to say something to somebody else, I say it to somebody else. I don't treat them any differently. He's pretty smart, so he's not a big mistake guy. But there are things that he'll do that are mistakes.

There are times initially when he'll sort of make -- that was a high school play. He'll figure that out soon enough. We've practiced seven times. He hasn't been to all seven practices. I think he's been to five of them, maybe four. So little by little he's figuring out the speed of the game, the size of the guys, and he's adjusted well, and playing in more than one spot, he's figured that out. So I think it's been great so far.

**Q. Have you talked to college coaches who have coached their sons?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I talked to Greg McDermott, John Beilein, and Craig Neal. It's interesting because they all had different stories. You would think it would be similar, because I guess it's easy to coach the National Player of the Year. I said I don't even know why I'm bothering with you. But he said you should send both he and Patrick to play for me because he's proven I'm the best at it, so can't argue with that.

**Q. In the past when you've traveled overseas it has been with a more veteran group. Do trips like this have more of an affect with the younger guys than maybe more veteran group?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: That's a good question because every other time I've gone we've had veteran teams, and it was sort of the culmination of you're sort of bringing a group along. But I kind of look at that team that even though this team is still young and they're kind of veterans because they've played so much last year, and you look at a guy like Brady and he's a senior and he's got two years of eligibility, but he's been around. He is playing like a veteran.

Christian Williams same thing, junior, playing like a veteran. Dom seems like he's been here forever, and I think has really stepped his game up. But you see a difference in him physically, which you would expect being now that he's a senior. Each and every one of them have stepped up their game in a very positive way. Ahmad Wagner is attacking the rim and finishing with authority.

It's been a fun group to be around because they're working hard. They really like and respect each other, and I think they feel like we all do, that this is an unbelievable opportunity and they're excited about it. I think they're excited about doing it with each other, which is more important.

**Q. It's hard to replace and replicate what Peter (Jok) was able to do, but you have to replace those minutes in that position. Where do things stand? Is it two or three? I know they're kind of interchangeable.**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, Nicholas Baer's playing on a whole 'nother level, and he came off the bench. But he could very easily be our starting three-man. Isaiah Moss is as you would have expected, taking another step. Brady Ellingson hasn't missed a shot in about three weeks. That's always a good sign. Christian Williams really was playing well, he's backed up a little this week. Last week was the best I've seen him ever. So I'm not really worried about it.

I think you can play Ahamad at three. You can play Dom at three. We've got a lot of options there. I think the point you're making is Pete was such a -- anytime you lose a leading scorer in the league, he could go get you 30. I think of a couple games last year where we essentially won because of him. That's why he was first team all league. So that's a different animal to replace.

We'll get shots. We'll get buckets. We have a lot of minutes, we have quality people. But that guy could make buckets at really critical times of the game. Somebody else is going to have to do that. Other guys could do that, I know, but some of these guys do it regularly like he did.

**Q. Do your fours and fives constantly rotate, Cook could play both spots, Cordell, Kriener, Garza?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, and Jack. Yeah, because we have more low-post scoring threats than we've ever had. We have so many guys that can score inside. But the great thing about Ryan, Luka and Jack is they all make threes. So that creates a little more space for Cordell and for Tyler.

I think Tyler has been more aggressive off the dribble,

attacking the rim. That's been good. I guess Cordell has been phenomenal just for two days. But Kriener, really, he's been impressive. He's, from a competent standpoint, we always saw the complexity of his skillset. He made a move yesterday in practice and it was like, wow, you know. He took it like hard right to left crossover, you know, fake this way, finish with his left-hand over a guy. I mean, that is NBA stuff right there. You know, you can't coach that kind of play.

So I'm just really happy for him. He's really worked and he's in a good place mentally, I think.

**Q. Is that why minutes are so tough right now?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, it's not going to be easy. But if they all deserve to play, they'll play.

**Q. Is this one of your taller teams? Obviously last year height was a little bit lacking; has that changed how you look at the combinations as well?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: It's one of the reasons we brought those two guys in. They give us a different dimension in terms of not only the fact that they're 6'11", but they're both really long. But, again, the beauty of their games is more in the fact that normally you recruit a 6'11" guy who is long, you're throwing ball to him on the block. You're almost better throwing the ball to those guys on the 3-point line. They can both pass. They can both make threes. They both can make plays off the dribble, either for themselves or for their teammates. They're both willing passers.

Luka had a day a couple days ago where he was the dominant player in the paint. Just scored at will. I don't know what his numbers were, but seemed like he scored about 90 percent of the time he got the ball. I've seen him do that too. He was really, that day, more of a low-post scoring threat, low-post, rebounder, outlet guy, trailer, as opposed to the first post out.

**Q. Will you tweak your motion offense at all?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: No. I don't think we will. I think we'll keep it the way it is because both of those guys like to be able to face and play with their back to the basket, and that's kind of the beauty of that offense. You see more Cordell and Tyler, once we started, they rolled into the post and kind of stay in there. But that's okay because we'll have a four out, one in, and a five out. But, if you've got those two guys on the floor, and Tyler is the one in and they want to help, those guys will drill it for you.

The other way to think along the lines of that question is would you run more sets? With Luka Garza, throw the ball inside, he's going to score. He's going to score on guys in our league. You can't get to him. He's 6'11.

He's got a 7'4" wing span. You hit him, and he still makes it. He makes every foul shot.

So I might be more inclined to utilize him that way but to bring it to the big fella. He's on fire, let's bring it to him, and maybe he'll go for 30.

Same thing with Jack. Jack's just really efficient, really efficient. Averaging 35 in a Prime Time league and say well, nobody plays D and this and that, but still average 35 points in a league, that's pretty impressive for a guy that's never played a college game.

**Q. Speaking of defense, that was kind of a sore point for you guys last year.**

FRAN McCAFFERY: We didn't have a lot of rim protectors. I thought our defense was okay. I think what you're seeing now is Tyler protecting more, Luka and Jack will protect more. Baer's always been a shot blocker, you know. I think Ahmad could be a stopper. On the perimeter, let's see where we're at with Isaiah, with Christian, with Jordan and Brady in particular. Maishe's been banged up. He's had a little bit of a back issue and he will not practice today. He hasn't practiced the last two days. He was playing really well, I thought, hasn't practiced all week.

**Q. What do you think of the imbalanced schedule you were dealt?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I really didn't. I didn't think about it at all. I don't really pay attention to it. I know everybody does. I have the same respect for every team in our league. And I mean that sincerely.

So regardless of who we play twice, who we play once, who we play home, I mean, this with total sincerity, I haven't even looked at it. I know we're going to play 18 games against teams that are really good, and we better be ready.