

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

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Fran McCaffery Men's Basketball



Q. Your 3-point shooting has really picked up here late. Is there something that's different? Is it just shots are falling?

FRAN McCAFFERY: No, I just think we have good shooters, and I think percentages over the long haul are going to reflect that. Some of those guys had a couple off nights, too.

Q. The Indiana scout has got to be pretty fresh in everyone's mind. Do you tweak it from the last time?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, you always do. They played three games. They won two of them, and they played decently against Purdue on the road. You know, they still -- they're still battling. There's still obviously a lot to play for for them, and they know that, and we have to know and understand that and respect that, and they know the same thing about us.

Obviously they've had some really good games. They played well against us, and for the most part we got down 17-4, they battled us, got to overtime, and we ended up winning in overtime. So obviously it's a team that has our full attention in terms of what they're capable of doing.

Q. When you rely on so many freshmen, one of the things I think coaches worry about is that freshmen will falter in February.

FRAN McCAFFERY: I don't worry about that. Other people seem to have invented that somehow. I don't pay any attention to that. I've never seen it. I don't think about it, don't talk about it, don't try to overanalyze it. If a guy starts struggling, he's struggling. It has nothing to do with how old he is. I've had freshmen that were phenomenal at the end of the year, and I've had freshmen that struggled throughout the year. I had freshmen where you can't put them in the game. I had freshmen that were the best player on your team. I never thought that would be the case with our team.

Q. Speaking of freshmen, you had to be really pleased with the postseason recognition.

FRAN McCAFFERY: I was pleased for them. When you have players who work hard and sort of exemplify

everything that you want as a coach both on and off the court, in the locker room, as people, you want to see them recognized, and I'm particularly happy for Pete. He had a lot going on in his head last spring and decided to come back, and to come back, you've got to come back with the right mindset, and he did that. His goal and my goal for him was that he lead the Big Ten in scoring, and he did that, and he led this team, and I'm very proud of him.

I figured Jordan and Tyler would be right in the middle of it, and they were amazingly consistent, both of them, and I'm really proud of how Tyler was able to come back from an injury that kept him out for a while, and Nicholas Baer, as I said the other day, it's great when you're recognized by other people in the league for what you do, but from where I sit, he's one of the best players in our league. Happens to come off the bench for us, and I'm glad he plays for us.

Q. Is he more comfortable coming off the bench?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, that's what he wants to do. As we move forward in the future, do we want to keep doing that, but that's what he wants.

Q. Why does he like it so much?

FRAN McCAFFERY: You'll have to ask him, but he'll play the same amount of minutes anyway. He's not going to play 40 minutes. He plays starter's minutes.

Q. You've always liked everything he's done, the little things and the big things. Did he just need more playing time?

FRAN McCAFFERY: No, he needed to get stronger, he needed to gain more experience, figure it out and go through it. He was really good last year, but he's better this year, and hopefully he'll be better next year.

Q. This wasn't easy this year when you replaced 392 starts and then you had the defensive issues in November and early December, and then you had up-and-down kind of through the course of the Big Ten season, three-game streaks one way or the other. How did you manage to maintain your focus on just improving every day?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I think anybody that's been in the program before knows that's kind of how we do it and that's sort of the expectation. The hardest thing would be for the new guys. But I think their maturity

and their desire to be good never wavered. There was no, if we were going good, that was great, if we weren't going so good, there wasn't any finger pointing or blame, it's how do we figure it out, how do we get better. Real simple coaching and just staying on top of it, watching film.

I think the important thing is when you're struggling to sensibly approach it with the guys. We've got to hold you accountable and we've got to point some things out, but essentially stay positive. I think that's going to be a situation where it's just received better, and it has more impact.

A guy knows if he's not playing well. You don't have to rip his face off and remind him and show him every clip and make him feel inferior when you're trying to get him to develop and grow as a player and gain confidence. You know, when it's all said and done, you want your team to play with confidence, and that's one of the things I've always tried to do. That's why some people have always marveled that I just give so many guys the green light and encourage them to shoot, keep shooting, that's a good shot, shoot it, because I don't want any hesitation. I don't want tentative play. And I think if you coach that way, the players respond better. That's been my experience.

Q. Some players can press where they start missing some shots, and at various junctures last year, probably three or four years ago, there seemed to be players pressing, but in the Illinois game where that was an obvious point where it could have gone south the rest of the year, your players seemed looser.

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, that Illinois game was a strange game, and if you go back and -- a lot of the plays that happened down the stretch, it was just really strange. So I didn't overanalyze it, didn't panic, they didn't panic. The key is to get those guys to continue to believe in themselves and just go out and do what they're capable of doing. That's what they did.

Q. How do you feel about the Big Ten Tournament being in Washington, D.C.? It's kind of a media friendly thing or maybe an exposure thing, or is it good for the Big Ten ultimately?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think it's great. I like the idea of playing in different locations. You think, well, you play in Chicago, you play in Indianapolis, you play in D.C., play in New York City next year. I think that's what our league is. I think that's what college basketball is. We have the Big Ten Network. We're a national conference. We've got alumni all over the country, all over the world, and I think it's important to go to those places and play, and I think it'll be terrific.

I've coached there before. It's a terrific venue and a great location and a great city.

Q. I know your players have played in Madison Square Garden and all kinds of places like that. Do you sense an extra spark when they get to go into a big arena like that?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I don't think it's that big a deal because sort of every arena they play in now is about that size in our league, and then obviously some of the tournaments we go to. I don't think it's that big a deal.

