

# Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 13, 2025

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

**Iowa Hawkeyes**

**Fran McCaffery**

**Payton Sandfort**

**Josh Dix**

Postgame Press Conference

Illinois - 106, Iowa - 94

THE MODERATOR: Iowa has arrived. Coach, we'll ask you to make an opening statement.

FRAN McCAFFERY: I just want to begin by saying how proud I am of these guys, not only how they fought today, but how they fought all year long.

One of the best leaders I've ever been around in Payton Sandfort, and to watch him fight the way he did today and play the way he did just really speaks to his character. He's been banged up all year, as we know.

And Josh, so incredibly versatile, incredible stamina. Never complains about anything. Just keeps fighting.

And the way they stayed together through some adversity this year is something that makes me incredibly proud as a coach. Love these guys. I will miss coaching that guy right there. That's why we do it. Same with him. That's why we do it.

**Q. Payton, this is kind of directed to you. Outstanding career at Iowa. You left it all on the floor today. I saw the tears. What's it been for you to play for Iowa?**

PAYTON SANDFORT: It means a lot, man. I grew up in the state. I didn't really grow up an Iowa fan, but I know how much Iowa athletics mean to the state. I remember as a kid you walk around your neighborhood, and you see everybody's got Iowa flags, and they've got Iowa on the backboards.

It's the greatest honor of my life to be able to represent the black and gold, and that's why I gave it everything I did



every day. The chance to play for Coach and the chance to play with so many great Hawkeyes, it's the honor of my lifetime.

I wish I could repay this place as much as it gave to me, but I gave it everything I had.

**Q. Payton, this is for you. What did it mean to be able to play these two years with your brother and the way your brother had grown as a player this year in particular, and the finale, to get a double-double to beat Nebraska?**

PAYTON SANDFORT: Getting to play with him, it's one of the coolest things in the world. They did the Big Ten Network journey on us, and just seeing, watching that, how they put that together, that was so cool. That only gives a fraction of what it was really like.

We won a high school state championship together, and we thought that might be it. Then he blew up, and I'm trying to tell him to come to Iowa and come to Iowa. When he finally committed, Coach and a bunch of other people were trying to hide it from me because they knew I'd be too excited to practice that day. I found out, and I broke everybody down, and he finally told me.

Getting the chance to watch him grow from just a skinny kid when he got here who just wanted to play with his brother and play for the Hawkeyes and turned into a really, really good Big Ten player, I think it's one of the coolest things you can see as a big brother. Everybody in the room who has a brother knows that, knows how special it is to watch them grow up.

I hope he's twice the player that I am. I'm so proud of that kid. I'm so happy for my family and just knowing that we got the chance to do that is something we're going to remember forever. I'm sure we'll tell our kids someday about who was the better player and all the fun things we did together, but that is for another day.

**Q. Brad Underwood was saying -- this is for both of you -- that the two of you scared him today and he thought the two of you could have beat Illinois by**



**yourselves. To know that and hear that, what's that mean to you guys? To know that you guys have this kind of respect from other teams.**

JOSH DIX: Yeah, it means a lot, but we couldn't do it without everyone else on the team. Ladj and Evan, they freed us up for good looks throughout the game. Brock, Drew, Pryce, they gave us the ball on time and allowed us to score easy.

PAYTON SANDFORT: Top to bottom on this roster, we've got so many guys that have improved over the year. I'm so proud of everybody. Brock hits a big shot, and Drew's been great.

I want to give Josh his flowers. He's fought through a lot this year. This dude is going to be in the NBA someday. Watching him play and watching him grow since he got here, I feel like he's one of my lifelong brothers now. It's been special getting to play with him every day. I'm so proud of him.

**Q. Josh and Payton, 54.9 from the field, 44.8 from deep, about all you could ask for, if I told you you were going to have 94 points, would you feel pretty good about that, and what made you so tough to stop?**

JOSH DIX: If you told us that, we'd have thought we had a good chance to win, but they're a very versatile team. They go about ten deep. They've got guys that can play three or four positions. They make it tough to shoot and tough to guard. Especially the way they move the ball and share the ball, they don't really have selfish players. That's what makes them so hard to guard.

PAYTON SANDFORT: They just spread you out so much. They're just really well-coached. They've got a bunch of pros on that team.

