

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

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Coach Fran McCaffery Men's Basketball Press Conference



Q. When you look at Northwestern, a lot of familiar players on its roster. Is this just a case of a veteran team getting better and believing in itself, the players just all getting better?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, I think you look at last year's team you could see it coming. I certainly could.

Starts with Kopp and Nance. They both started as freshmen. They kept getting better. They have been good players since they got there; now they're juniors.

Gaines was hurt last year; now he's back.

Ryan Young got a lot of playing time as a freshmen. He was pretty good and now he's really good. Now same thing with Beran. You add Audige who was there last year, but was ineligible to play, so he kind of learned the system. Ty Berry is really good player, you add him.

So now you have depth on top of what is probably one of the best -- forget about point guards -- one of the best players in our league in Buie.

Q. You're not surprised that Northwestern is doing as well as they are. Can you speak to how tough this league is and do you worry about maybe that you guys all just kind of beat the heck out of each other for the next couple months more than anything else?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, that's no different than any year. That happens every year, and it's kind of what you expect in this league. If you are in a power conference that's the way it should be.

I think without question ours is the best top to bottom for the reasons you just mentioned. That's the way it's going to be all year long.

Q. What changes have there been in travel this year and what changes lie ahead?

FRAN McCAFFERY: We've only traveled twice, and there

haven't been a lot of differences other than you're on your way to a shoot around you stop and have a COVID test.

We had two COVID tests the day before the Gonzaga game, one here and one there. But the shoot arounds are kind of the same. I think we're going to bus maybe a few extra times. We're taking a smaller group, so we're taking smaller planes sometimes. We've taken bigger planes to accommodate what would now be considered Tier 2 personnel. Only Tier 1 travels, so it's smaller planes.

But in terms of the schedule and so forth, it's not that different.

Q. I heard that Maryland just stayed on the road this week going from Purdue to Wisconsin. Will you have anything like that at all this season?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, if you look at the next two games after this one that would've been a logical time to do it because we're playing at Rutgers at Maryland, but there is a lot of the time in between, so we'll come home between those two games.

If the games were a little closer together we would've stayed on the road.

Q. I saw Nicholas Baer along your bench helping out as something, in some sort of role. Can you speak to his role and what it's like to have Nicholas back with you? I think most of those guys have an immense amount of respect for him.

FRAN McCAFFERY: Nicholas is a guy that we love. He had a desire to finish his graduate degree. As you know, he played in his fifth year, so he began his graduate degree in his last year playing for us.

So he expressed a desire to finish, so we've added him as a graduate assistant, and we're thrilled to have him as part of program. There is no better representative of everything we stand for than Nicholas Baer.

Q. I've heard two of your players in the last week compare Keegan Murray to Nicholas. Do you agree with that? And if so, why?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I think they're different players.

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I think when people make that comparison is it's both of their energy level. They both play with great energy and both impact the game a variety of ways, especially on the offensive glass.

But Keegan has a chance to be really special, like Nicholas was, so I think let's let him develop. I think it really begins with the energy level in terms of comparison.

Q. What's the key now in kind of getting consistency on the defensive end of the floor here? We saw against Purdue it was really good, and then Minnesota, some lapses. What's the key now to get that consistently?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, I think it comes down to locking into what they're doing. Every team does different stuff, and I think consistently locked in like we were against Purdue, Purdue runs a lot of really good stuff offensively, they execute well.

Our press was good. Half court defense was good. Activity was good. Execution was good.

Against Minnesota it was good at times; it was really bad at times. And we kind of relied on our offensive ability to go out score them, and didn't get the job done there.

So I think the same type of effort we had against Carolina and against Purdue is going to be necessary in this league.

Q. How much does having a veteran team help you in situations like this? You never get too high or low, but are you pretty confident your players feel the same way?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think when you have the kind of game we had the other night, I think the guys take responsibility for that. I haven't seen a lot of finger pointing, blaming the coaches, blaming each other, the refs. I think it's accountability. We as coaches and we as players, we accept that collectively and then we try to improve and get better.

I think that's what we've always tried to do, and I think that's what's happened the last couple days. Guys in the locker room have been very professional, as you would've expected and that's what you kind of expect - I think that's kind of your point - from a veteran club, that they'll be able to understand what we can't do and what we should have done and make the necessary correction the next time we take the floor, and then consistently execute them.

Our defense wasn't great against Gonzaga either. We scored 88 but we gave up 99, so we needed to be better in

that game against the No. 1 team. We were really good at times. We forced 18 turnovers against Gonzaga. But we weren't consistently good, and the same thing against Minnesota.

I think our performance against Purdue was as good as we've had in a long time. So we have proven we can do it. We've got to now do it consistently.

Q. CJ is as unselfish as a player as you guys have on your team. Would you like him to be more aggressive or are you pretty satisfied with where he is offensively?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, I'm satisfied. I would like him to be more offensively oriented, but he's not that kind of guy. He's not hunting shots, he's making plays.

The play in the Purdue game, he was open, he drove and kicked it to Patrick for three in the corner. That's who he is, he makes winning plays. That's why he shoots such an incredible percentage. He works hard at the defensive end. He's very active. So he's a two-way guy that does what his team needs.

I'm comfortable with him taking five or ten more shots a game with the way he shoots the ball. I'm okay with him hunting shots at times, and I've encouraged him to do that and I think he's gotten better.

The bottom line is he has always been that way. He was that way in high school. He is incredibly efficient and really understands the game and plays it the right way.

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