

Big Ten Basketball Media Days

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Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Iowa Hawkeyes

Men's Head Coach

Fran McCaffery



THE MODERATOR: Next to the stage from the University of Iowa is Head Coach Fran McCaffrey. Coach McCaffrey is entering his 14th season in Iowa City after leading the Hawkeyes to their seventh NCAA tournament appearance in the last nine years.

Coach, we'll begin with your opening statement.

FRAN McCAFFERY: Good morning, everybody. Obviously this is an exciting time of year for all of us. I think in our case it's going to be interesting to see how we develop with what is essentially a new team in a lot of ways.

When you look at last year and you look at Connor, Chris, and Phillip, our starting frontline, they played 3,000 minutes. That's a lot of minutes. They were awesome. They were also our leaders.

So as we move to this year with four freshmen and two transfers and others that have to step up and fill maybe a different role starting at the leadership position. We had a little bit of a glimpse of what we can become because this was a year where we were able to go overseas. Went overseas in August. Played three games. Had extra practice time, which I think was really important, especially considering, as I pointed out earlier, we have six new players.

We've been together for a while. We're making great progress. I've been very pleased, and I'm very optimistic.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open the floor now for questions.

Q. You talked about filling that leadership void. Who have been some guys that have had more of a voice in the locker room these days?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I think the three guys that are here are the ones we're looking at in particular: Tony Perkins, Payton Sandfort, and Patrick McCaffrey.

Patrick, of course, has been here the longest. But those guys are veteran guys. They've produced well at this level. They're great people, and they do have the respect of the other guys in the locker room. So it will be interesting to watch and see how they perform in that capacity, but I'm very confident that they'll succeed.

Q. How is your evaluation of freshmen different than some of the other coaches? Sometimes your guys are a little bit underrated, but they come in and two years down the road they're really productive for you.

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, obviously we target players that we think will fit our style, our system. We think we do a pretty good job of that. I'm very impressed with my staff in that regard.

I feel really good about the four freshmen we have. They were very heavily recruited in a lot of different ways, but I think, as I pointed out, most importantly fit. They're multiple position players. They can run. We're going to play fast. They're smart, intelligent players.

They also provide what we lost in graduation, so we needed to get bigger. So with obviously Owen Freeman and Ladji Dembele, the two freshmen, but then also the two transfers, Ben Krikke and Even Brauns. We were not a big team last year, so there's a little bit of need, so those guys are going to get to play.

Then, also, with Pryce Sandfort and Brock Harding, they were both Mr. Basketball in their respective states, Illinois and Iowa. Again, they both can score. They both can push it. They can play multiple positions. I think they saw opportunity.

So when we recruited those guys, we recruited them with the expectation that they were going to play. How much will be up to them, but they're going to play. They're going to be a factor throughout the course of this season.

So I think in summation, this group and those guys in particular probably make us the deepest team we've had in quite some time.



Q. What have you seen from Patrick in term of a development standpoint? I know he went to Portland as well this summer. Just what jump do you feel like he can kind of make this season?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, he's a guy that is always -- when you look at his strength and his weight, you know, he didn't play positional high school basketball above 180 pounds. He had that situation when he came in as a freshman. Now he is up to 217. I think physically he is in a different place, which you would expect. He is in year five.

He has proven to be a double-figure scorer in this league. So I think his shooting is something that has been really impressive, but I think his ability to attack the basket and I think he has really improved dramatically defensively. I think that will be reflected on the glass as well.

He's progressing as you would expect a fifth-year senior to do. Especially one that has been such a solid contributor for three years on really good teams.

Q. As you were talking about player development a moment ago, how big in your estimation is that jump from freshman to sophomore year? What sort of things make a player take that leap in your experience?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I think first and most important, how much did they play as a freshman? Did they get a chance to perform well? Did they get a chance to make mistakes, play through their mistakes? That's how you develop confidence, and that's I think how you develop the ability to understand how to make plays, especially in crunch time.

So when you have a young guy that has been through it, he comes back as a sophomore, we consider him a veteran guy. If he doesn't play much as a freshman, then he still is looked at as a freshman, still thinks of himself as a freshman, and kind of acts like a freshman. So the more opportunities you get to succeed and fail as a young player is really going to benefit you in the long run.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you for your time.

FRAN McCAFFERY: Thank you.

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