

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

Tuesday, February 8, 2022

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

Coach Billy Taylor

Men's Basketball Press Conference



Q. Is this it for your reign (laughter)?

COACH TAYLOR: Yes, we expect Fran to be back tomorrow. He's been preparing with Coach Dillard, watching film and we met as a staff two different times... making sure we're organized and ready to go. We expect coach to be full-go tomorrow and then get on the plane and head to Maryland.

Q. Doing a lot of better since?

COACH TAYLOR: Yes.

Q. Will Connor McCaffery be ready to go for the game?

COACH TAYLOR: We hope so. We had yesterday off. I know he was getting treatment and probably doing work on his own. We'll see how he is. We have practice coming up soon.

It's truly day-by-day, seeing how he feels each progressing day. Hopefully he's feeling better today. We'll see if he can get on the court do some activities. But we're certainly hoping to get him back sooner rather than later.

Q. What would it mean to have him back?

COACH TAYLOR: Connor brings a lot to the table for us. It's not always the scoring. But it's so much more that he does. And it's kind of a unique situation, obviously, for Fran. It's his son, so talking about his son and what he does.

But from our standpoint from a coaching perspective, Connor's toughness, his intelligence and understanding of the game, defensive assignments, rotations -- it's kind of that veteran leadership that you have.

And from an offensive standpoint, he facilitates ball movement for us. Whether it's getting the ball moving side to side, or getting into the post, or the timing of when to screen, when to cut, when to deliver to ball, it's all really

critical. To have that veteran presence back, especially on a road game in kind of a hostile environment, would be important for us.

Q. Joe Toussaint gave you six minutes and he played hard gave you a spark on defense. Second half he didn't play, but he seemed to have all the right body language. How important is that, because this obviously can't be easy for him?

COACH TAYLOR: No, it's huge to have Joe Toussaint have that great attitude, great energy cheering on his teammates. It is important. And really speaks to the culture of on your program.

And the last time we played Maryland, Joe Toussaint had nine points, nine assists -- really impactful in that game and was guarding Fatts, a tough assignment. He did a good job for us.

To have Joe that can still be a positive contributor for us, because he's going to have moments where he's going to play extremely well for us. Just like Ahron Ulis stepped up, we'll need different guys to step up. It's a unique roster, unique team that we have a lot of different guys that can play and can impact the game for us.

Q. Patrick had good scoring and rebounding games the last two games. Is he getting better as a player and if so how?

COACH TAYLOR: What we're seeing with Patrick is the game is slowing down for him. As you get more experience, you get more comfortable out there, you start to go through the league for a second time and you're starting to see some different coverages and you're starting to understand the games.

I think for him things are coming together. And again his trajectory is continuing to go forward and increase. But it's great to see him playing the way that he's playing, he's playing with an elite level of confidence. He's shooting the ball well from 3. He's getting to the basket.

He was playing really well over the summer, and then had a couple ankle injuries early in the fall. It was a long process to get him back and get him to 100 percent. But now he's feeling good physically, mentally and the sky's



the limit great to see him starting to move towards his potential.

Q. Fran said on his radio show last night talked about the lineup change to Jordan and just why he did that or why you guys did that. What did you see as maybe what the team needs out of the gate to have him in there at the point?

COACH TAYLOR: A lot of it is getting Jordan going again too. I think it goes both ways. And we lost a couple in a row. You never want to feel like it's one guy's fault, because Joe Toussaint plays hard and contributes in so many ways for us.

But we thought maybe this change could help us offensively. We've been struggling a little bit with some of our offensive efficiency. So, getting Jordan back at the point pushing the basketball, maybe that will create some more space for Keegan to get opportunities in and around the paint.

And we're fortunate that Jordan made a couple of 3s early which was good. So the defense really had to be picked up on him from Minnesota's standpoint. It gave more room for the other guys for Patrick or Keegan to take advantage of that space.

Q. Does he articulate to you that he's more comfortable in that position or anything like that?

COACH TAYLOR: Jordan has always been a team guy. Even as we saw in the Minnesota game, especially the last 15 minutes, he was on the ball quite a bit with Ahron Ulis. So I think whether it's Jordan, Ahron, Joe Toussaint, Tony Perkins, those four guards have the ability to play on or off the ball and play with different combinations of people.

Whether it is Ahron Ulis at the point and Bohannon at the 2, Bohannon at the 1 and Ulis is at the 2, or Tony at the 2, or Joe T. is in with Ulis and whoever is on the ball. That kind of flexibility makes our offense a little more dynamic. We're not relying on one guy to kind of be the primary ball handler/decision-maker.

Q. With the way the team is constructed, it really seems like when your transition offense is going, your half court is better. But when the transition isn't going, the half court struggles. Is that a fair assessment? If so, how do you try to get that tempo offense going without trying to force it?

COACH TAYLOR: I think the hard part always is your transition game is based on your defense. So being able to get defensive stops and then you can run in transition.

Obviously we've been a team that's stolen the ball quite a bit this year. So we're a big steals team. So, whether it's in our three-quarter-court pressure, some of our trapping, run-and-jump trapping or even at half court, forcing turnovers, then we can get out in transition and have some number break situations.

