

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

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Coach Fran McCaffery

Men's Basketball Press Conference



you came to Iowa City and you faced an Iowa team with Roy Marble, who was playing his seventh Division I game. Now you've got a guy who's about to beat his record. What do you think Roy would say about this?

Q. Like any other coach who's had success at the same place for more than a decade, you've also dealt with your share of adversity with some really good teams. What have you kind of learned from some of those past losing streaks, and how can those lessons apply to the current situation?

FRAN McCAFFERY: In this league, you know it's going to happen at some point. You try not to make it happen. Obviously you want to do everything you can. But we're playing really good teams with really good players. You've got to overcome certain things at certain times, whether it be foul trouble, player injury, being on the road, being at home, which isn't as much of a factor this year.

But we just keep plugging away. If you're going good, it's great. You don't take that for granted. If you lose a game, you try to get better in the next one, and then you try to get better in the next one. If you lose a couple in a row, respect your opponent, just keep working.

Q. What's different about this Rutgers team maybe the last four games that they've kind of gotten hot here after that streak when they were losing a lot of games?

FRAN McCAFFERY: They shuffled the deck with the starting lineup. Put Geo back with the ball and put McConnell in there. At the start of the season they weren't even sure McConnell was going to play. Actually he wasn't going to play. He's a really good player. Jacob Young is playing extremely well. He's just coming off the bench, as is Mathis. So they kind of have seven starters, almost eight if you want to count Cliff.

So I think they've settled into their roles now. They've got a really big starting lineup. Myles Johnson is playing as well as anybody in the country, as is Geo Baker. I remember at the beginning of the year he was injured, and he started playing and he kind of wasn't himself. Well, he's himself now, and he's one of the elite players in the country.

Q. It was your sixth game as a Division I head coach,

FRAN McCAFFERY: It was incredible. When I first got here, he's one of the first people I reached out to on a number of different levels. He was Iowa's all-time leading scorer. He lived in town. We were recruiting his son, kind of re-recruiting him because he had been recruited by the previous staff. And I think in the process and then coaching his son, we got to be really friendly. The one thing that always stuck out with me with Roy was he was a Hawk. I mean, he loved this place. He loved his experience here. He loved coming to the games. I mean, it was clearly a lot of fun for him when Dev was playing. That meant so much to him.

But he was very much involved in our program, knew all of our players, went to every primetime league game, talked to the guys, the guys listened to him.

He would have appreciated Luka Garza in a number of different ways. They would have gotten to know each other and he would have loved the kid as a person and his character but then his work ethic and tenacity and consistency. I think he would have really been a champion for Luka and watching him grow and develop and fighting through adversity like he did his sophomore year, and he would have loved him, and he would have supported him.

I wish he was here. I wish he was here to see it.

Q. Looking back at the first meeting with Rutgers, obviously that was one of your better wins of the season. What impressed you the most looking back on what you guys did down the stretch in that game, and do you reinforce with your guys that moment, that they can do it, that they have done it?

FRAN McCAFFERY: That game was consistent with a lot of the games in this league. There's a number of lead changes. We won the game. Keegan made an unbelievable play at the end.

But there was so many plays coming down the stretch by both teams. I mean, Geo made a big hoop, Bohannon made a big hoop, CJ made two big buckets, Luka had a

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monster game, Keegan ended up playing a lot, Connor got hurt. So it's one of those things where we kept fighting, they kept fighting, and we were the last ones standing.

The same was true in our losses. We're fighting, guys are making big plays, and so are they. We're just going to try to be in a situation where we're the last ones standing.

Q. Could you spell this out, your philosophy for taking players out with two fouls in the first half. You've been consistent about it, I believe, since you've been here. Could you detail your thinking on that?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I don't want them to be in any way tentative in the second half. It was unique on Sunday because we had four with two fouls. We had to put Keegan back in, and he came back in and played well. But then I got him out again because I didn't want him to get his third because I knew we were going to need him. He ends up fouling out on an interesting call.

So I just look at it like this: There's a couple ways to look at it. I felt like our other guys had been playing really well, and they could play together, play well together and finish the half and have those guys in the second half play without being concerned and having to get yanked because of foul trouble. I want to be able to have my key guys coming down the stretch.

