

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

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Fran McCaffery

Men's Basketball Press Conference



Q. At what point in Connor's life, basketball life, did you recognize him to be a team-first guy in how he performed on the court? Was it there all along? Did he gradually grow into that role or at what point did you see him maybe become that type of person that he is today?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: I think he kind of always had it in him. He would always come to practice when he was in kindergarten, first grade, second grade, third grade. He would watch film with me on weekends with the staff. He would come to all the film sessions. So there was something sort of engrained upon him.

For his middle school team, for his AAU teams, as an elementary school-aged athlete, he scored a lot more. But even then, he moved it and made really good passes. But, particularly when went to play at West High for Coach Bergman, when he got there as a freshman, they were loaded up with talent and he was the perfect fit for what they were trying to do. Get the ball to Wyatt, who was going to lead the state in scoring and they had so many other talented players, David DiLeo, Wally, Devontae Lane, so many good players. So he ran the offense for that team and engineered a state championship.

So he's kind of always been that guy. And then his senior year they moved him around a little bit more. He played a little bit more on the wing and he guarded post guys, which I think gave me the confidence to do that last year when we started having injury situations that required us to kind of move him around. It's great to have that kind of versatility from a guy who knows all the spots and understands how to win and understands that we have the best player in college basketball, let's get him the ball. And we have got great shooters, great players.

And he's also been really good with our young guys. Obviously, with his brother, he's been like that since they were little. But with Keegan, with Tony, Ahron, Joe Toussaint, he does a terrific job as a leader.

Q. I think I remember seeing Connor at a career day

when he was probably in 8th grade at, or 8th or 9th grade, and the thing he said he wanted to be was a coach. Do you think that's in his -- that seems to be in his makeup. Do you see that as his future?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: I think he would be a really good one. I think he has prepared himself. As a finance major, he's actually a double major now, finance and political science, he had a 3.94 last semester, he was on the Dean's list. So he has the opportunity to enter the business world, I think, in a good place, perhaps to go to law school. That's something he's talked about wanting to do. I think it would be hard for him to distance himself from the game. But again, he could have a very successful career in another field as well. So we'll see. Maybe he would stay around as a graduate assistant, kind of like Nicholas is doing now, we have had other guys, Kyle Denning did that, and kind of get a feel for it, maybe get his MBA. But it's nice to have options and I believe he would make a great coach. But to be truthful, I'm not sure his mother would encourage that career path (laughter).

Q. This is statistically your best 3-point shooting team at Iowa (sample size is growing). How important is that to the way you run your offense when you have a 3-point shooting team like this?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: I think the more 3-point weapons your team has, the harder you're going to be to guard, provided the group of individuals are unselfish and team-oriented. When you have the best low post player in a college basketball, you want to throw it inside, you want to get him the ball. But he's equally effective at the 3-point line, which creates opportunities for others to flash into the low post and post up or drive the ball into a space that wouldn't be there if Luka was always there.

So the other thing is, when you have players coming over the bench who can also make threes, a lot of times you might have a couple 3-point shooters in your starting lineup, but you don't have 3-point shooters coming off the bench which changes everything when you go to your bench. But Patrick and Keegan and Jack can all hit threes. Joe has been a guy who can make some threes. He's not going to shoot as many, but he's capable. And so are Ahron, Tony and Chris.

I think moving forward, most coaches are going to try to



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recruit as many 3-point shooters as possible. When you think about the return on investment per possession, it makes a lot of sense. If you're going to the analytics side of things, shooting threes, provided they're open shots and you've moved it and you've made the defense work and you don't constantly settle, because if you do that you're never going to be in the bonus, so there's got to be a mixture there. But having multiple weapons and not having the other team be able to focus on one or two guys is really helpful.

Q. This is the first game that we know of that may be affected by the COVID situation. How much information are you getting about what's going on on other teams and do you feel like you're getting enough information?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: We don't get a lot of information about other teams, unless we're getting ready to play them. So we were informed that there might be one or two guys out. If there are, I hope they're doing well and getting better.

But as it relates to, say, Penn State and Nebraska, I suspect Brad Floy, our trainer, may know more, but we're not playing those guys for awhile, so they're on pause and probably expect them to be back off pause when we get ready to play them.

Q. Regarding Michigan State, what do you think is the key to a program having sustained excellence like they have had over decades now?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: Well, I think there's a variety of things. Coach Izzo is a Hall of Fame coach. That is a good place to start. But they've recruited well. They have had really good players. I think they play a style that is I think really good for the personnel that they have. They have always played fast and they have always defended. And they compete hard.

So you put a great coach and really good players and a good system and a team that competes and understands how to play, they're going to win a lot of games.

Q. Whenever we talk to you guys about defense, you always talk about, the team has to be so well connected on the defensive end of the floor. What's the formula for having a well-connected defense?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: Well, first of all, you have to be committed to playing it, everybody that's out there. So if you have one guy who is sort of relaxing on defense to save his energy for offense, it won't work. We're a team that changes defenses, so that's critical. So what are we

in? And let's make sure we're making the appropriate slides, if we're in zone, if we're in man, are we switching, are we not switching. Are they running ball screen continuity, are they running set plays, or are they just dribble, draw, and kick.

