

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

Tuesday, March 9, 2021

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

Fran McCaffery

Men's Basketball Press Conference



Q. We might as well jump into it. What do you know about Joe's status for this weekend and beyond that?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Not much more than I knew the other day. He was a little bit better yesterday, a little better today. He won't practice today. So we'll see.

Again, it's literally day-to-day, so we'll see how he is today, tomorrow and go from there.

Q. I'm curious about this travel thing. Could you detail what it's going to be? When do you get to Indy? Are you going to be there from now until your last game is played?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, we leave tomorrow. The answer is yes, we'll be there till our last game is played, correct.

Q. What goes into all this? This is a wildly unusual thing for you and every other team involved. What do you have to do to make this thing work as well as possible?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, you're right, a lot of things. I don't think our players have ever had to pack for 28 days. It starts with that. You can imagine what our coaches and student managers are bringing. We're bringing academic folks, obviously our strength and conditioning coach. Then the next phase is kind of staying sequestered with our group, not exiting the hotel, roaming around town, getting involved in contact tracing situations that could put us in jeopardy of having a healthy team.

Being tested, meetings, practice, lift, academics will continue. We'll have a room set up for the guys to do their classes online, whatever else they need. Just go game to game.

Q. I know you've spoken a lot about Luka in the past. Here he is now Big Ten Player of the Year, two years in a row. Never happened before with the Hawkeyes. Is it tougher to stay on top once you've achieved that

level of brilliance? How has he managed to do that?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think it is tougher because he's the focal point of every defense every time we take the floor. The more tape that's on him, the tougher that gets for him.

So I just have been really impressed with his relentlessness to continue to improve and to handle anything that comes his way from a defensive scheme perspective or physicality perspective. He just keeps coming.

When you think he's maxed out, he just amazes you again and proves that there's more there. That's a credit to him and his character.

Q. I know over the years you grew very close with Roy Marble. You recruited his son twice basically. Anybody who covered Dev has really high, strong feelings, positive feelings, for Dev. When you saw what he had tweeted, did you reach out right after that or this morning? What's kind of been his reaction to the last 12 hours through your conversations?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I've had multiple conversations with his family members. Reached out to Dev. Haven't spoken to him yet, but I reached out to him.

I know that Dev knows I love him and I loved his dad. We became very close. I really appreciate Mr. Barta's comments and sensitivity toward the situation. In no way were we playing Luka in any way to disrespect anyone else, least of all anybody named Marble. I just appreciate what Gary is doing.

These situations are not typically something I get involved with. But due to my relationship with both Roy and Dev, I did. I felt it was important to do that.

Our conversations have been very positive. They will remain so as we move forward to honor Roy, as he should be.

Q. A complicated issue, of course, when you're dealing with honoring people and the levels of degree. I understand you're also preparing for a tournament. Going forward, is there a way where you can parse this? Even your son has a number previously retired

ASAP . . . when all is said, we're done.®
sports

for a special reason. Is this going to be some off-season discussion how to make it more consistent, per se?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think that's what Gary just said. There are different circumstances for everybody, different eras. I think you look at Roy in particular, there's only two players that ever played here that scored two thousand points or more, and he's one of them. He was also on a team that won 30 games, which is the most any team has ever won here.

I don't think you have to stretch that far to understand what his performance and his accomplishments meant to our program and its history, in particular with his son coming here and having the spectacular career he had.

I think Gary recognizes that. He said as much. I'm confident in his ability with the other folks that he referenced to move forward and recognize Roy properly.

Q. Friday is going to mark one year since things were shut down. What do you personally remember from that day when word came down, maybe even the hours leading up to it when the world was changing, and the trip home?

FRAN McCAFFERY: When we got there, it was all systems go. We checked into our hotel like we've always done. We had meetings, meal, then we all went over to see the game, the winner of which we were going to play. So it was Minnesota-Northwestern. We were then preparing to play Minnesota.

It just became more evident that there were issues involved starting with the NBA players who contracted the virus. Then when Fred (Hoiberg) got sick on the bench, we didn't know if he had the virus or if he was just sick. It turned out he was just sick. Everything was hitting us all at once. We really didn't know what it was.

Those in charge had very difficult decisions to make, as we all know. We were prepared to play. We were prepared to play with fans. We were prepared to play without fans.

I think initially we thought the tournament, the NCAA tournament that is, would proceed. Once they canceled the Big Ten tournament, the other one was canceled in short order.

