

# University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

Monday, November 19, 2018

## Fran McCaffery Men's Basketball



**Q. Fran, you guys are ranked in this week's polls. What are your thoughts on being ranked?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Obviously, we're happy about it. I'm happy for the guys. But we've played four games. You have got to temper it a little bit and continue to strive to get better. Obviously we made a big step. I felt we competed. I felt we really were locked into the game plan. I said that to the guys afterwards. To beat teams of that caliber on that stage, you've got to be locked in as a unit, and we were.

You guys can see the remainder of our schedule and how difficult it is, so it's going to be critical that we continue to do those things night in and night out.

**Q. Do you feel like this team has that focus to not let positive attention affect it?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think they do. They should. They're an older group now. Sometimes it's harder when you're younger. But also we've got some depth that maybe we didn't have last year. It seemed like we did, but they were young and couldn't always overcome -- a couple guys didn't have a game up to their capability, and we seemed to struggle. And now, somebody else seems to step up.

I'm really pleased with that aspect of it. A lot of guys are playing well. Occasionally you have an off-night, somebody steps up for you, but in any event they're all pulling for each other. They're all in for each other doing what we can as a group to be good, and I think that's always great to see when you're a coach. You want to see that kind of enthusiasm and support for one another.

**Q. When you've had really good teams, how important is that when guys just totally embrace whatever role they need to have?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: You know, it's sometimes harder to achieve than you think it should be. And it's understandable. Everybody wants to play all the time. Everybody that's on your team wants to play, and they want to contribute and believe in their hearts that they can contribute, but to get them to understand, hey, this is what your role is right now -- sometimes you'll play a little more, maybe sometimes you play a little less, but

to be all in with that is exactly what you need. And I've been doing this long enough to know that.

**Q. Nicholas Baer was saying after the game about your positional versatility and how tough you are to match up on defense. Can you expound on that?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: It's especially important because of the downshifting that everybody is doing across the board, and everybody is playing small. Some teams will play big. Obviously Oregon was pretty big. But we can play -- because of the guys that we have and the length, like I said before, Maishe is 6'7" and Isaiah is 6'6", Connor is 6'6", Baer is 6'7". Those guys can -- we can switch if we have to, we can play different lineups if we have to, plus they now know and understand if they're in a different position where they have to line up in certain situations based on what we're running or what defense we are in. And that's absolutely critical, that there's no confusion out there and there's no delay if getting where you're supposed to get to. He's right about that.

**Q. Besides what you've already addressed, is there anything in New York that jumped out at you that pleased you, maybe surprised you even?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think when you -- and we said this before we went. Okay, I thought we played two pretty good teams before we left here, but we were going to go play some teams that -- ranked, brands, Syracuse, UConn, these are big brand programs. You're at Madison Square Garden. The competition level is raised, and you have to go in there with the correct mindset. I've been there before. A lot of you guys have been there before, and you know what that means. But some of these guys hadn't played there before. Obviously we did last year in the Big Ten Tournament, which I think was helpful.

So you've got to stay together to the point where there's that level of consistency. I thought there was more consistency, which I think is what we were striving for. But it also wasn't perfect.

So if you -- like we turned the ball over a couple times against UConn's pressure. Okay, can you just overcome those mistakes and get to the next play and then be successful. So the lead went 25, to 13, then it went back to 18. It didn't go from 25 to 13 or 5 or 2. We were able to -- okay, we made some mistakes, we'll

come back and make our free throws and we'll move the ball and we'll get fouled. We won't turn it over, then we'll get back and we'll get a crucial stop when we need it. I think that's what we accomplished, that level of consistency.

**Q. After the game you called Connor a gamer, and from a coach's perspective, is that something that you can teach a player to become a gamer, or is that something they just have to kind of naturally be?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: That's something that's developed over time. He's been playing a long time in different situations, whether it be high level AAU, World Series baseball, you know, when he's 10 or 11 years old, to West High and the schedule that they play. I've always been impressed with Coach Bergman. He's played against Gary Trent Jr. and Tre Jones and those guys. That's who they play against. So there becomes an expectation of yourself as to the level of performance that you expect to consistently perform at.