We gave them all they could handle, but they made big time shots, and they got a ton of rebounds. That's going to make them a tough out. If they shoot like that, they can compete with anybody in the country.

**Q. Fran, there's been a lot of speculation about your future, and frankly it's unavoidable. I just wanted to ask do you expect to be the coach of Iowa for next year and beyond?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I do.

**Q. What did you do to get that first technical foul? Clearly you said something --**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Not enough.

**Q. What led up to it?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I want to answer your question, Mike. I like you some days. I think I might have pointed out the foul discrepancy. I think I said it was 5-1. I didn't think that was that egregious.

**Q. Not commenting on the circumstances beyond the technical, but just the effect of your absence, you mentioned the emotion involved with Payton. Was there any wistfulness that you weren't able to be there when he was off the court?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Absolutely. I would want to be there, but I'm always going to advocate for my guys. That's my job, and I'm the only one who can do it. So I did it, and we had some very emotional moments in the locker room.

**Q. Looking back on this season, what would you say to some of your favorite parts of coaching this group have been?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: This is one of my favorite teams I've ever coached, and I mean that sincerely from a number of different perspectives. It starts with when you have some adversity, how do the other players respond? So it's a challenge for the coaching staff, it's a challenge for them. To watch Ladj and Evan in particular and see Riley play the way he did against Washington, but then also, when Drew was out to watch Brock and Pryce really thrive the way they have to get quality minutes out of Carter Kingsbury who came in as a walk-on and earned the scholarship.

It forces players into more responsibility, which as you know, is not easy in this league. We just played one of the most impressive teams that I've watched on film all year long. Brad does a great job every year, but I love this team that he has and how it came together. They had some issues with sickness in that one stretch, but they're coming together now with the pieces they can make a run.

So recognizing the challenge in this league night in and night out and watching our guys continue to fight despite quite a few setbacks. I'll mark earlier in the season when Payton and Josh were injured, and of course Payton's been banged up all year. So he just kept taping it up and playing. One of the toughest dudes I've ever been around.

So very proud of the leadership, very proud of the fight, very proud of the professionalism and focus of this group. It was awesome coming to work every day with these guys.

**Q. You've made a couple references this week to the**

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**crown. Is this a viable option? Can this happen?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Oh, yeah, it's going to happen.

**Q. It might be a little early for this, but following up on what Scott said, in terms of next season, what has to happen for Iowa basketball to do what you and the family want it to do to make a deeper run here and in the NCAA Tournament?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: We could go on a long time answering that question. It's a different era. Used to be, okay, we graduated these three guys. Here's my recruiting class. Kind of look at it and say maybe want to sign a guy late. But we kind of know what our roster is going to look like today for next year. It's not like that anymore.

We've got quite a few seniors. We have a top 20 recruiting class. We feel like those guys can come in and contribute right away, four new guys there. Our sophomore class is really good. So really like that group. Can we add another player or two, three, who knows?

We are in a different world, as you know. That's why you asked me the question. We have guys that might be offered seven-figure deals, which will challenge their thought process. If you were 21 and somebody called you up and said they'd come play for me for a million five, you might think about it. So we're dealing with that, or we will deal with that.

But it's a close-knit group. Our coaching staff has a great relationship with our guys. I fully anticipate those guys coming back and playing for us.

**Q. Fran, what do you need resources-wise to be competitive to compete for a Big Ten Championship? Do you have everything you need infrastructure-wise in order to do so each and every year?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Scott, I think the numbers this year, you'd probably need 6 million, and we were nowhere near that. I think you know that. Those numbers are going to go north of that.

Now, when the settlement is completed and the rev share number is what it is, we'll know what that is, but I think it's safe to say the collectives aren't going away. Those are the numbers that exist already, so we can only imagine those going up.

**Q. Drew Thelwell said you gave him the confidence that he could play professionally. How did you convince him of that?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Truthfully, it's not that hard. That kid can play. He's talented. He's smart. He's tough. He has character. He's got all the qualities you need. I'm really impressed, he was a great college -- not a good college, a great college player, but he wanted to prove himself at this level.

It would have been great to see him if he'd have been healthy all year long because that ankle injury did really set him back for three, four weeks. Boy, he was great today, and he's been great ever since he came back.

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