Q. Is this as balanced a Big Ten as you've seen?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Probably as balanced a league as I've ever been in. There's always the -- everything I've ever been in, the teams at the bottom, they just aren't very good, and that's just not the case this year in our league. You've seen that. And yeah, some teams don't have the same record as some of the other teams, but they've beaten those teams and they've played really well. They've played really well out of conference. They've got terrific players, every team in our league. I think that makes for a great conference, makes for a great conference tournament certainly, but I don't know that I've ever gone into one where you look and say, well, pretty much anybody can win it.

Q. You just talked about confidence and not wanting your players to be tentative. Are you extra vigilant of that going into this being a tournament situation? Do you want them flowing?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yes. But the thing that I think we all have to understand is this is different, and they know it. I don't overstate it, I don't understate it. Everybody knows what's at stake. Everybody knows where we sit and what opportunities are out there for this team. You don't have to remind them and hit them in the face with it every minute. You just do what you think -- we'll do as a staff what we think we need to do to get ready to play Indiana, and I'm sure Tom will do the same.

Q. Is it fair to say Indiana is a dangerous team; is that the right word?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Indiana is a really good basketball team. You look at their speed and quickness in the backcourt, it's phenomenal. You look at a guy like Bryant, obviously he's as good as any big man in the country. I think Morgan was hurt for a couple games, he's back. He's tremendous. Really athletic, versatile. Davis is another big body, and then you can play the bigs together if you want to or you can go small. Freddie McSwain is playing really well. He gives them another dimension, a guy who can guard the point guard and guard the center. Very few guys can do that. Green is playing extremely well off the bench, and he's started a couple times, and he's scoring the ball.

So you have multiple scoring options. You have size, you have athleticism on the wings. You have a guy like McRoberts and a great coach.

Yeah, but I would pretty much say the same thing who matter who we were playing. But Indiana is certainly a program that I think gets everybody's attention.

Q. The last couple years you've struggled in the Big Ten Tournament; is there anything to draw that's similar in the situations, anything you want to change, whether it's approach, practice times or anything, or is it just --

FRAN McCAFFERY: No. Since we've been here, we've played well, we've not played so well. We've had some hard defeats when we played well. The two Michigan State games stick out in my head, one for sure. It was bizarre what happened in that game.

But we've played well against Illinois. We didn't play well against Illinois. Played well against Northwestern, didn't play well against Northwestern. That's what happens in tournament play.

Q. When you guys recruited Pete, he was coming off a major knee injury. It seemed like his recruiting stock had dropped, and then you guys took a chance on him, and it really paid off.

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I don't know if we took as big a chance as everybody seems to think. We were pretty diligent in our analysis of him. We had watched him before he got hurt. Clearly he was one of the best players in the country. We were just a little more patient maybe through his recovery process.

A kid gets hurt, you can walk away, or you can wait to see what happens. It was a lengthy process, and that's the way it is for a surgery like that. But that doesn't mean he's not going to come back. We did our homework there, and okay, who's come back from this injury and how long does it take, and then we went and watched him. He was tremendous. I got to know him as a person. I felt pretty good about his character, and whenever you're dealing with a situation like that, I think that's critical. Is this guy, is he going to really get after it with his rehab, does he understand how this works. He never panicked. He didn't rush the process because if he had rushed the process, probably would have hurt it again. He had to be patient, and he was.

Turns around and gets Mr. Basketball, which is impressive in this state. We're thrilled that he came to Iowa, and we believed in him and he believed in us.

Q. You look at the defensive challenges early, missing Adam Woodbury was critical. You can

probably take him out and replace him, but how did you find a way to compensate, whether it's with multiple players or other people to do what he did so well, and how have you grown in that role?

FRAN McCAFFERY: We're different than we were with him. He's one of the best I've ever seen in terms of a defensive post presence. I mean, he was absolutely spectacular, and there's a reason why we won so many games with him in the starting lineup. And we've talked about that before, you and I. I don't know that he was ever appreciated. You did; I think a lot of guys in this room did. He seemed to be always evaluated for his offense. Well, we didn't utilize him that way.

But in terms of this team, we didn't have him, so it wasn't like we were trying to get somebody to be him. We didn't have anybody who was going to be him. We just had to have guys that figured out what they needed to do defensively for our team to be good, and Tyler Cook is a different kind of defensive player. So is Cordell, so is Ryan Kriener. So it starts with transition defense. Then it starts at half court, then it starts with ball screen defense. Then it starts, okay, if we're changing defenses. And that just takes time to learn how to read situations and how to process scouting report information and keep your mistakes to a minimum, keep yourself out of foul trouble, and maintain your activity level.

And then clearly understand how to play with four other guys and then how to communicate information, which is hard. When you have young guys who don't really know exactly where they're supposed to be or where they're supposed to go, communication doesn't do any good. It's communication that has a purpose to it, and as time has gone on, those guys have figured that out, and they're much more connected at the defensive end.

Q. To make a deep run in a tournament like this, how important is it to have a lengthy rotation, have 10, 11 guys that you can bring in and play?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, it's important. But I've had teams I didn't play a lot of guys and we won it, we won the whole thing. So you know, you're -- it's not like you go into the next game and say, okay, I'm going to make sure I play a lot of guys so we're rested for the third game in this tournament. No, we're going to do whatever we have to do to win that game that day because you don't play that third game. So I like having a lot of guys I can play because it gives me options. I can go big, I can go small, I can put my shooters in, I can put my athletes in and press. It gives me flexibility. But it doesn't mean that playing 11, 12 guys is going to help us win four games in four days. It's not how it works.