

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

Wednesday, November 9, 2016

Fran McCaffery Men's Basketball



Q. When you evaluated your exhibition, what did you think of your point guard play?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: I was impressed. I thought Christian was really good, and I thought Jordan did a lot of really good things as well. I thought Jordan picked us up when he came in the first time and scored seven quick points. I thought Christian in the second half was spectacular. So I think those two guys give me great confidence moving forward.

Q. You weren't pleased with the consistency of your defense; what have you guys worked on since then?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: I wasn't really pleased with the consistency of anything, to be honest with you. And it's kind of been the trend since June. We look good some days; we look just okay some days. Individually, there's days when guys are absolutely spectacular, and then there's days when they go missing. That's not uncommon for a young team.

That's the challenge. We have to get more consistent with our execution offensively, whether that be our half court offense, our transition game, our ball movement, defensively same thing. Post defense, transition pick-up, communication defensively, all of that kind of stuff. It's okay at times, but you can't win at this level by playing in spurts. Our defense was good in a spurt in each half. I mean, really good.

Well, it's got to be really good all the time. That's a challenge we face every day when we come to work is to get whatever team you're coaching to play that way all the time, and it's often harder, obviously, with younger guys. But we do have depth. We do have length. We do have a bigger, stronger, more physical team than we had last year, even though they're not as experienced. So I'm confident that we'll be able to get it fixed.

Q. Have you seen consistency from the veteran players?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: For the most part, yes. Ahmad Wagner's one of those guys; I thought he was really good. Even though his stat line didn't look like it, I thought he had a really good game. And he's had

really good practices. I thought Uhl -- and this happens a lot with Uhl -- sometimes I'll watch the game and then I'll watch the film. He's always way better when you break the film down than you remember him being in the game, and that's rare.

Usually I'm spot on. I know exactly how well a guy played. But he's one of those guys, he does a lot more things that you don't appreciate. Then you appreciate when you break the film down. That's why he's in the starting lineup. I thought Pete was terrific he was on fire there, but didn't hunt shots and moved the ball and I thought played good defense.

Q. What stands out as you watch the film that you don't necessarily see?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: He runs the floor. His activity level, his ability to make plays off the dribble. He feeds the post, he threw some really nice passes inside to Tyler. He just understands what we want done, and that's what you need from him especially being that he's a junior.

Q. You averaged just over 10 turnovers a game last year. What's a realistic number for a younger team? You had 15 the other night in the exhibition.

FRAN MCCAFFERY: I don't think that number changes based on youth or experience. If you want to be good, you can't turn the ball over. You have to come down and get a shot at it. My teams are always going to have a few turnovers because we're going to attack and we're going to run, but sometimes that helps too because we quick shoot the ball. If you don't make a ton of passes, you're not going to turn it over or get a shot up.

So I think that's in the philosophy. So that number's got to be lower than 15, no question about that.

Q. You talked about debating whether or not to bring Baer off the bench or put him in the starting lineup? Why are you leaning toward the starting lineup at this point?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: He deserves to be in there. He does too many good things at both ends. On the glass, with the ball. He can make threes. He can put it on the deck. He can handle the ball. You're getting intense, half court, man-to-man defense... he's going to be able to handle it, move it. He's got a low-post game, and he's really smart.

He knows where he's supposed to be, where everybody else is supposed to be, and he communicates that information to the younger guys. He's valuable in that area.

Q. In these early games, what is going to serve as tangible improvement for you? What is the marker for you?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: This will be our first game, so I expect us to play well. I think the tangible improvement will be moving forward from there because what's happened so far, we've had practice, we've had exhibition game, scrimmage... this is different. This is, see what these guys do in games and who can perform well when the lights come on. Then from there the tangible improvement area will come into effect in my opinion.

Q. You went about 11 deep the other night?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: Yeah, except we had two guys hurt, and they both would have played. So we'll see how that goes. Getting 13 in would be pretty tough. But I don't know that I've ever had a team, quite honestly, that had a lot of guys that kind of deserved to play. They all do. It's going to be interesting to see how that shakes out. Kriener's a little banged up. I think he'll be ready to go in the game. He'll probably practice tomorrow. Dale Jones' knee swelled up on him a little bit, so we'll see how he does. He's not going to practice today. That may be ongoing throughout the whole season. I hope not, because he really hasn't had any swelling, but he did the last couple days. So we're going to be protective of him; we'll see how that works out when the game comes.

Q. Brady's back?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: Yes. He had a really good practice yesterday.

Q. Have you had those thoughts on if you are going to redshirt anyone this season?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: Had a lot of thoughts and discussion. We haven't decided to do it yet.

Q. Is it possible you wouldn't red shirt anybody?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: It's very possible, yes.

Q. What are your thoughts on Luka?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: Thrilled with Luka. I saw him two years ago now and fell in love with his game. What's interesting is how his game has transformed. I loved his game initially. He was an incredible shooter for a guy that big. He was big, thick and physical, and he has subsequently changed his body. He lost 30-35 pounds. He's quicker, he's more mobile, he's bouncier off the floor, he uses his length.

So he's a rare combination of a guy with a really good low-postgame who can stretch the floor and make threes and who understands how to compete on every possession, and that's a rare combination when you get a guy who is 6'10" and a 7'3" wing span and can stretch the floor and play smash mouth inside. Up and unders and jump hooks, and those kinds of moves, you don't see a lot of that anymore. He's effective.