So it's -- the answer to your question, it's not something I can prepare him for in a short period of time. It's something that I can help him prepare for over a long period of time. He's always been on winning teams. He's always been on championship teams. He's been on teams that were close to winning championships, and he's been through what that feels like, and playing two sports. It started when he was very, very young. The competitive side of this thing is so critical.

I think you see that with him, but I think you're seeing that with the rest of our players, many of whom have kind of come up the same way, but last year we were a little bit on the younger side, and sometimes you have to go through a couple tough defeats and some adversity before you can figure it out. But he's really smart. He knows what we need, he knows who we have, and he scored the ball against UConn, which is great, but he also knew where to get the ball, and that's critical.

**Q. It's not just him on your team; you've got several guys whose fathers, mothers played high-level basketball or football. Is that something you look at when you're recruiting kids? I've heard Doug Gottlieb saying that you can't understand how important it is to grow up in a family like that unless you've done it.**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I think he's right. I recruited Doug, so I know the family he grew up in. I know how his father was and how tough he was. But he also loved him and really prepared him for what he was facing.

I think we know what's coming, and you can talk about

it, and you can show him film. But it's how you're raised and how you've been prepared before. He's had great moments of success. He's had some moments of failure. And it's all part of the growth process, because it's really difficult to do what we did, on that stage against that level of competition.

Everybody went there expecting to win, expecting to have a game plan that was going to help that team be successful, and we were the ones that came out successful. And that's great. But that just makes the next game bigger.

When you make the decision to come here and play at Iowa and play in the Big Ten, that is what you signed up for. That's what you want. That's what you expect. And there's always going to be some bumps in the road, and it's how you deal with that, and I think what Doug is referring to and what we're talking about with Connor is that preparation helps you deal with those bumps, too, just the continuous grind that's required to be great and to be successful at this level.

And the challenge is just going to get tougher. You see what our league is doing across the board and some of the other teams that are still on our schedule are really good. That's the challenge we're faced with. Ultimately, I always say this, but I hope they enjoy that. That is the fun part of this. That's what competition is. That's fun.

**Q. Is the number of free throws you're getting right now, is that a function of just experience and knowing how to get there and where you can get fouled and that sort of thing?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, we have -- we've got some front court guys who can score. We're going to throw it inside, so that's part of it. We get to the glass. That's part of it. I think we have guys that are intelligent enough to know when and when not to drive. We run a motion offense, so we're going to move it, move it, drive it, move it, drive it. We also recognize intelligent shot selection. So if you get to the bonus, if you get to the double bonus, don't be jacking threes for no reason. Put the ball on the deck, throw it inside. We're going to get two shots. That was a big part of the game plan against UConn, shot selection, because poor shot selection is layup city for them, and then they're going to shoot a high percentage against you, and it makes it hard. So our guys really executed that to perfection.

**Q. Are you surprised how well this team is shooting free throws?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: No, I think we have really good free-throw shooters, and they're comfortable and getting there a lot. So that's always helpful, too. The more you get there, the more comfortable you get.

**Q. You mentioned the Big Ten success early on. You only got four teams in the NAAs last year. How important is that to see that early on in the league, and what are your impressions of the Big Ten so far?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, my impressions of the Big Ten are very simply this: It's exactly what I expected from this season. I said that before. I think people thought I was just saying it. But if you look at the teams and the quality of players that each team has, you can easily see this coming. I'm not surprised. It's what I expected. It makes the challenge bigger. I think we all know that. I think every coach -- if you would have asked them, they would have all said the same thing. There's not one team right now that's not playing well and not competing at a very high level, and there's some incredibly talented players in this conference with great coaches. And we all know how hard it is to win on the road.

But you're right. If you perform well at this time of year, the narrative becomes that, that the league is doing well. And if you lose the Challenge and you lose the Gavitt Games and your teams don't do well in the MTEs and you get a few games that people would consider upsets, then that becomes the narrative, and it becomes a big negative, and I don't kind of like that because you'd like to think that as the season progresses, that would become the narrative; how are teams doing as they get into conference play, as they get towards the conference tournament.

But everybody seems to be obsessed with who's in the NCAA Tournament at this very minute, and it's a little early for that, I think.

