

# University of Iowa Media Conference

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## Coach Fran McCaffery

### Media Day Press Conference



**Q. Obviously a lot of attention on Luka, but Joe Wieskamp has showed steady improvement. How is he going to be a better player?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: The thing about Joe, he's an incredibly hard worker and he's smart. What you're going to see now is a guy as a junior who started for two years, been a really good player, not only in our league but nationally, and he's just going to be better. He's stronger. He's really worked on his ball handling, his attacking the basket, his shooting. He's a great shooter, but he really works on it, so he's even shooting the ball better. He's just going to be a really aggressive offensive player in his junior year, and now he's physically ready to be one of the elite players in the country.

**Q. There were a few games last year, I think at Minnesota for one, where they just defensively just got physical and really hounded him and --**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I don't think that'll be a problem for him this year at all. He'll be able to handle that.

**Q. How has Jack Nunge responded now that he's been fully cleared?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Jack has been terrific. He looks great health-wise. He's in great shape physically. He's been lifting now for the better part of two years, even though he had an injury. His upper body looks really good. Terrific shooter, skilled big guy who can play multiple positions. He's a shot blocker, he's a tremendous low post defender, he's a runner, he can stretch the floor, and he can really pass. We're really excited about getting Jack back.

**Q. Too early for you to project a starting lineup?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think so, but the good news is we have a lot of options, and right now fortunately everybody is healthy.

**Q. How did the game with Gonzaga come up?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: It's like anything else this year. We were all set to play Oregon State. Their schedule was in flux. They didn't know what their league schedule was going to look like, whether they were going to start playing this semester or next semester only. They didn't know when their conference games were going to be. A lot of the conferences were talking about trying to get as many conference games in December as possible. So it really wasn't going to work for them.

So then there was an opportunity -- the thing about those folks up in Sioux Falls, they're in constant communication with various programs, and so Gonzaga was interested in playing a game, we were still interested in playing a game. It had to be on the 19th. I think it was originally scheduled for the 20th or the 21st.

So you just have to be flexible with what you're doing with your schedule as best you can. Obviously we would want to play Gonzaga if we could in a situation like that. The fact that it's going to be on CBS is great for both programs. It's an opportunity to play a team that could very well be ranked No. 1 at the time, and I think it's important that you recognize an opportunity to play people. I always say to have a good team you've got to go play people, and that's what we're doing.

**Q. You have so many good players; how does that elevate the level in practice?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: The practices have been incredibly competitive. I try to not always have the same five guys going against the same five guys. Okay, this is my top five, six, seven. We kind of rotate those guys on different teams, try different combinations because we very well may have to play different combinations this year not knowing what's going to happen week to week.

The good news is we have a lot of different options to look at if we need to. It starts with our experienced guys, but I think the freshman group in particular has been really competitive. They got here in the summer and were able -- we had the quarantine period, but those guys have been able to lift and learn, and they're good players, and they're versatile.

I like so far how those practices have gone in terms of

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competitiveness, and that only makes you better when guys are challenged every day and you don't have to be where you're, okay, we're going to get ready today because we have a game. No, you have to be ready today in practice because guys are coming after you.

**Q. With the uncertainty with COVID, can you project redshirts at this stage?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: We wouldn't redshirt anybody this year because everybody has a free year. It's kind of a non-factor. We were thinking about it. I think it would have made sense to because you want to protect --

**Q. Is everybody ready to play?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, everybody is ready to play. You want to protect eligibility and space your classes if it makes sense, but then of course you deal with injuries. Sometimes injury will dictate more opportunity or less opportunity for a particular individual, but now it's all hands on deck because at any point in time somebody could be pulled out for 21 days.

**Q. What kind of team are you going to have this year in general and compared to the one that went through the Big Ten season last year?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: We're much deeper, substantially deeper. We've got veteran guys coming back who have produced at this level, but at the same time it won't change in terms of our ability to share the ball. It's a very unselfish group. You've got a lot of guys that can score, a lot of guys who want to score, a lot of guys who can carry a team on any particular day. But I have seen no selfishness at all in terms of I want to get mine. It's not like that at all. They move it, they share it, they communicate with each other.

So I think we have enough weapons offensively. I think we have enough depth to keep fresh bodies on the floor defensively. I think we have enough size. I think most importantly we have enough three-point shooters because you can't have enough of those, especially the way the game is being played today, and especially the way we play.

I really like our team. I like how we sort of handled the pandemic, from last year's disappointment at the end of the year through the uncertainty, through we're back to playing, but no, we're not playing because some guys got sick, now we're back to school and now there's a spike. I think we've got sort of a singular focus on what's in front of us, and I think our guys have for the most part made good decisions off the floor, and that's absolutely critical. But you would expect that from a mature group, especially guys that have

character.