He's a gamer, on top of which he's got a phenomenal attitude and an incredible work ethic. So you put all that together, you've got something special.

Q. Is that a position you really wanted to target, or is that one more that you really like the player and you're going to make him fit?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: Well, I think obviously after Woodbury graduated last year we really only had one center, and Luka can play power forward or center, it doesn't really matter. That was a position we weren't looking at. But it's still a skillset that you're going to try to put on your basketball team, if you can. And we committed to him right away. We put the offer on the table and really recruited him hard. Others were a little more wait-and-see. And then, of course, at the end of the summer he was playing as well as anybody in the country, and that's why all the scholarships came his way at that time.

I was happy to see him have that experience and earn that kind of respect and recognition. You don't always look for competition when you're trying to get a guy to commit. But I had tremendous respect for how he trained and how he prepared and how he got himself to that point.

Some guys have 39 major offers when they're in ninth grade. It took a little while for him. And to watch a guy earn it like that is impressive. I'm very proud to have him in a Hawkeye uniform.

Q. Does he remind you of anybody you've had here at Iowa, his style?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: He reminds me a little bit of Kevin McHale.

Q. And somebody said Marc Gasol, too.

FRAN MCCAFFERY: Yeah, because he stretches the floor like that. You just don't see that combination inside and out. But he can pass it too. You can run your offense through him either in the high post or the low post.

When you watch him run, he doesn't look like he's running well, except he's always down the floor faster than everybody else because he runs as hard as he

possibly can every time. That's a gift. That's special.

Q. Those are some of the things that Woodbury was able to do, get down the floor and then run the offense through him, even though he may not be scoring, but can move the ball around?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: And he understood what we were trying to do at both ends and could communicate that to everybody else. I think Luka will be the same way. He's verbal. He's really smart, instinctive. He'll command the respect of his teammates that way.

Q. You've been able to hit on a couple of guys, including Tyler and Luka now. Guys that you got involved with early. How important is that in the process for you?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: It's very important, because most players that you recruit are relationship people. You know, the parents, the prospect, it's conformability, and it gives them an opportunity to study your program. They watch your team play on TV, they read up on your team and watch your players. They know who is there, who is leaving, style of play. Ultimately a conformability on their end. That's a big decision, especially when they're getting the kind of attention that they're getting.

So the more that they get to know us, the more willing they are to come and pull the trigger. We'll keep trying to do it that way.

Q. How important is an early signing day? Is it just sort of icing given the relationship you've built with them, or does it save you from having to worry about all those extra offers coming?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: Most kids now are going to sign early, so you're shooting for that, for a signee at this time. It's more difficult when you have to wait through the spring time. But not uncommon at the end of July of the end of their junior year, going into their senior year, that's typically when everything comes to a head so doesn't matter who you recruit or how hard you recruit them, that's a period of time that you have to get through most of the time.

We tried to get him to commit a lot earlier. He visited unofficially a year before, right around this time a year ago, and we were willing to take his commitment right then, and I think he almost did that. But he just wasn't ready.

But everybody goes about that process at a different pace. And then you have to decide how willing are you to take your time? When do you want to say, okay, we kind of need an answer. I think in fairness to him or anybody else, you have to give him an opportunity to really study it, and that's what he did. We got to know his family. He's got a beautiful family; mom and dad, his

sister, wonderful. His grandfather was involved in the process, real family decision. When it all comes together that way, it's what makes recruiting fun.

A lot of coaches will complain about it, but it's those kind of starting from scratch and building a relationship, and then ultimately getting the opportunity to coach somebody I think is going to be great, and that's what makes this business fun.

Q. It's a numbers game. I know it's been discussed before. Most of the time things just work themselves out in this sport. Is that what you're kind of looking at right now? Not worrying about, okay, who may be there at the end of the year? Who may want to leave?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: You don't worry about that. You've always got somebody that tweaks their ankle, knee swells up. Last week we had two guys banged up. Kreiner is a little banged up, Dale's a little banged up, and that's just part of it.

You have to have depth and bodies ready to go. You have to have versatility. That's one thing that helps us too, guys play multiple positions. So far everybody's pretty happy. Inevitably there may be somebody who would like to play more. I was the same person.

It seems like yesterday, it was a long time ago, but I wanted to play more. So you recognize that about everybody you recruit, and you try to help them get to where they want to get to, and at least get them to knowing and understanding what role you've identified for them and where this thing is headed. Sometimes people leave. It's part of it. You anticipate that happening. You don't want it to happen. Right now I'm pleased with what we've got.

Q. Kennesaw State, what do you see from them?

FRAN MCCAFFERY: Kennesaw State has a well-established head coach in Al Skinner. He's been the national "Coach of the Year," Big East "Coach of the Year" twice, a ton of wins, played in the NBA. Went down there two years ago, which I guess this is year two for him, knows what he's doing. They run really good offense. They compete. They're athletic. He's had an opportunity to get a really good recruiting class in there, so I think they're deep. How deep he decides to play, I don't know.

But I think he's got some pieces that he can play. They have an 18-point scorer coming back in Kendrick Ray. He's really good. So I think a very difficult task for us right out of the gate for a team that will be ready to go.