**Q. One negative, the turnover issue. Is that misleading in your mind?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Needs to be addressed. Needs to be improved. We played three teams at least that really scrambled at full court and really got up into us. Oregon was the one that didn't as much, but they also pressed 1-2-2, and they scrambled a little bit at the end, so we're seeing a lot of pressure. But we've got to have it the other way. We've got to be a positive assist-to-turnover ratio ultimately.

**Q. With Luka coming off the MVP performance earlier this week, can you speak a little bit to his development between last year and this year, and especially considering -- we talked about it before, but he missed a lot of time with that surgery, and he's just starting off the season like nothing happened.**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I think if you look at his progression, it's pretty consistent. He started the season playing pretty well last year. He had a

phenomenal Big Ten portion of his season. His summer was really unparalleled from a lot of people I've seen over the years. He worked so hard, and he was playing so well. So the surgery was obviously a scare to all of us, most importantly for his health, but the surgery went well, and he was diligent in his recovery. He just picked right back up where he left off. So I'm not surprised at all.

My only concern was would there be a health setback. But he just kept saying, Coach, I'm doing well. I'm doing exactly what they said. That's the kind of person he is.

But he was playing so well, was in such phenomenal shape before the surgery, that's why he didn't miss a beat. I'm thrilled for him. To be able to get that trophy on that stage is pretty impressive, considering what he went through.

To be honest with you, I think that's what we all kind of expected, he'd be playing that well at this time of the year, and I'm not surprised by it, I'm just happy for him. You're looking at potentially a season-ending surgery, and here he is picking up the MVP award for prestigious tournament. It's just a credit to his character.

**Q. How about Cordell; is he going to be back Wednesday?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I don't know. We just did film and free throws and shooting and lifting Saturday and Sunday. We'll go hard today. So we'll see where he's at.

**Q. You're not on the coaches' panel for the coaches' poll. If you were, would you vote for yourself?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, I would have voted for us, absolutely. I used to be. I would try to be as fair as I could. The thing about it is when you're on that, you have to do your homework. I remember one weekend I was really -- one weekend I was really busy and forgot to put some team on there and it became really controversy, and I just forgot. I left them off. So you've got to pay attention. When you're on that panel, you've got to go through who beat who and who's winning and who didn't win.

**Q. I know you said this coming into the season that Tyler Cook, you really wanted to see him step up from a leadership perspective. First half he played all 20 minutes; second half -- I think he played 24 straight minutes, and he's banging the ground trying to get his defense pumped up. What have you seen, and how was he in New York?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: He was spectacular. He could

easily have also been the MVP, and I think the most impressive thing about that whole situation was how happy he was for Luka when they called his name for MVP. They love each other, and that's absolutely crucial.

But I thought he was unguardable this weekend. I just kept saying, we've got to go to him. They can't stop him, they're going to keep fouling him. His confidence, I think, is growing as a result. It's funny because you're right, I didn't take him out. Normally I'll always take him out and get him get a little breather, but I just felt like, just stay out there. He wanted to stay out there, and he didn't seem to be tired. He was a little tired in the second half. He said, Coach, give me 30 seconds. That's about what I gave him. Put him right back in, and he finished strong.

I'm really proud of him. I'm proud of that leadership, and I think it's fun to watch him play with the confidence that he's playing with, and that's got to be fun for him, too.

**Q. We haven't had a chance to talk to you since signing day, and you were over there with Patrick. Given what he's gone through, how special was that day for you and your family?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, incredibly special. It's funny because his journey was a little bit different. He was -- he was really not that into basketball when he was really younger, and then all of a sudden it's like the light went on, and he started following the NBA. He wasn't interested in sports at all, and then he starts to make great progress, and then of course diagnosed with cancer, and then you're just concerned about one thing, you're not concerned about his basketball career anymore. But just to watch how he's dealt with that and continued to work hard and improve -- he always wanted to play here. Ever since we moved here, he's wanted to play here. He's wanted to play for me, and that's a great feeling as a dad, as you can imagine.

And to have the whole family there to support I'm in that incredible moment is something we'll remember for a long time. Yeah.