

# University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

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## Fran McCaffery Men's Basketball



**Q. One of the players that was really interesting for you last year was Nicholas Baer, a skinny walk-on that's still trying to develop his body. My question to you is what do you see as his role next season?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I think he'll do a lot of the same things, but he'll have an expanded role. He'll play more. He'll have more opportunities. He's stronger now. He'll continue to get better as he gets stronger, but I think you'll see it reflected in his stamina. If you remember last year, some of his better games we had to get him out. He kind of goes to exhaustion, and as he gets stronger, everything that he does translates well, whether you're coming off the bench or whether you're a starter. He makes plays, he makes shots, he rebounds the ball, he defends, and he plays both ends. He thinks the game through. He truly understands the game plan and how we do our scouting and preparation.

I mean, he's as professional as they come. So he's going to be a very important part of our team for the next three years.

**Q. When you look at Tyler Cook, he's kind of a unique body because he's a Big Ten body at 6'10" as a freshman coming in, has explosiveness. What are the realistic expectations for him this season, and what do you think he's capable of doing as a freshman?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I think he's capable of being a star. I really do. You guys that have been around me know that I say what I think typically, so it's not like let's go easy and not push him. I have a responsibility to be honest, and I think he's an impact player, certainly on our team, in our league, and on a national level. I think he's that good.

**Q. How about Cordell Pems! He looks like he's got some quickness back and he's already got the Big Ten body.**

FRAN McCAFFERY: He's been really impressive. What you saw there is pretty much what we've seen in practices in June, July, August and now. I mean, he's a guy that has real good feel for how to play the game, and when you're 6'8", 250, and you know how to play, you can dribble, pass and shoot, you know how to

post-up, you know how to use angles, that's a guy who can really help you, and I'm really excited about him.

**Q. Where do you see Cook playing on the floor, what position?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: You know, he'll line up in the forward position, but you'll see him bring it down. You'll see him post-up. You'll see him shoot threes, attack the rim, playing ball screen action, and that's what I told him when we recruited him, that we'll utilize him that way.

He has typically been a prototype 4 man with that body, and he can do that. The key for us and the key for him is going to be to making sure that while he's dribbling the ball and shooting threes, he still gets after it on the glass and is up around 10 rebounds a game, which is not easy.

**Q. In terms of potential or ceiling, where is he at as far as players you've brought in?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: He probably has the highest ceiling.

**Q. What's your expectations for point guard? Does it change now that Mike (Gesell) is not here anymore? Is it still the same expectation?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Same expectation. We're still going to play the same way. I think when we recruited Christian (Williams) and Jordan (Bohannon), we felt like they were perfect fits for what we do. We're going to have to be a little bit patient because they're young, but they're smart, tough, and versatile. They both can get to the rim. They both can make shots. They both battle defensively. They're intelligent, so they'll understand our offense thoroughly, and if we're changing defenses, they'll be fine there. They'll communicate what's necessary to the rest of the team. I'm excited about both of them.

**Q. You've always been lucky to have good senior leadership. Where is Peter Jok in that development, and do you feel like he's ready to step up?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I've been really, really happy with Pete's development there, and as you know, it didn't just start Saturday when we officially started practice October 1st. It's kind of when the last year ends, and he recognized that immediately, and it wasn't easy because as you remember, he put his name in. So it

was a very critical thing for him to recognize. While he was getting a thousand shots a day up with an NBA basketball and traveling and trying out for teams, whenever we had a workout, he was there early and stayed late, said all the right things to the young guys, and led that group both through example and verbally. So I was really impressed with him there.

When the young guys got here this summer, he was even better. I think it's more important for those guys in particular, because they're going to be in a critical part of this team. Sometimes you bring guys in and you know they're going to develop and we're going to get them ready down the road, but this is a group we expect to play, and you've got to get them ready as coaches, but the more you can get from your seniors is helpful. The guy that we always seem to forget is Dale Jones. He's in the gym all the time rehabilitating and getting back, but he's a really good person, he says all the right things, and you watch him work and you listen to what he has to say, he'll have an impact, too.

**Q. Back in May you mentioned Pete playing some point guard. How do you envision that playing out?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well I think what you'll see is Pete sometimes bringing the ball down. You'll see him have the ball on top. You'll see him have the ball in different situations maybe than what he did last year, as opposed to being a traditional point guard and getting us into our offense. When we have him on the floor, we want to get him buckets and create opportunities for him to have space. He's going to have to diversify his game in some ways because he's going to see tight coverage in a lot of ways, whether it's double teaming, rotating personnel, or physicality. I mean, whatever you want to point to, he's going to see it all, so the critical thing for him is going to be keeping the ball moving and the thing for us is going to be getting him open.

