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An Interview With:

COACH McCAFFERY

Q. Is everybody healthy going into this week?

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah.

Q. How is Michigan State different now that they kind of have all the pieces back in place?

COACH McCAFFERY: I think when you get those guys back initially, there's a little bit of an adjustment period and I think you've seen that with them. But ultimately they are better. You're talking about, you know, a couple of the premiere players in our league. So they are going to impact the game in a very positive way.

I mean, Payne is really starting to look like himself. Dawson looks healthy. But you've just got to get back playing. And I think we'll see a different Appling, because he played through his injury and it wasn't easy for him. He battled through it, was trying to help his team, so you've got to respect that.

And I think, what Tom is trying to do is get that group, ready to go for obviously the last two games, but then the Big Ten Tournament and NCAA Tournament.

Q. You've had three really tough losses to Michigan State over the last two years, one possession games where they have ultimately prevailed. What is it about Michigan State that you guys just can't get past?

COACH McCAFFERY: They are just good. I don't think there's anything specific that you're going to say that they have done or we haven't

done. You've just got to give them credit. They beat us in those games. They are a good team.

Q. What was Illinois able to do?

COACH McCAFFERY: A couple things. No. 1, they got off to a good start. I think that was critical; their offensive patience was critical. They shared the ball. They made big shots. They got some transition opportunities. They defended and they rebounded. They didn't make a ton of mistakes.

Q. So the senior class is 0-5 in the state of Michigan in their career. Do you sense any kind of motivation from them to get one in that state?

COACH McCAFFERY: We are motivated to beat Michigan State. They don't think about what happened when they were freshmen or anything like that.

Q. A lot of other teams have been talking about they are tired or appeared to be mentally exhausted this time of year, and you look at the calendar of the season, starting practice now in September, there's the summer workouts. Do you feel like or do you think it's possible that across the board, it's maybe just too much and maybe it needs to be cut back, whether it's practices or games?

COACH McCAFFERY: I don't think it needs to be cut back.

I understand your point. I think it's a valid point. I think it was a concern from the beginning when we started doing what we're doing now with regard to the schedule.

But there are a lot of reasons why we wanted more access in the summertime. There's a lot of thought that went into that.

So the fact that we have more access, it makes it incumbent upon us not to go crazy and be sensible with how much time we practice. Every

five-minute block in practice this time of year, I'm putting a lot of thought: Do we really need it; do we go live; do we go walk-through; do we have first team, second team; do we have one team versus a scout team, and all of those things. I'm sure everybody else is doing the same thing.

Q. Given the time demands they have and the classroom and the travel, is there any way that across the board it could be curtailed a little bit, or is it just constant --

COACH McCAFFERY: No, I don't think it can be. TV is going to drive a lot of that. We want to be on television. It's important to us. Not more so than a student athlete's academic progress. We have to stay on top of that.

We have academic support and things of that nature. We require them -- even though we got home at two o'clock in the morning the other night, some guys have got to be at class Friday morning. You've got to go. You know, we missed class on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday of that week.

So you're not going to sleep in because we got in at two o'clock. So you just have to be intelligent with regard to how you manage your time as a student athlete. We have to be intelligent with how hard we push them and how much time we require of them.

There's not as many things that you have to go over now, because you've been going over it since -- for us, since August.

No, I don't think it's going to change. I don't think it should change. I just think that the coaches that sensibly manage that are the ones that have a team that's fresher at this time of year.

Q. You talked a little about backing off; in what ways have you backed off a little bit?

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, we have cut practice back significantly in terms of overall time. So that's less they are here and that's more time that they can be studying and it's more time that they can be resting and it's more time they can be with a trainer if they are banged up.

At this point, a lot of times we are playing teams for the second time. Obviously that wasn't the case on Sunday. So it's not like you have to really go over personnel as much.

But you know, the Minnesota team we played the other night was different than the Minnesota team we played before. Same thing with Michigan State now.

So depending upon the amount of time, thinking about Wisconsin, how long ago we played them, and then we played them last Saturday. So you might take a little more time in a situation like that. But they know the players. They know how to play. They know how to follow a game plan. And you get them locked in, but you don't overwhelm them with information and more importantly, time.

So we treat them, as upperclassmen. At this point in the season, whether you're a freshman, a sophomore, a junior or a senior, you're an experienced guy at this point. We have to be able to hit you with what you need to know. You need to absorb it and then go execute it.

Q. The fatigue after the game, is it as much mental as physical?

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, you look at early in the year, there were a number of times where those two guys in particular, Dev and Aaron White, wanted to go back in the game. And I said, "You're done, you're done for the rest of the game. We're up 18, we're up 22, and, you know, we need you in March."

They were good with that and they understood it. And so I used my bench a lot more because sometimes you get to this time of year and you squeeze it a little bit more. We've done that.

