

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

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Fran McCaffery Men's Basketball



Q. Is there anything different about Purdue or is it pretty much the same as what you saw, whenever that was, a month ago?

FRAN McCAFFERY: nothing has changed in terms of how they play. They're going to really defend, and they've got a lot of different guys that are dangerous. They have changed their starting lineup a few times in the last few games. That almost doesn't matter because all those guys are going to play anyway.

Q. Three-point shooting seems like it's huge with Purdue and huge pretty much in all these games?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I've said it before, you hear a score, and you're like, hmm, maybe this is a little different than I thought. Then you look at the box score, one team made 12 threes, the other team made four. It's like, well, there it is. You could almost do that every game, I think.

But the thing about them is they've had some games where they haven't made them. We all know -- you can look at the box score and see that. But they've got a lot of different guys that can make them, and you've got to guard them all on the perimeter, so it makes them hard to guard, especially when you've got the scorers inside that they have. Williams is tremendous, Haarms is so good around the basket, he dunks everything, and then Boudreaux is playing extremely well. He can score but he also is a terrific offensive rebounder.

Q. Seems like every team, including yours, shoots threes much better at home than on the road.

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think that stands to reason. It's the home floor. You're comfortable. The fans are behind you. I'm sure if you did a study, an analytical study, it's probably true everywhere.

Q. Hidden away from the court, away from the team, I always wonder on senior night if senior night is just one more thing the home team has got to deal with in terms of sending seniors out the right way and ceremonies and so forth. Is it at all?

FRAN McCAFFERY: It's become one of those things that everybody does. I think it's a good thing to honor them with their families. It can be a distraction. I've seen unbelievable emotion that is not typical before a

game. I always prefer to honor our guys appropriately at the banquet, when you can step back and do it properly with the families there. We'll do it tomorrow night, but it's typically not something that I like to focus on, to be frank. I just want to focus on the game. And I think if you were to ask the guys, that's what they would prefer to focus on.

That said, we've got some pretty special people that we're going to honor, and they need to be honored appropriately. So we'll do that, and then we'll lock into the game plan.

Q. What has Ryan Kriener given your program in his four years here?

FRAN McCAFFERY: A character guy that's an incredibly hard worker, that's very talented, kept getting better, really effective on a consistent basis in terms of skill, toughness, intelligence. Great in the locker room, great leader, great representative of the program off the court, and a guy that will be really missed when you look at his collective body of work.

Q. Fair to say he plays with a lot of confidence?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Always has, yeah. I think that's so true. But even when he was a freshman, you'd put him in and he would just go after it. He might make some mistakes, he might miss some shots, but he wasn't nervous. He was aggressive, had an aggressive mindset at both ends of the floor, and those guys are incredibly valuable, obviously.

Q. Can you quantify what he's meant in terms of the progress that the program has made in the last two years?

FRAN McCAFFERY: He definitely has had a tremendous impact in the last two years. We always go back to that sophomore year where I think he was really on the verge, and then he had the two concussions, which obviously would set anybody back. When we played Penn State here that year, he was on his way to having one of the best games of the year, and that's when he got his first injury. And then he had the other one at Rutgers, and it took a little while, as you can imagine. Anytime you have two -- we did not rush him back, and we missed him. We needed him that year.

So we got him back, and he was great the last two

years, because he can come off the bench and score. He can come off the bench and lead. He can come off the bench and bring toughness, and he can come off the bench and be a defender. He can switch ball screens and guard small guys. He can close and contest at the rim and block shots. Just phenomenally valuable, and one thing I always say about him is he's not out there making mistakes, plays within himself. He has a complete skill set.

Q. What was it about Bakari that convinced you that he could fit in this culture, because that's important to you, to have somebody that's going to --

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think it starts with the very first phone conversations you have with him. You kind of get a feeling, like this young guy, he gets it. He wanted to play in the Big Ten. Then he took his visit, and he fit in immediately. You could see it. The guys really liked him. He liked them, and you could tell it was going to be a great fit.

Even early in the year when we were moving him around and it probably wasn't the thing that he was excited about, he just accepted it and did whatever we asked him to do to help us win. That's who he is. And little by little, he's had some great games for us. I mean, just tremendous. And games where he hasn't scored as much, he's been rock solid as a point guard or as a defender. He has the ability to play through a mistake, which veteran guys typically do. But he's been a great fit in that locker room, and that's obviously really critical.

Q. Riley is going to go through senior night, and he's got another year if he wants it. How did that come about? Did he come to you and say he wanted to do it?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think he's going to graduate, and he's either going to make a decision to play elsewhere, kind of like Darius Stokes did, or -- pretty well-rounded young guy. He could go get a job and join the workforce if he wants, and anybody would be wise to hire him. Character guy, terrific team player. I have the utmost respect for him and his commitment to his teammates, to the program. So we'll support him either way. If he wants to play another year, we'll help get him placed. If he doesn't, we'll do whatever we can to help him in whatever area that he wants to go into.

Q. Do you think Luka is the Player of the Year in college basketball?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I do. I believe the thing that separates him, not to disrespect anybody else that's under consideration, because there's some phenomenal players that put up great numbers. The consistency of productivity, considering the quality of

teams in our league and the quality of big guy that he's doing it again I think is what separates him. I mean, you look down the list, every night, it's Otoru, it's Kaleb Wesson, Jalen Smith, and you look at those numbers, and they're pretty impressive.

Q. Do you think the injuries help him, too, what you guys have had to overcome?

FRAN McCAFFERY: It could. I don't know if everybody that is thinking that way is really going to look at it that closely. They're just going to kind of look at him. I think it's probably something that should be considered. You deal with us every day, so you understand that. Not everybody else does I'm guessing.

Q. How impressive is the consistency, 20 or more points?

FRAN McCAFFERY: It's really hard to do in this league, knowing the quality of coach that we're going up against and the things that they're doing to stop him, and it just doesn't seem to affect him in any way. He continues to get better with his ability to play out of a double-team in terms of making plays for other people, and if he's having an off day shooting, he's going to be all over the glass. He's just going to keep coming. Special character -- it takes special character to consistently perform the way he does and an incredible amount of maturity to approach the game every day the way that he does.

Q. After Jordan Bohannon went down, Bakari really seemed to step up and take some pressure off Joe Toussaint. How would you describe him just being a mentor to your younger guards?

FRAN McCAFFERY: He's a guy that he's been around, and fortunately for Joe, he's got some veteran guards around him in both Bakari and Connor in particular, but Wieskamp has been around and CJ is in year two, even though he's only a freshman. That's been helpful to him. But I think the key for Bakari is his versatility. He can play both spots, so he can play with Joe Toussaint or he can play the point and somebody else is at the 2 spot. Those guys, they talk a lot on the bench, they talk a lot in between games. He's studied a lot of film. Those guys have really, I think, put their arms around him knowing that he's a valuable member of our team, but he's only a freshman, and he's going to make some mistakes. And I think helping him play through those mistakes is what's critical, and I think Joe has done a terrific job of that, and Bakari has been a big part of it.