So it's a combination of factors that really is pretty simple. Is everybody down in a stance, where they're supposed to be, competing defensively until we get the ball back?

Q. You guys are leading the country in assists per game and assists to turnover ratio. As a Coach, how important is that to the success of a team and how proud are you of your team to be No. 1 in the country in that category?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: Very proud. But I think if you were to ask all of our guys, they would sort of say, we expect that of ourselves. It helps when you're throwing the ball to Luka, but we have other guys making shots too, and he's passing the ball really well. He's handled the double-team. He's finding guys. And we don't have a selfish group taking contested shots. We're taking open shots as a result of the fact that we move it and we have individuals who can find guys and are willing passers.

So I think any coach would want to have those two stats that you're referring to and it typically leads to way more wins than losses.

Q. Along those lines, maybe if there's one component, one intangible that your team seems to possess now that very few teams do is just patience in the passing, and that's being able to just wait that fraction of a second for things to open or to look. Is that specific to experience? Unselfishness? Everything? How do you quantify that as being kind of a positive quality in that part of your game?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: I think it's a good point because especially when you have a guy like Luka on your team, teams are going to be working hard to stop him. So if you are impatient and you move it before you give him a chance or before you give him a look, same thing with our shooters. You have to let it develop. You have to let it happen. You have to be properly spaced. You might have to pivot. You might have to take a dribble or two to get a better angle. And I think that does come with one of the things that you mentioned was experience. You say we have a veteran club. Well, veteran clubs don't panic. You're going to see tremendous heat from Michigan State. They're going to be up in your space. And a lot of times that forces you to move it maybe sooner than you want to. But you got to wait and you got to get in a triple threat or it's a one-dribble kick or you catch it and move it right away

or you go in and out, skip it to the other side, back in, back out.

And it's a collective understanding of being patient and understanding what plays were called. Are we in motion? Are we in sets? Are we in a continuity offense? And consistently move the ball with a purpose while people are cutting and screening and posting with a purpose.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Jordan now that you have had him for five years. Obviously, he's always carried himself with a great deal of confidence, but where have you seen him improve the most in his time here, just in terms of his skill development?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: He, to me, he's kind of always been the same way. He's incredibly confident. He plays the game with a keen understanding of what's necessary. He plays the game with a swag that you need. He's always been a great shooter. He gets our break and what we're trying to run and he gets time and score situations.

So I don't know that there's been a huge change in him. He's kind of always been -- he was that way in high school. He's that way here. He was that way when he was a young player. You think back, and I mentioned it when we played Maryland, the performance he had at Maryland when they were honoring their national championship team and it was a packed house, it was as loud as any building I've ever been in, and he drops eight threes and loads Tyler Cook up on his way to 27, and he had only played about 14 or 15 college games. That's what he does. So I haven't seen a big difference. And I think what makes him special is that he's always been consistent that way.

Q. When you were at Rutgers, and Connor was injured early, and it probably killed him to admit that he probably couldn't play, can you see how difficult it was for him? And then, conversely, at the very last seconds when he came back in, how did he, kind of what did he tell you that he could do that enabled him to come in for you?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: Well, I think the great thing about that day, okay, once we knew he wasn't going to get back in there, all right, who is going to step up? Keegan stepped up in a big way, Patrick, Tony and Ahron, and that was special. But you know, and you guys have been in the buildings. There's nobody there. So there's a real sense of team and camaraderie and support of one another.

So Connor was able to contribute by grabbing guys during timeouts, talking to them during timeouts, encouraging them, and then when the last play happened, I said this before, it wasn't even a thought of mine that I was going to

put him in because when a trainer tells you he can't go, he can't go. But the coaches and the players, Coach, just put Connor in. He doesn't have to move. He can inbound the ball. And they're going to foul right away, we can take him out, which is what we did. And I asked him, can you do it? And he said, yeah, I got it. And the guys worked hard to get open. We got the ball in. We got the foul, and now they have to go the length of the floor to beat us.

Q. As far as self-awareness goes, he seems to be off the charts in that, where it's, he doesn't hunt for shots. He looks for shots for everybody else. And if he's the best one on the floor, that's great. If there's anybody else is, that's even better. How different is that to have somebody so self-aware on the floor, of his strengths, maybe his weakness, but then everybody else's strengths and weaknesses on probably both teams?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: It's absolutely critical that you have players that understand that concept that you're referring to. What are my strengths and weaknesses and how can I help my teammates be the best that they can be? And that comes with being patient, understanding the offense inside and out, and understanding how to play more than one position, understanding time and score, home versus road, the scouting report, the adjustments we make throughout the course of the game, and truly understanding, what are we trying to accomplish when we come out of a timeout? What are we trying to accomplish coming down the stretch? And the impact that that has on settling everybody else down is crucial to a team's success over the course of 40 minutes.

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