**Q. You've probably been asked this from time to time over the years, but I was wondering if it's changed. What is your recruiting strategy?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, the recruiting strategy hasn't changed. The first thing we're going to do is identify a group of talented guys that we're going to look at, and then we're going to zero in on character, work ethic, intangibles, those kinds of things, because when you get them here, you can move them around, you can bring them along, and they're more willing to accept a particular role. We tell them the truth, so they don't have unrealistic expectations when they get here. They know exactly what's going to happen, and we try to work on their entire game, whether it be through video, skill development, or in the weight room. We try to make sure that we max out the opportunity that

they've been given.

**Q. Is there one role more so than any other that's going to be the most challenging to try to replace this year and not necessarily the person but what that person brought?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I don't think there is one. Obviously we got unbelievably consistent play out of the center position with Adam Woodbury. His understanding of how to play this game was so advanced and so intelligent and so physical. I was just impressed with him every day with the professional way that he came to work. You could say the same for Mike (Gesell) and Anthony Clemmons because that's the point guard position. Those guys were leaders, they were workers, they came in essentially in competition with one another and ended up playing together and ended up being the best of friends.

We haven't even mentioned the guy who's probably the best of the four. That oftentimes is hard to replace, a guy that can make tough shots at critical times of the game. So that sometimes is more difficult. When you look at those other things that we just talked about over time, over the course of a season, there's a reason why that group won 89 games, because of how they lived their lives, how they prepared, how they worked, how they trained, how they supported one another, and how they overcame adversity. All of those things that you are faced with in the course of a long season. That's something that oftentimes you have to experience before you excel.

The key for us is going to be when you look at Pete and Dale and then Dom, Ahmad, Brady Ellingson, Nicholas Baer, these guys are young but they've been around. They've had great examples of how to do it, and they will get these young guys to step in and be really good because they'll have the ability. If you look at them, every one of them has a chance to be special, and so how soon will that happen? Well, they're going to get a chance. They're going to play, and I'm going to play them. So we'll see how it ends up.

**Q. You don't have a seven-footer on the team but you're playing 6'7", 6'8" guys in the post. Is that going to impact how you defend teams, what types of defense you use?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: No, it won't. While we don't have a 7'1" center, we have way more length and size than we had last year. When you look at the physical makeup of our team in terms of strength and length, we're in a much better position this year to defend in the post than we were last year. Everything kind of fell on Woody (Adam Woodbury), and he was spectacular, except for one or two occasions when he got in foul trouble.

**Q. Dom Uhl has shown you stretches of really good play. Is it fair to say he's got to play on a more consistent level for your team to get where you want to go?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think that's a fair statement, and I think he understands that. I also think sometimes you need consistent play and time to play the consistent way that you're talking about. If you think about the last two years, while he was an integral part of everything that we did, some games he would play 26 minutes, 18, sometimes he would play nine, and that's not easy, and I think I certainly recognize that.

I've been impressed with his growth, both in terms of his game and his strength and conditioning. What you're seeing now is a guy that is doing all the things well that we've seen him do well, but he's finishing better and he's rebounding better. He's much more physical with his game, yet he's still versatile off the dribble. So I'm really excited about him.

**Q. Ryan Kriener had a slow start with illness this summer. Has he caught up?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: He's more than caught up. What was interesting about him was the day he was diagnosed, he completed a practice with as much energy as anybody else, and then we shut him down after the diagnosis and he didn't play for a while, then he came back and finished I thought pretty strong in the Prime Time League. I think he played two or three games. He didn't play the first couple.

He's 6'10", 240. He'll get stronger but he's got a 7'2", 7'3" wingspan, so he's blocking shots, dunking the ball with that length.

When you get a big guy that is as active as he is with his feet, I mean, he sprints back. He runs down the floor. He's constantly moving. He's up, he's back, he's over. It's hard to get those guys to do that sometimes because they get tired. He's got incredible stamina for a guy that big. It would be nice if he was 10 or 15 pounds heavier, but he might be better leaner because of his activity level.

**Q. Given what you said about different guys bringing the ball up, should we expect to see a different kind of offense, different style of offense this year?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: No, I don't think it'll be a lot different, but you will see the guys get it off the glass and go. Tyler will do that, Ahmad Wagner will do that, Dom Uhl will do that. We kind of did that with Jarrod and with Aaron White, but pretty much everybody we have can rebound the ball and go, and maybe with Ryan it's a couple, three dribbles moving on and then

sprint.

But when you have a front court that can run like our group, we take off rather than worry about who we're getting the ball to because that takes time.