Q. The lineup -- is it getting closer to eight or nine or ten --

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, it's going to be a function of who's healthy and who's playing well, maybe that day, or that week. You know, obviously Clemmons played well against Minnesota. We gave him a shot and he played well. Basabe wasn't able to go; so that's more opportunity for Olaseni, Zach and Jarrod Uthoff; and sometimes that means also that Aaron White plays more in the post, things of that nature. So you just adjust.

Q. The matchup you have at shooting guard, Harris -- who can not only score and do a lot of things offensively, but they are two of the better defenders in the league at their position?

COACH McCAFFERY: Oh, yeah, there's no question they are going to go at it and that's what you expect from two great players. It happened the last time we played. I think they

have mutual respect for one another. But there's going to be so many more other things to be thinking about, and that's one interesting matchup I guess from a fan's perspective.

But they have so many different weapons and they are so physically big and strong. You've got to be able to withstand the defensive intensity and the rebounding situation is going to be critical.

Q. Was Melsahn still feeling effects of his illness when you played Purdue Sunday?

COACH McCAFFERY: No, he's fine. Yeah, he seemed to be over it.

I thought against Indiana he played well. What did he have, 16, against Indiana on the road. A pretty nice performance for a guy who had been out for a week. I don't know if there's anything that he specifically did or didn't do in that game.

As I've said before, sometimes games take on a life of their own, and the lineup that we had on the floor was Olaseni, White, Marble, Oglesby, Gesell, and then Woodbury and McCabe. That was the only adjustment we made. We kind of road that group to the end.

Sometimes I put Melsahn in; sometimes I put Uthoff back in; sometimes I won't. I kind of went with that lineup down the stretch and that happens. It's happened a lot. I think back to Atlantis, it was McCabe, he was the guy. Oglesby wasn't even healthy at the time. Sometimes it will be Clemmons. There's been times -- at Ohio State where it was Uthoff; he was the guy we rode him right down to the end. That's the kind of team we had.

Q. Do you feel like Zach is still a little bit pressing?

COACH McCAFFERY: I don't think so. I think there was a stretch there where he was shooting too many threes and feeling pressured to shoot and make threes for our team. And so I think he's played a much more complete game of late.

He has been driving the ball a little bit more and sometimes it's good and sometimes it has not been as good. But for the most part, I think he picks his spots. I still have great confidence in him and expect him to finish strong.

Q. You mentioned the other day that you had to recruit Devyn a couple times before he came here. Can you go through that scenario, how it played out?

COACH McCAFFERY: When you first take over, you reach out to all of the players that you

have and all of the players that have been recruited by the previous staff. A lot of times, you get a sense pretty quickly, especially with the guys that had signed, are they coming or not. It was evident early that Cody Lawson and Ben Brust weren't going to come. It was going to be a struggle and it wasn't going to happen.

We gave them their releases, and they found other places. It was obvious that Zach was going to come, so he came.

Dev wasn't sure. Went up there, he re-committed to us, and then started wavering again. Typically what happens in those situations, there's people involved making that happen. And whereas you might think I would be upset about that, you know, that wasn't the case at all.

I'm very respectful of the importance of that decision in his life, and I wanted to make sure he gets it right. He had just met me and Coach Francis, he was getting comfortable with the two of us, and the recruiting process typically goes a lot longer, and he didn't have that luxury at that time.

So he was looking at other options, probably his second and third choice the first time he committed to us. And I'm sure that they were working him, those folks.

In the recruiting process today, there are a lot of people involved. You could argue that there's too many people involved. But in his case, it was a relatively small sphere of influence, his mom, his dad, and his AAU coach were very involved. Fortunately his AAU coach was a stand-up guy. I think AAU coaches often get labeled in a negative way; stand-up guy. Was honest from the beginning.

And Dev was open-minded. So we had to go back up there and make sure that he knew and understood just how important we thought he was, what we were going to try to accomplish what our vision, what my vision was for him; and I think he was intrigued by a number of things. He knew, No. 1, our style of play was going to be perfectly suited for him. He knew he was going to have an opportunity to play right away, and those two things were important for him.

He knew the institution. He already loved the University of Iowa, that's why he signed in the beginning. He had grown up following the program. I think he was excited about, you know, his father being the all-time leading scorer and coming up and doing some amazing things at the same place, which he obviously has done.

And so what I ended up doing after, so we went up the first time, thought it was done, wasn't done. We go back up, he recommits to us the second time, and then from that day until the day he showed up here for summer school, I spoke to him every day just to reemphasize all the things that we talked about and to continue to develop the kind of relationship that we would have had if I started recruiting 18 months earlier.

Q. When you look at the senior class, have those three guys exceeded the expectations that you had for them in the beginning, or have they been about where you expected when you first met them and got to know them?