So for us it's about getting stops. We obviously run on makes and misses. Everybody knows we'll push the ball on makes as well. It takes something out of you every time you take the ball out of the net and try to push it against a stacked defense or playing against a stacked defense at the half court level. If we can get stops get out in transition, it makes things a lot easier for us.

Q. When you broke down Sunday's tape what were you doing well defensively? Was it just the intensity or was it some other things?

COACH TAYLOR: I think the big change the last 15 minutes was the ball pressure at the point of attack. Whether it was Ahron Ulis or Bohannon, even when Keegan was up pressuring the ball. I think that kind of individual defense up top really sparked everybody else. It allowed some of our guys to kind of be up in the passing lanes.

We pushed their offense further from the basket. So then we were able to get the couple two or three shot clock violations we got in the second half. And everybody behind because we weren't in scramble situation. We weren't getting broken down off the dribble where they're getting in the paint making plays and now we're in scramble situations.

I think that aggressiveness at the point of attack really helped us. And guys were able to feed off that energy and then everybody else kind of got into it as well.

Q. Is it different with Maryland this time around that you've seen? How they've developed as a team?

COACH TAYLOR: They're obviously a really dangerous team, because they've had some incredible games where there was an Illinois game or even the home game against Michigan State, they lost, but again it was super competitive.

Their game against Rutgers, the home game, where they kind of felt like they had control of that game, lost, and then went to Rutgers and played unbelievable and won there at the RAC.

So just an interesting team because when you have the dynamic scorers they have and experienced guys,

obviously Ayala can score it as good as anybody in our league.

Fatts, his speed is just a game-changer because you just don't see that elite level speed very often. So it's just hard to game plan for that kind of athleticism and speed.

And Donta Scott obviously can score the ball, makes jumpers, posts up. And Wahab is just a handful on the block, and he hurt us the first time around as well, really efficient.

When you have that kind of dynamic scoring and play making, it's a matter of, okay, how do we get stops, how do we get multiple stops, consecutive stops so that, again, we can get out in transition not go against their stacked defense?

Q. Do you anticipate Perkins starting again on Thursday? Have you talked about that?

COACH TAYLOR: We haven't talked about it yet. We were off yesterday. We'll go in and have practice these next two days and see how things progress.

But again, we have the mentality, all hands on deck. Everybody be ready to go. So when your name is called, step up and perform. And if guys continue to have a good attitude whatever their role is for that particular game, that will go a long way for us.

Q. Where do things stand with Ulis and Toussaint -- looked like Ulis moved past him in our eyes. Was that just a one-game thing in your eyes?

COACH TAYLOR: First time around, you watch that film against Maryland, and Joe Toussaint played fantastic. We're ready to use whoever in whatever roles we need to. And Joe will be ready, as I'm sure Tony will be as well. We'll have a good practice today, so we'll get a good gauge on where guys are.

Q. Tough to win on the road in this league. What are some of the keys that you guys have learned this year when you've been close, games right there but can't finish, I guess?

COACH TAYLOR: To have the last couple of road games where Rutgers goes right down to the wire, obviously a one-possession game and goes down to free throws at the end.

Penn State, one possession. If we get one stop there in overtime, but go to double overtime.

So we've been really competitive on the road. But again, it really comes down to, can you defend and rebound on the road.

And our defense was really good at Rutgers. We didn't always rebound the ball the best against them. Against Penn State, they outrebounded us, and that wasn't a good thing for us.

So our ability to, again, be able to rebound the ball and play in transition, play the way we like to play and try to impose some of our will on the game.

Q. Seemed like you didn't sub much at all in the second half. Was that a feel thing, or was that kind of your plan going into the game?

COACH TAYLOR: We used a lot of guys in the first half. We got a lot of guys involved. Kind of as we went to our bench early in the second half, that unit just got into a really good flow.

And I've learned over the years, if the unit that has it going, you don't mess with that.

We got a couple of quick subs in there so the guys didn't have to go the entire long haul. Payton Sandfort came back in, gave us some minutes in the second half.

We tightened the rotation just because they had a really good thing going, and we wanted to stay with it. The tempo was different in that game, too, because Minnesota had so many long possessions. So obviously the game was over in an hour 45 minutes. So it was fast-paced game, not many fouls. Long possessions.

It kind of shortened the game a little bit. Felt a little bit different than your normal game, if there's a bunch of possessions and stoppages where guys were able to keep the flow going. And we certainly didn't want to mess up that flow they had.

Q. Seems like you were intentional about Kris and Keegan or Keegan and Filip, trying to work those three guys so that they're sharing the minutes --

COACH TAYLOR: Yes, I got Keegan the whole 45 seconds of rest. I was trying to get him a couple times before the media timeout to give him an extended break. But then there would be a whistle right away, and it's, all right, let's get you back in there.

Those guys gave us a lot. And Filip and Kris, I thought, played significantly better in the second half. Kris obviously made a big 3 for us in the second half during that

run. Filip had a couple of baskets early, jump shot in the paint.

Defensively I thought both those guys were much tougher defensively in the second half, trying to guard on the interior, being physical and rebounding the basketball.

We're trying as much as possible keep fresh bodies, relatively speaking, but with the tempo of the game and long possessions the flow we had, we wanted to stay with it.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports