

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

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Fran McCaffery Men's Basketball



Q. Your team has shown a high degree of persistence when things don't look good, which maybe we didn't see last year. Is that just a maturity in your team, or is it --

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think it's all of that. We are more mature. We've been through it. Sometimes you have a chance to fail and you figure out what you can't do because even though last year we lost some games when those kinds of things happened, we kind of would have those little mini-stretches where things would fall apart, now you figure out how not to make that happen anymore. But we're also a better team. We've added pieces. Our guys are all a year older.

You're bound to get better when the bulk of your team is that much older. We pretty much had everybody back that was a contributing member of the team, and then you add some other good players. Joe has been tremendous, Connor has been great, so that gave us the depth in the backcourt we didn't have. So there's a lot of factors involved, and it's been fun to watch.

Q. Along those lines, like with Tyler, last year at some times it looked like he tried to do too much offensively. This year he's already got more assists than he did all of last year. Looks like he's looking for his teammates a little more rather than just kind of getting the ball in deep and then putting it up.

FRAN McCAFFERY: He's played really a much more complete game at his pace. It's really been rewarding to watch a guy who's worked that hard to be a guy that clearly is committed to winning. When you're giving the ball up rather than shooting it, that tells you everything you need to know about his character and his commitment to winning because when you're leading scorer and he's your best player, typically you want those guys to go get buckets, and he does that, but he's very content to have a solid game and we win rather than look down and, hey, I should have had 25. He'll get 25 sometimes, sometimes he won't. But he just cares about winning, and that's why he's special.

Q. You've talked about what you guys went through last year. Does what Indiana is going through right now remind you at all of your team a year ago?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I don't know about that. The thing that's impressed me about them is they continue to fight. They really are competing, and I think that's what you look for. They've lost some games maybe they thought they were going to win, but they keep coming. Our game was very difficult, the Ohio State game was really intense, the Purdue game, obviously that's an in-state rival, packed house, you know what that game is going to be. They keep coming. They've got some young guys that keep getting better.

You sort of expect it from Romeo, but you forget how young he is. He's been tremendous coming down the stretch in games. Morgan has been great and so have a lot of their other guys.

We know what that team is, and we just experienced it three games ago.

Q. What's the mood of your team been since that Maryland game, third straight game comes down to the final possession and this one didn't go your way?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think you just come to expect that. That's what this league is, and that's what typically happens the second part of the conference schedule. Every game has been like that, even the ones we've won. Obviously the Illinois game was a little bit of an outlier because we made all those threes in a row. You hope that happens once a year. You hope it happens more than once, but typically it doesn't. It's kind of what happened to Indiana the other night against Minnesota. Guy hits his first three of his career, then comes down and hits two banked threes after that to kind of get some separation. Sometimes there's games like that, but the rest of them, think about our Northwestern game on the road, our Penn State game on the road. They were absolute wars, and that's what this league is.

Q. Do you worry about the Big Ten standings as far as your NCAA Tournament resume? And why or why not?

FRAN McCAFFERY: No, I really don't. I don't do anything other than prepare for the next game, and when it comes time to having an NCAA resume, you'll either have one or you won't.

Q. What have you said to Luka Garza and how has

he responded?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Just keep encouraging him. He's a terrific player. I love him. Stay positive with him. Keep telling him to shoot. And then point out some things maybe he could be doing differently to get shots or to stay out of foul trouble, things like that, that have been hampering him a little bit. Nobody is more committed to doing what it takes than he is.

Q. He seems very accountable, too.

FRAN McCAFFERY: Maybe too accountable. Yeah, because we lost by one point to a ranked team who was really good. Really good players, really good coach, conference game. You can't take the blame for that, one player. We all take it together. Typically the coach takes the blame for the loss and the players get the credit for the win. That's the way it should be.

Q. Tyler has mentioned that he sees himself more in a leadership role now and then really since he decided to come back. Have you sensed that in him and the way he carries himself?

FRAN McCAFFERY: He's been that way all year. Yeah, I think he wanted to be. He had the ability to do that last year, and he did it a little bit, but he was only a sophomore and kind of deferred to Pete his first year. I think he figured out how to do that. It's a lot harder than people think. But he's a guy that puts the time in so you have credibility to speak up. If you're not a worker then you keep quiet, but when you work and you produce and people like and respect you, then you can speak up and hold your teammates accountable. The really good teams have that. It can't be the coach that's the only one holding everybody accountable.

Q. In your coaching career have you found it a challenge motivationally when you've already beat a team at their place when they come to your place on the rebound?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, I think that it is, but when you're playing Indiana and you know what they've done this year, they've had some great wins. We know what that game was down there, how difficult it was. Our guys know what's coming in here tomorrow night.

Q. It's getting to the time of year where refs let a lot more things go, harder to get to the free-throw line. Have you talked to them about that?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I haven't really thought about that. I would like to think that the games would be officiated the same way and not, hey, we're going to let stuff go late in the year. I don't really look at it that way. So therefore I wouldn't have addressed it, no.

Q. Do you think the NBA is wrong to keep high school kids out of its league?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think if you're good enough, you

should be able to go right from high school. That's what I think. I don't think anybody is wrong. I'm not accusing anybody of being wrong, right. But I think if you're good enough coming out of high school, you should be able to go right to the NBA. Your only professional option shouldn't be Europe.

Q. The rebounding was good against a team --

FRAN McCAFFERY: Especially against them. You look at their stats, you don't see a +10 rebounding margin for the season this late in the year. They've played some really good teams. They've played some great rebounding teams. That is a big number. We out-rebounded them by six. And that's what the games are. We didn't shoot it well. They shot it better than us. They make 12 threes. We missed a lot of shots in the beginning of the game, but if you go back and get some and you kind of limit the number of second shots they have, obviously we'd have liked to have eliminated one more, but it gives you a chance; we were in a position to win. We took the lead back twice, so you appreciate the fight in this group.

Q. How do you build on that? You had a ton of offensive rebounds. How can you try to sustain that for the rest of the year?

FRAN McCAFFERY: It's important recognizing the advantage because -- same thing with Rutgers. Rutgers is the number one offensive rebounding team in our league. They go back and get more than anybody, and we did a really good job against them. We didn't shoot it that well there, either. Not a lot of people do because they're real physical defensively. They work hard. They're big. They're much deeper now. They've got taller and more length on the wings, assortment of post guys that they can put in there. So we needed to fight to win that game in a big way.

Q. The Big Ten is notorious for having a high floor among the teams. Teams 13 and 14 can oftentimes beat teams that are 2, 3, 1 in the league. You guys expanded to 20 games this year. Games usually 14 through 18 seem to be a grind every single year, and now you're adding two more. What's kind of your thoughts on the 20 games, and I know we haven't reached 20 yet, but just kind of two more bruising battles?

FRAN McCAFFERY: It makes it, in some ways, fun for the guys. In other ways, it is a grind, physically, so you've got to be careful how you manage practice, when is your bye, how much time do you have between the next game. Road games, get back late. We've had a number of those this year. We've had weather issues, traveling. So you just try to -- it's a bigger challenge to manage, I think. But nobody is at a disadvantage. Nobody is at an advantage. We're all in the same boat, and when you look back on the season,

it will benefit our league by playing 20 games, and I think that's what you have to remember.

Q. Do you think the NET Rankings is a better indicator of other teams' strength rather than just RPI in the past?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I do. I don't know if it's perfect, but if you really study it, there's probably flaws in both. But I think you applaud the people that are trying to be fair in terms of assessing who deserves opportunities and who doesn't.