COACH McCAFFERY: When I watched Dev play, and again, I was watching on film, I said he's got a chance to be really special.

And then, if you remember his freshman year, it's kind of unique, because he ended up playing a lot more point guard than we thought. So he ended up in the starting lineup and he played point and three, and Matt was the two. Of course when Matt left, he was the two, but he played one and three, also. But he was a worker and he got stronger and he was, as we talked about before, very young player.

So the guys that are really young, they tend to develop into players that maybe some people didn't see coming, because you have 20-year-old high school seniors now and you have 17-year-old high school seniors now because of all the prep school stuff and all of the guys getting held back, reclassifying and things of that nature. He didn't do that.

He's gotten stronger and he's incredibly cerebral. That's something that you never really know until you get your hands on a guy; does he really know how to play; does he really understand how he fits with other people on the floor; does he really know how to prepare.

And then that's one of the thing when I talk to NBA people about him that I dwell on, because he has all of those qualities, and to me that's why he's great. Basabe, there's no doubt in my mind, he was going to be a thousand-point scorer and get us a ton of rebounds and be a great player for us, because I knew him, I knew his character.

Zach is different story. I heard great things about him when I met him. I flew up and met his family. They are tremendous people and liked them right off the bat. I wasn't sure what he would be until, after a couple weeks of watching him, I

said, he can put on the deck; he can make shots; he's tough; he's smart; and he's physical and he's not afraid.

Those three guys, you put them in difficult environments, home, road, doesn't matter, they are going to perform for you. And I think that's the thing that makes them special. You look at their numbers and they were really good but their character and their work ethic and commitment to one another has been really special.

Q. What do those three guys mean to you personally, they came here with you, and have kind of stayed the course?

COACH McCAFFERY: I think any time a coach takes over, and a player recommits to you and gives you a chance, you're always going to have an incredible bond, for the rest of our lives.

Melsahn, he came here to play for me, plain and simple. That is an unbelievable feeling as a coach. As far as Dev and Zach, it wasn't fashionable to come here then, it just wasn't. They didn't know me. Their careers were in the balance. It was in many ways a leap of faith.

I think realistically at the same time they wanted to play in the Big Ten. They understood all the hard work that they put in in their lives, put themselves in a position to be recruited by the highest level; and how great is that. So for Zach, he was all-in.

Dev needed a little more convincing. But those conversations had depth to them. It made sense to me and I guess that I felt it was important that I could continue to convince him. I was going to use him in the right way, I was going to take care of him, going to look out for him. We're going to hold you accountable but we're going to work with you and we're going to teach and we're going to make sure you're where you need to be academically. We're going to take care of your health and welfare, all of those things, and those things were important to his mom and dad, as well.

I feel like my staff and I honored the commitments we made to all three of those guys to help them get better and put them in a position to be really good, put them in a position to have an unbelievable college experience which they have had, and I think that's what you hope when the whole recruiting process starts.

Every year you bring in a group of guys, whether it's one, two, three, four, you make promises to them and you try to live up to those

promises. And I think we've done that, and they have done everything that I've asked them to do, and I'm thrilled for their success.

Q. Cutting turnovers to five, what points were you making in practice on turnovers? Is it as easy as saying take care of the ball, or what else is involved in that?

COACH McCAFFERY: I think in many ways, you look at our team, and we got out of character there. It's one thing if you're averaging, you know, 12 to 18 turnovers a game and you're trying to get it to five. But when you're typically less than ten and all of a sudden you're at 18, it's a little easier to get them to understand we've gotten away from what we do and who we are.

You've heard me say this a million times, we play fast, we don't play nuts. We're not jamming the ball into places it can't go. We're not driving the ball into packs of people. We're not throwing long passes that aren't there. We want to come down, we want to work the ball, get a shot. We get a shot, we have a chance it's going to go in, we have a chance to get the rebound and we have a chance to get back on defense.

If you're coughing it up against a team with great speed -- Indiana was one of those teams and so was Michigan State; typically those turnovers are around the top of the key area or the elbow, and shorter distance to the other end of the floor. So you can't let that happen.

They understand that. You show it to them. You talk to them about it. It's happened to us. Don't want it to happen again. And they will try to do what we ask them to do.

Q. Uthoff is averaging eight points and five rebounds, is that what you expected from him this year?

COACH McCAFFERY: I'm thrilled with those numbers for him. I think he can double them. I think he's that talented. I think you're seeing him, little by little, be more aggressive. I'd like to see him shoot more threes. I respect the fact that he's a team player. He moves it on and he doesn't play crazy. He's out there under control and trying to do things to help our team win. That's the kind of person he is. I like to see him play with a little more reckless abandon at times.

But we forget -- because everybody in this room has known him for a while. But this is his first year through and his first time through the wars in this league, and I think he's been doing extremely well.