Q. Are those your basic thoughts, principles, what have you?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah.

Q. In general?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yep. In the past, as you guys have seen, I have put guys back in because I felt like we just absolutely had to, and that's why I put Keegan back in that game. But I wasn't going to put Bohannon and Connor and Luka back in. You need your veteran guys on the road coming down the stretch. I felt like Keegan's energy level and in particular his rebounding was necessary, that we needed to put another big guy in there, front court guy, and he was really good in the time when I put him back in.

Q. You mentioned that Rutgers has kind of gotten going by shuffling the lineup a little bit, and other coaches, Izzo, seems to change lineups about every game. Is that something you've considered to try and get your team going in the right direction?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, we've had to do it out of necessity. CJ hasn't been playing, so Keegan starts, and if CJ comes back, he'll be back in there.

Q. Jordan Bohannon and three-point shooting, they're kind of joined at the hip, but do you think his ability as a passer and assist guy has been underappreciated during his career?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I don't know who would underappreciate it. He's going to be the school's all-time leader in assists. I don't know what more you have to do to get appreciated. I appreciate it, I can tell you that. So anybody that doesn't appreciate it doesn't know anything about basketball.

Q. My point being everyone looks at him as a three-point shooter and they maybe don't notice how he's handling the ball and getting it to guys in shooting position.

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I can tell you -- I think that's a good point. All I can tell you is that I'm happy he does both because he's really good at both. I know one guy that appreciates it, and that's you.

Q. You've been in this league now 11 years, I guess, and you know the scoring record for Luka is probably coming. How would you kind of place him, I guess, in Big Ten history, in Big Ten in the time you've been here? What does what he has accomplished in this short period of time these last few years, how does that translate for you?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I think you start to see -- I guess you look at it from a numbers perspective. That's the only way you can compare someone from one era to another, when you say, okay, he got to 2,000 points quicker than anybody else in the last 25 years. Think about who's playing in this league the last 25 years, some pretty incredible players. So that's an amazing statement when you think about it.

And then I see those pundits who want to say that, well, this game doesn't translate to the NBA or this or that. I don't know what does, because to me, they still have a scoreboard in the NBA. But he also rebounds, he shoots a high percentage, he's a winning player, he's a character guy with leadership skills, constantly works on his weaknesses. He's been a much better defender and is a much better defender than what anybody gives him credit for.

So I think in terms of those comparisons, I think his numbers speak for themselves.

Q. After losses especially, I think the typical player and coach just sort of wants to answer questions and

be done with it, but Luka talks and talks and talks. It's almost like it's a therapy session for him. Is he like that with you or with the team in general? I mean, he seems to take things so hard and so personally.

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think you've gotten to know him pretty well. He's seriously competitive, so he will not take losses well, nor should anybody. But what I don't want him or anybody else to do is internalize it to the point where they feel like it's their fault. If I would have made that one more shot, if I would have got that one more rebound, if I would have made that front end of a one and one, we would have won. There's a lot of plays in the game.

So the thing for him and anybody else on this team is to just keep grinding. Young guys need to follow his lead in terms of preparation and work ethic and keep believing in each other.

The first part of your question, no, he doesn't talk like that with me. He just keeps working. If he talks that way with you guys, you'd have to ask him what his reasoning for that, other than he just likes to answer the question to the best of his ability.

Q. I'll ask the CJ question: Is he going to play tomorrow night, and how much have you missed him on the defensive end? I know how much of an impact he makes offensively, but where is he at defensively?

FRAN McCAFFERY: He's our best perimeter defender, and he's the best shooter in the Big Ten. So you're going to miss that guy. He's a gamer. He's a late-game player. I hope he plays tomorrow. Our plan is for him to play. We'll see how he does today in practice.

And I've said to you guys, and it's hard for you, you're not at practice so you can only ask the question. When I say he's legitimately day-to-day, he's legitimately day-to-day, and it's probably going to be like that for the rest of the season. You can keep asking the question and I'll keep answering it as honestly as I can. I think he's going to play. I hope he plays. But he's only going to play if he feels right. If he's in pain and discomfort and can't go, then he won't go. We'll play somebody else.

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