**Q. The virus, is that something that's addressed every day with your team?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: We don't address it every day, but we address it pretty consistently because all of the success that we hope to have is going to have predicated on the ability to stay healthy.

**Q. What will it be like to play games in Carver without fans, and have you kind of tried to prepare the team for that?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, you really can't. We're going to have a dress rehearsal on Saturday. We'll have refs and we'll have the table set up the way it is. We'll have the benches set up the way they are for games. We'll have some crowd noise the way it's going to be. There won't be any cardboard cutouts or anything like that. Maybe that will happen down the road.

But it's interesting because you have to just deal with whatever comes before you. We've been doing that now for months, and hopefully being a veteran group we'll be better capable of handling that.

**Q. Will not having fans on the road make you an even more dangerous team?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think that's a fair observation, maybe it would. But you could argue that we'd be better off on the road being that we have a veteran club. So there's two ways to look at that.

I think what you just hope is that this group knows and understands what we have to do night in and night out to beat our particular opponent, and if we lose, that we're mature enough to evaluate what needs to be corrected, make those corrections and be better the next time we play.

But consistency of effort, concentration and the ability to play together is going to be critical in any year, whether it's pandemic or not. I think this group in particular has what it takes to play with what would be certainly a non-traditional atmosphere.

**Q. As the reigning Big Ten Player of the Year and the preseason pick, obviously Luka is going to get everyone's best shot. How has his game improved where he can handle that game in and game out?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think he's already proven that he can handle that game in and game out. I don't think he has

to be any better in that area. I think what he has to be is better in all areas of his game. So just taking the natural progression from his junior to his senior year, okay, what can he be better at. Well, it's impossible to work any harder because he works -- his feel for low post play is unmatched. Defensively I think you saw a dramatic improvement from his sophomore year to his junior year. I think he could improve there even more.

He was a factor defensively in ball screens. He was a factor defensively on the glass in terms of being a rim protector. He really shot it well last year from three-point range. I think you'll see that improve, as well. He's really shooting with great confidence. He's shooting a lot more from three-point range.

So I think you'll see a better player, just because he's worked that much harder since the season ended because he was in the gym, even though it was hard to find gyms. He found one and he'd be in there by himself and when he could be in there with some others, he'd be in there. He was on vacation, he's doing sprints on the beach. The guy is just relentless, and that's why he's great.

**Q. Seems like you have a collection of guys that love high expectations. So they're ranked No. 5 in the country; how do you think they'll respond to that?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think you have to embrace it. You have to enjoy it. I think they do. But they also understand it and respect it. You see some of the great teams -- what did we have, seven in the top 25? So I think there's a tremendous respect on behalf of our players for the rest of the conference, but then also there's other teams on that list that we're going to be playing that aren't in our conference.

We know what's before us, but I think that's the fun of it essentially.

**Q. A lot of coaches try to temper expectations; what's your opinion about that?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I really think it's important that when you have older guys that have proven that they can be successful at this level, and we have one, the challenge is can we win more. Can we win more against a tougher schedule. That's what competition is.

I just think it's foolish to kind of create any kind of guise that we're going to -- we're not going to be as good, I got this guy hurt, I got that guy hurt, there's not going to be any crowd, it's going to be a weird year, the game might get canceled at the last minute. You know what, we're going to show up and play, and we're going to be ready to play

whoever shows up to play against us, and if the game against canceled then we'll prepare to play the next game. It's going to be a goofy year. It is. But we have a good basketball team. We have really good players. We have character on this team.

At the end of the day, that's what they signed up for. You come to the Big Ten, you want to take on the big boys. We're scheduling the No. 1 ranked team in the country preseason, and we're going to play them on CBS. That's why you come to Iowa, because you want that competition and you want that challenge.

I think, like I said earlier, you embrace it and you enjoy it, you don't run from it.

**Q. We've seen what the offensive ceiling is for this team and you guys can be as good as anybody in the country offensively. What do you think the defensive ceiling is because you have a lot of guys that can do different things on defense.**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think last year we were better -- we need to be better defensively, but we also didn't have any depth really. So that could be good and bad because we had a group that settled in offensively. They knew they weren't coming out, and I think if you ask any player, they don't want to come out. They might say they like depth, but they want to play 38 minutes, 40 maybe.

But I think we'll be able to have fresh legs on the floor more regularly. We have, I think, length. When you look at some of our wings in particular, whether it be Patrick or the Murray twins, Tony Perkins who's a terrific athlete, on top of obviously the guys that we already know. Aaron Ulis has played really well. He can play more than one position.

So we have a lot of ways to keep pressure on the other team's defense, but hopefully sustain effort and pressure on the other team's offense, and ultimately I think we have a really good rebounding team or the potential to be a really good rebounding team, and I think if you can limit them to one shot -- many times you see a broken play three after a long tip-out, boom, somebody hits a three. You had a really good defensive possession, they hit a three anyway. So you're hoping that we have the activity level that's necessary to limit those opportunities for the other team.

**Q. Knowing the kind of year that it's been, I'm sure a lot of programs felt like they had to play catch-up, but knowing how many guys with starting experience you bring back, did it feel like you could kind of pick up where you left off, that maybe that gives you an edge?**

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FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I think that's the plan, but I think the other thing is I think you're seeing a lot of teams where players might have gone on to the NBA. They all stayed -- not all of them but a lot of them. So you're seeing, I think, across the board more veteran clubs, certainly in our league. Guys that maybe would have thought about leaving, I think maybe I could have gotten drafted, I think I could have signed a two-way, but they all came back because there was no NBA combine, there were no NBA workouts. They had some interviews over the telephone, but you have no way of knowing what your real chances were of getting drafted. So I think you're going to see -- certainly our team is a veteran club. I keep talking about that. But there's a lot of others.

**Q. Is there a vocal leader on this team?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: It's Luka. J-Bo does. Obviously he's been our point guard for a long time. Connor is very vocal. Wieskamp is a quieter guy, but he does now -- he wasn't doing it much when he was a freshman.

Those guys who have been through it will speak up. They have opinions, and they know and understand what we want and what we need to do. But I think the one big voice right now would be Luka.

**Q. You've been here now 10 years since you walked off the tarmac at Eastern Iowa airport. What are maybe some of the biggest memories over this last decade either personally or professionally with this program?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I think it was important to reestablish ourselves not only within the conference but on a national level because that's the expectation here. I think of some great teams we had, some great players. Obviously getting us back to the NCAA Tournament for the first time was critical. That was a big moment. It was of an interesting and difficult moment for our family at the time because it coincided with Patrick's diagnosis. But I thought the players handled that extremely well.

And then we came back and had some really good teams. I think of the opportunity to coach Devyn Marble, one of my favorite players I ever coached, Melsahn Basabe coming with me from back east, that was huge. Just so many great players -- Aaron White, that kid, what he did statistically was impressive.

But I think being able to have a consistent winning program and establish a style of play that we have, you bring a guy in like Tyler Cook, he was a big get. We had to beat a lot of people to get him, and I knew it would be different when he got here because not only was he a great player but he

was an even better person. Peter Jok, we targeted him. Adam Woodbury, very first minute I got here; Mike Gesell, we targeted those guys, and they came. But then you look at a guy like Gabe Olaseni, Anthony Clemmons, guys a little under the radar. They didn't necessarily know if they'd get a Big Ten offer and they got one and they made the most of it.

Then we had the National Player of the Year; you don't very that very often. You're so proud of the kid because not only did he prove that he could do it, but he worked hard to get there. Forget the emotion of major surgery his sophomore year and we didn't know if he'd ever play again, and six weeks later he's the MVP of the 2K Classic, and the next year he's the National Player of the Year.

Very proud of the guys we brought in and the way they conduct themselves and our ability to win in what is so far and away the most difficult conference in college basketball. It's not even close anymore, so that says a lot about what we've been able to do.

I don't often talk about it because I prefer to give the credit to the players. I'm very proud of my staff, but we had some guys early that they had to believe in us and say, okay, yeah, I'll come. Aaron White was one of them. Marble right off the bat. We didn't know if he'd come or not. Said he was coming, then he changed his mind, then he said, okay, I'm coming, and he was phenomenal. Bryce Cartwright, he led the Big Ten in assists. Nobody knew who he was but we developed a relationship with him and got him to come.

It's been a fun ride. I remember in the beginning, Connor and Patrick would come to practice and sit on the side and shoot on the side and now they're playing, and that's tremendous for our family and it's a lot of fun for them. It's great to see them be a part of it.

**Q. You touched on your freshmen earlier. Which of those have caught your eye?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, the only guy that's a little bit behind right now is Josh, and that's not his fault. He had an interesting journey just to get here. So he's catching up. The other four guys were here in the beginning, and all four of them, the Murray twins, Aaron and Tony, they've been tremendous. All those guys are ready to play. It's not going to be easy to find minutes for them if everybody else stays healthy, but we'll see where it ends up because we're going to need everybody at some point.

