

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

Tuesday, February 23, 2021

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

Coach Fran McCaffery

Men's Basketball Press Conference



Q. Your defense, certainly you've been better, and we've asked you about that. What types of things do you look for to know that this is a real change or real improvement over these last four or five games?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think the only thing really to look at is consistency. It's consistently been better, and you want it to continue.

But it also comes out of rebounding, so you've got to start -- it starts with transition defense and then it goes to ball screen defense and then guarding dribble penetration, but rebounding that first miss is critical. We'll be challenged in a big way with Michigan the way they offensive rebound.

Q. Is that kind of key to your offense, too, just to get in transition off the defensive boards?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Absolutely. Like we always say, we run off makes and misses, but it's much better to run off misses.

Q. About Michigan, it's been such an impressive team this season. Besides the addition of Dickinson, what has transformed this team?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, Dickinson is tremendous. He's as good -- he could be the top freshman in the country right now. But it's the grad transfers. You have three starters back who are tremendous. Livers and Wagner are all-league players. Eli Brooks is terrific. They're all veteran guys. But then you take the guy who led the Ivy League in scoring and you take Wake Forest's best player, and those guys are 21, 22 years old and you plug them in with that other group. Now you're bringing Davis off the bench with Brandon Johns, fifth-year senior and another veteran guy, this is a very veteran group. They don't make mistakes. They don't turn it over. They really do a great job sharing the basketball.

They've got a lot of guys scoring, but they move it, they share it, and they defend.

Q. I wanted to ask you specifically about Dickinson, what kind of problems he's going to present for Luka and what kind of matchup you see that as.

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, he's one of the best centers in the country, so it's always going to be a challenge for Luka. He's good in the low post. He's a good passing big man. He runs well. He's physical. But it's like every game in this league, you're going against somebody like that. If it's not Myles Johnson it's Kofi Cockburn, it's Nate Reuvers. You just keep going.

Q. Joe got up to now the top five for the Jerry West Award today and Luka will certainly be up for the Kareem again this year. What does it say about their development that they've been able to reach that level on an individual level?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I'm very proud of both of them, happy for them, but I don't think any of us are surprised. I think we all saw that coming. Both of them are incredibly hard workers, character guys through and through.

I think as a coach you're just -- like I said, you're proud of them. You bring them in and you work with them and you watch their work ethic and you see them get better, you see them compete, you see how important it is to them, and then to be recognized on a national level is something that I think makes all of us happy to see. But the key for both of them, and they would both tell you this, is not to be satisfied. We're still hungry.

Q. Your team this year came in with its highest ranking I believe it's had since the '50s, and now that we're in the final stretch of the year, how would you say your team has handled the added pressure of being one of the elite teams in college basketball and what's your role as a coach to help them with any sort of pressure that may come with that?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think -- I don't really look at it as pressure. You could be right, they could feel some pressure because of the questions they get all the time, but we just have a healthy respect for this league and who's in it. So what somebody says about you at the start of the year, that's what they say then. It really makes no difference.

You've got to play the games. You've got to play a very difficult schedule. There's going to be bumps in the road. Some teams had COVID issues, some teams had injury issues, now who steps up, and we've dealt with that. Very proud of our guys who have had to step up when we've had guys injured. So it's not something we really think about or talk about quite frankly.

Q. Did you make a decision on whether you would come back after the Michigan game --

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, we're going to come back.

Q. What is the -- what were the pluses and minuses there? What led you to that last part?

FRAN McCAFFERY: There's a lot that goes into it. We just feel like it's better to do it this way, better to be here.

Q. I guess 71.3 percent from the line isn't horrible, but I thought it would be higher this year for you guys. Have you seen anything? Do you need to work on free throws more? Do you see that as a little bit of a red flag, anything you've noticed there on free throw shooting?

FRAN McCAFFERY: No, we've got a couple guys that are a little bit lower than what you would expect. We've just got to get those guys to the line a little bit more. I think the more they shoot, the better they'll get.

Q. I know there's a lot of different ways to get to Big Ten head coaching jobs, but you don't see too many guys go from the NBA to the Big Ten. How has Juwan Howard in your eyes adapted to it so quickly and have the team playing so formidably?

FRAN McCAFFERY: He's got a terrific background. I don't think he would have taken any other job but the one he's got. Not that he wouldn't have been a candidate for one, he just I think has an affinity for his alma mater. But he played in the league a long time. He played for Pat Riley, worked with Erik Spoelstra. He's been around great teams, great players, great coaches, so he has a lot to offer. I think he's real happy where he is.

So I don't think anybody should be surprised when you look at his resume that he's done well there. You can say a lot of really nice things, but the reality is if you were to ask him, I think he would probably have expected that of himself because he put the time in this business to be ready when his coaching opportunity came, and he's proven that he was.

Q. I know you've attributed a lot of your recent

defensive success to playing more man-to-man. Do you guys chart what percentage you play man-to-man and zone and everything else, or is it just kind of a feel game-to-game?

FRAN McCAFFERY: It's a little bit of both, but we crunch the numbers. I think it's critical to do that. Sometimes -- I would say this: Most of the time you don't need to look at the numbers; you know. But not always. And I think that the numbers are what they are, and we've just been better on our man-to-man.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