**Q. Do you envision Jordan and Christian playing together?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I do, for a lot of reasons. Christian is a really good defensive player, so we might need him to go shut down a 2, especially if Pete is in foul trouble. I'd like to play him with Pete kind of like we did last year with three guards. Christian is a really good offensive rebounder, so we could turn him loose because you don't send your point guard to the glass. You can, but that's rare, and it's difficult, and it takes a lot of adjustment. So I think Christian and Jordan together would be really good, especially with the way that Jordan shoots the three.

**Q. When you came to Iowa City you probably set some goals. Where are you with those goals as far as team placement in the Big Ten?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I think everybody thinks that you sit down and write things down, we want to be here by this date and here by that date. There's so many things that factor into where you end up. Do you have a healthy team? Do you get a couple guys that you really wanted that end up being as good as you thought they were going to be? How do your young guys develop? How do you put a schedule together?

The bottom line is what I wanted to do was be a player on a national level, build the building back up, and make it exciting for our players, for our fans. I wanted to win big games, win big games on the road, and develop a mindset that enables you to do that. It's not easy to go win at North Carolina, at Michigan State. First time we went into Michigan State, we lost by 38. We go back there and beat them by 18 or whatever it was, but that's over.

So the key now is to try to maintain some consistency with what we put together, and that's a challenge for the next group, and it's a challenge for our coaching staff. This is a different team, and it's a young team with 10 freshmen and sophomores. We have great chemistry and great character. I know that sounds cliché, but it's so true. We have a group of guys that are together, and they truly like one another and they respect one another and they compete hard and they learn quickly. Not all young groups learn quickly.

**Q. How much patience is required from the fans of this team?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I said the day I was hired, that we have a sophisticated fan base. They've watched great

basketball and great coaching for a long time. You know I remember back to the '60s, the Freddie Brown teams and Ralph Miller and that group. They had great teams before that. But that's how long people in this state have been watching really good basketball, and not only that, they follow the Big Ten, which is arguably the best conference in the country over that period of time. It has certainly led the nation in attendance over that period of time.

So you have a sophisticated group of people not only in this state but within the league.

I don't wake up and say, well, they're going to give up on us if we're 1-3. I don't have that feeling. I think they'll analyze our personnel and say, okay, do we think Tyler Cook is going to be as good as Fran said he's going to be. Let's see how Jordan Bohannon comes along with Christian; can we get the point guard situation where we want it to be? Which one of these other guys steps up? Does Dom Uhl take the step that we think he can take?

Each and every one of those guys that I've talked about, Ahmad Wagner, Brady Ellingson, every one of those guys has improved noticeably, but what you have to do now is you've got to do it in the games. You've got to do it when the TV lights come on. You've got to do it when the TV lights come on on the road. Then you've got to do it consistently, and that's the hardest thing. That's the journey, and I think that's the fun of it, but it's the challenge, as well, and there could be bumps in the road. I have a good feeling about this team, and I go into every season fully confident that we're going to be winning, and we'll see where it ends up.

The other things that you don't have control over sometimes are injuries. When you get the wrong injury to the wrong person at the wrong time, that can change a whole season. We've been lucky. I think our training staff and our strength and conditioning people have done a great job of keeping our team healthy. I think I'm smart in terms of making sure that we get enough work in but we don't overwork them. It's a long season. We start practice in June, and we expect to be playing hopefully in April.

**Q. Is this team mature enough to get the things done you want to get done?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: No question in my mind, yes.

**Q. Talk about Ahmad a little bit; he seemed to never get flustered last year. He just seems like he's a mature player.**

FRAN McCAFFERY: He's an incredibly mature person, and I think that starts there. If you know his family, it's easy to see, it's easy to understand. Then you start

coaching him, you tell him something once, okay, I got it. That's it. You don't have to tell him again, and now we make progress. Now we tell him something else, and he does that.

What you'll see is a guy who's going to play a little differently. Last year what was his role? Come in, be a physical presence, be a versatile front court guy, and be an athlete. He was not a mistake maker. He was a very efficient offensive player. He didn't shoot a lot, but when he did, he scored. Well, now you'll see a guy that will be a little more aggressive offensively. He will be a little more aggressive with the ball off the dribble, and physically he's even stronger and in better shape than he's ever been in his life. So I'm excited about it.

**Q. You mentioned Dale Jones as a leader. What kind of role do you see him playing?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: See, Dale is a guy that can really score the ball, and it's really a shame because we sort of forgot about him. He got hurt in the fifth or sixth game last year, and he had a really good game I thought at Marquette. He had a terrific game against Dayton, one of the most intense games that we played all last year in the tournament down in Orlando, and as we struggled a little bit offensively down the stretch, that was the guy that we looked at and said, you know, if he was here, he'd go get 25. I mean, he has that capability. He makes threes, he's 6'8", he's 235, but he's also a rebounder. A lot of jump shooting forwards don't rebound the ball. But he rebounds the ball. He's physical.

I expect him to do those things. That's what we brought him in here to do. We thought he was going to do it last year. I'm really proud of him and how he's responded. Very proud of everything that he's done because when you're a guy like Dale who knows he has the talent to make money playing basketball and you blow your knee out for the second time, that's a very upsetting thing and could really mess with your psyche. I've been impressed with his positive approach to his rehabilitation and the way that he has assimilated into the team when he hasn't been on the floor every day.

**Q. What's the timetable on him?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: He's going full tilt about 50 percent of the time, so we're getting close. I mean, I would think by next week he'll be 80 percent of the time, and then at that point you've got to turn it loose, because we've got games coming up. He'll have a scrimmage, and then we'll have an exhibition game. We will try to get him some minutes there and get him ready to go. But the good news is he has been consistent with his approach to his rehabilitation so that he hasn't had any major setbacks because that's what could take a half a year away from him, but he's too



smart for that.

**Q. Pete and Bryn Forbes are probably the two best pure outside shooters last year. Can you see him making any more strides there, or is it the rest of his game do you think that --**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I do think he'll make strides there, but I think you're right, he'll make strides with the rest of his game, as well, and he's going to have to because he's going to be defended differently than he's ever been before. We all know that. He's one of the top two or three leading returning scorers in the league. He's our leading returning scorer. We don't have another double-figure scorer coming back, so if you're preparing to play us, you're going to face guard him, and you're going to double him. So what he did was he got himself in the best physical condition of his life so he can keep running and keep moving because that will get you to the basket, that will get you to the free-throw line, and it will get you a lot of easy baskets in transition.

It has also extended his range. I mean, he's always had pretty good range. You've seen him play a bunch. He's really taken it to a whole 'nother level. I mean, he's pulling from way behind the three-point line, which really makes you a hard cover because if you go out and get him, now he's going to go by you, and he'll give it up, and he's got a pull-up game. We're going to do everything we can to put him in a position to be successful every night. I can't ask him to do any more in terms of getting ready.

**Q. What's the risk of him trying to do too much?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, the only risk is turnovers. If you start driving into packs of people and coughing it up and occasionally taking a bad shot, which is the same as a turnover. So I think it comes down to decision making and understanding he is probably the most critical person on his team. You can't do it all yourself, and I think he's smart enough to know that.

**Q. In terms of recruiting, I know you can't talk specifics, but when you have more commitments than you have spots, how do you approach that?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, you know, it's not a conundrum until it is. We've got time. With regard to my son, he's on board; he gets it. He's also thinking about baseball, as well, so that's a whole other deal. But I'm going to support him either way, whatever he wants to do, and he visited for baseball last week, so that was interesting, and he really enjoyed that. So I was a parent on the visit, so that was interesting. We'll see.

**Q. Do you have an idea of a rotation yet, who your starters will be?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: No, I think it's a little early for that. I mean, I think you could pencil in some guys, but six, seven, eight, nine, we've got too many guys, and that's a good problem to have. A lot of times you get to this point and you look and say, okay, well, these three guys are definitely not playing. I don't have that with this team. Everybody is doing good things, scoring the ball, and playing smart. I don't have a mistake maker. I don't have a guy who's confused every day. I don't have a guy who's out of shape. So we've got stiff competition for what minutes are available, and there's a lot of minutes available. They're going after them.

**Q. Is this a team that's going to maybe have a 10-, 11-man rotation?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, I think that's safe to say. You've coached; it's hard to go 11, 12. Ten, nine, eight, is a lot easier. But it may be hard to cut it off there with this group, because we have so many guys that they all at least do one or two things really well that we'll want to get in there.

**Q. With this many young and inexperienced players, is it kind of exciting for you to get it to this point of the season where you're working with them every day, watching them grow, you can kind of teach and then just see what happens, not really have any preconceived notions?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think it is, but to be truthful, it was more exciting in June when they first got here. Now it's only two hours a week, two one-hour sessions, but we at least we are able to get our hands on them then and kind of see what they had. Then they go play in the Prime Time League and you see them perform there, which is a different kind of evaluation, but nonetheless an opportunity to get out and play against other college players and in front of people. I'm excited about this group. We've got some work to do. But what you were just talking about didn't happen Saturday necessarily. For me it happened in June.

Saturday was a little different. That's the first time we went two and a half hours. Because we gave them a couple days off, okay, this is really the official first day, and our effort and intensity level was phenomenal, absolutely phenomenal. So that tells me that it's a mature group, even if it's a young group.