**Q. As you know, it's been 40 years since Iowa has won the regular season title. What would that mean for this team to end that drought?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I don't know that I look at what hasn't happened in a long time, and I would love it for this group. They're a special group of young people that truly love each other, and they put the time in, and when you see a group work as hard as they have, you want them to succeed in a way that's special, and that would be a championship, whether it be a regular season or a tournament championship. A run in the NCAA Tournament is obviously what we all want.

It's there for them as a possibility, but it's a long journey to make it happen.

**Q. Where is Patrick at medically?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Patrick is in a good place. He's playing well. He had a little pulled muscle, so he didn't practice on Saturday, but he's been out there most of the days shooting it well, playing well, attacking. Physically he looks great. He's up to 205, which has been huge for him. It's hard to play in this league at 182 where I think he played in high school.

He'll be a major factor for us.

**Q. Connor's game has really evolved, not only the assists but the leadership and toughness he brings to the floor. How valuable are those traits?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Incredibly valuable because he knows and understands what we want at any given time, what we want to run, what we're in. A lot of times we'll come out of a time-out, guys will grab him, want to make sure they're going to the right place. He's the guy.

And also, I think not only does he know and understand what we want, I can play him at 1, 2, 3 and 4. I can play him at the 5 if I had to. He guarded the 5 against San Diego State last year and did a phenomenal job there.

Physically he's about 215 right now, looks strong and shooting the ball well. And again, it just gives you great flexibility with your lineup because we can play him at the 4 like we did last year, we can put Jack in there with Luka and play those guys together, and we can move J-Bo around and take advantage of his tremendous shooting ability.

It just gives me a lot of different ways that I can go.

**Q. A couple of years ago there was this graphic that went around with the Wisconsin starting lineup was older than the Milwaukee Bucks' starting lineup. That was a really successful Wisconsin team. We've seen**

**Villanova have a lot of success with redshirts on their national championship teams. We've talked about the experience on the court with this group, but you have an old group in terms of age, too. How is that impactful?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I always built my program in that way. You want your guys if they have the opportunity to go pro and fulfill their dream and become millionaires and play in the league that they always aspire to play in, then that's what you want for them. We've had a few guys leave, but most of the guys have played through and get better. They know and understand your system in a way that they can really be effective, and when you're coming down the stretch and you're as good as we have the potential to be, you're going to be in a lot of close games. That's the way this league is.

If you're going to advance to the NCAA Tournament you're winning close games. So how do you do that? You execute. You execute late-game packages. You execute coming out of time-outs, and that's at both ends.

I always talk about whether it was a breakdown because the play didn't work. A lot of times there's a breakdown defensively because we were supposed to switch and didn't, or one guy thought we were and one guy thought we weren't. So those breakdowns don't happen as much with older guys, and that's kind of what our hope is.

But like I said, there's a whole lot of teams this year in our league that have older guys. It's not like we're sitting here at the top and everybody else is playing freshmen.

**Q. You mentioned close games; I know Luka was upset about his free-throw percentage last year. What are you expecting in that department?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I would expect us to excel in that area. He's shooting it really well himself. He's really worked on it. He'll be a guy that would be over 80 percent I would think.

**Q. The team, like your starting five?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, you're shocked if they don't make it, but I would feel the same way with other guys, as well. Assuming the same team started last year, Joe was 83, J-Bo, you expect him to shoot 90; Wiesy led the league; Murray twins; Patrick. They're all really good free-throw shooters. Jack is tremendous. It's not like you're concerned when we get fouled. It's a good thing for us.

**Q. What's the fundamental important thing about**



## **unselfishness?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: The key is when you think about unselfishness, it's okay. Do you have a team of willing passers. And what that means is when you're open, I throw you the ball right then. I don't exhaust my opportunities to score for myself and then throw you the ball when they're exhausted because now it's late, and you can't do anything with it.

Luka is open in the post, throw it to him. Sometimes he's not. Well, you have to have patience and wait. And then I might have to move it to a different location because I can see that he's going to be open if I move it. But if I move it too late then he's not. And that same thing holds true with your shooters. When guys are coming off screens and you're playing a team that's switching, then you might opt it to slip guy.

But it's putting yourself in a position to make the pass at the appropriate time because that's what's going to lead to a bucket. I don't care how good of a shooter you might be or how good of a low post scorer you might be, if you don't get the ball at the right time to that person, they're not going to score. So I think we have a really good understanding of that.

**Q. What can Chris and Keegan bring? They seem like pretty versatile players that can play a lot of different roles for you.**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, they've been good, both of them. Keegan is a phenomenal rebounder. Phenomenal. Every day. His length and his tenacity to go to the glass is what separates him. But both of those guys do the same things. They keep balls alive. They can dribble and pass so they can play as guards. They can both make threes. They can stretch the floor, stretch the defense I should say, or they can make a play off the dribble. They're just low-maintenance guys. No issues off the floor, yes, sir, no, sir, they just want to compete. They're thankful for the opportunity. But those two guys can play.

**Q. Do you ever get them mixed up?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Most of the time I can tell them apart. Occasionally like when you're looking at film, it's hard. But one is left-handed, one is right-handed, so right off the bat -- one is a different number than the other one, so we can all figure it out (laughter), but they just grind, both of them. Proud of them.

**Q. What dimension do you think Patrick can add to your team this year?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, Patrick is a run-out guy. He in transition is really special because he can score in a variety of ways. He gives us another 3-point shooter, another guy who attacks the rim, another guy you can throw alley-oops too. I think defensively he'll be a lot better because he's more physical than he's ever been able to play. He was not a physical guy, so defensively his presence was pretty much get some rebounds, block some shots because he's taller.

But now he's fighting for traffic rebounds, he's sliding his feet really well, keeping guys in front of him, fighting through screens because he's going to be guarding guys that are going to be coming off -- if you're playing the 3 spot in our league you're playing a guy who's a killer. I don't care who we play. That guy is a killer. So he's going to get screened and they're going to run stuff for that guy, so you can't fall asleep, you've got to get back and guard. But he's a talented offensive player.

**Q. In terms of recruiting, it looks like you're going to sign probably one guy. Has COVID really held that back? Has that limited the number of players maybe that teams have signed?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think it has limited to a certain degree because we didn't see a lot of guys that we would have seen. We may have seen somebody we didn't know about, like think about last year, we ended up signing Tony Perkins. We didn't really see him until the summer. Fortunately we got to see the guy who committed to us well over a year ago, so we already knew him.

We were talking to kids on the phone that we hadn't seen and I would try to make decisions, do we want him, do we offer. I've never seen him play live and I've never met them. I've talked to them on the phone and watched them on film, so you can do it that way, but I think there's a greater risk for mistakes doing it that way.

So with the roster we have returning, we feel good about where we are, and we can shift a little more to the '22 class.

**Q. How has Bohannon come back from hip surgery?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: He's fine. He looks great.

**Q. And Fredrick is doing okay?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yep, both those guys look great.

**Q. Going back to some of the recruiting stuff, have you kind of had to gauge what guys may and may not take advantage of the extra year when you're thinking**

**about offering scholarships because it kind of creates a weird backlog of the number?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, we're just kind of looking at it like how many scholarships do we have in this class, and that's kind of the way we're looking at it. And if somebody leaves -- let's say Luka goes. Then we have another one in the spring, then we might evaluate in the spring; okay, how did our season go, who played well, what do we need. There will be a number of players available in the spring that we could go after.

**Q. Jordan comes back, obviously, so you may feel you lose a little bit of his role, but what role do you see him playing?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: His role will be very similar to what it was last year. We'll see what the minutes look like. May not get as many with J-Bo in there, but those two guys play well together. They kind of go at each other in practice every day, which has been really good for both of them. But like I said, I mix the lineups up so he plays with Joe, he plays with Aaron, he plays with Connor, and he's taken a step as you would have expected him to. He's playing really well, playing much better. As good as he was, I think fewer mistakes -- he had a couple turnover games last year. He's not turning the ball over the same. He's scoring the ball. Shooting the ball pretty good. So we're really pleased with Joe.

**Q. Opposing defenses, with all the attention focused on Luka, in a way can Jordan be sliding under the radar a little bit this year?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: That's a possibility, but everybody knows him. He could end up being the leading 3-point shooter in the history of the Big Ten, so he's going to get attention, but it's like you said, if you're playing us, are you doubling Luka? Where are you doubling him from? Who are you doubling him off of? Well, you know, we've got a lot of shooters around him no matter what lineup I put on the floor, if it's J-Bo and CJ and Wieskamp, Connor shot it really well last year, you kind of pick your poison there, so he may get some looks that he normally would have gotten, maybe he didn't get two years ago.

**Q. The new landscape in recruiting has given you more freedom of movement with the one-time transfer rule. How is that going to affect your philosophy in the future of recruiting?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think you'll see more schools, more programs save one for the spring at least. We kind of tried to finish it up in the fall and kind of know what your roster is going to look like, you might save one. But I don't know

that I would say, okay, that's my rule of thumb. I'm going to do that no matter what. If I had somebody that wanted to come, I'd take them early and I wouldn't worry about what I might be able to get in the spring.

It's going to be a different world, without question.

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