We were all just kind of numb like. Families were in the lobby. Some of them had just arrived, getting ready to go to the game. Then, Hey, we're not playing. Not only that, We're not playing again till next year.

There was disappointment. But any time you're dealing with a situation where those involved make decisions based on abundance of caution, you just move on.

The ensuing weeks and months were unique for all of us. We basically functioned on Zoom for the better part of the next five months. Fortunately our administration developed an incredibly involved return-to-play plan and we were thrilled. The NCAA followed up with a similar plan.

Here we are. We got all 27 in, heading to Indianapolis, and we're excited for the opportunity.

Q. Joe Wieskamp, obviously second team All Big Ten. Looks like he's playing the best basketball of his career the last month or two. What have you noticed about him that elevated his game recently?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think it was just what you said. He was a terrific player from the minute he got here. The complete skill set he's exhibited in the last six weeks or so has been really impressive to watch and it's a reflection of his work each of the last two summers. I'm really happy for him to be recognized the way he has been.

Q. With Joe Wieskamp's injury, is it strictly you're going to hear from the trainers and doctors or are there other factors in terms of what you'll allow him to do on Friday?

FRAN McCAFFERY: It is strictly the trainer and the doctor. Can he go? Sometimes you deal with is he 100 percent, is he 90, is he 80, is he 75? How does he feel? What does he want to do? So we'll wait and see.

Q. Is there a number that you want him to be at with the Big Ten tournament versus the NCAA tournament, wanting him to be at 100 percent by the time you guys get to the NCAA tournament? How does that work for you?

FRAN McCAFFERY: The problem with that is you can't guarantee he's going to be at 100 percent if he plays Friday, Saturday, Sunday. We play Friday night, Saturday afternoon. We'll factor that in, as well.

If he feels really good, my anticipation will be to play him on Friday. We'll see how he does. If he's not at or near 100 percent, then we might hold him. We're going to do what's in the best interest of the student-athlete, bottom line.

Q. If Joe is limited a little bit, looks like Tony Perkins will be a guy will have more time. What have you noticed about him that makes you think he's better

now than the beginning of the year?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think Tony is a guy that would jump in there. I also feel good with Ahron and Kris. Obviously it will enhance Patrick and Joe Toussaint's roles. Keegan moves into the starting lineup, so he's going to play a lot more minutes.

I think it's an all-hands-on-deck thing.

Q. It's been nice since Nunge has gotten hurt that Luka has not been in any foul trouble. If that happens, is that a case where Kris Murray becomes the four and Keegan the five? What kind of thought process do you have if Luka gets in some foul trouble?

FRAN McCAFFERY: That would increase Kris Murray's role, without question. Get another bigger guy in there with length who can rebound in traffic. It also puts Josh Ogundele into the mix. He has made great strides in probably the last month. I wouldn't be afraid to play both of those guys.

Kris is a little further ahead of Josh right now.

Q. How do you handle the scouts? Is this a weird one where you potentially could play Wisconsin again. Do you update them? How do you handle those things?

FRAN McCAFFERY: We have a scouting report on Wisconsin. We know what we're going to see. We just saw it. We saw it a short time ago up there. So each assistant coach that's responsible for that team will be working on that opponent.

You got Wisconsin, Nebraska and Penn State. We don't know which one of those three teams we're going to play. We'll be ready for whichever one it is.

Q. Luka being named the Sporting News Player of the Year this year puts him on a list that's remarkable. Michael Jordan, Bill Walton, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. What has this been like from your perspective, seeing all this pile up, what it means for you and your program?

FRAN McCAFFERY: It's an incredibly proud time for me just to watch him enjoy being recognized for the incredible amount of work he put in to being great. That's what you want for everybody you ever coach. It doesn't always happen that way.

Like I said before, he's an incredibly determined young man to not be satisfied. He gets a Big Ten offer. He's a Big Ten starter. He's never satisfied. He's not going to be

satisfied till he's an NBA player. That's what he's going to be next year.

Q. Unique spot this year in terms of playing the last game on Friday. Nine games played before you guys play. Do you enjoy that and watch the games or is it the competition of it or just focus on your own team?

FRAN McCAFFERY: It's strictly business. Just figure out who we're going to play, who we're going to play next, how we get our team ready. That's pretty much the game plan.

Q. This is the first time you've had a chance to win the Big Ten tournament with three games in three days. You did that three times. What is the key to doing that if you can string those things together? Probably 3-3 is better than 4-4.

FRAN McCAFFERY: No question about that. It starts with being prepared and winning the first one, obviously, to get to Saturday. You don't want to ever kind of look at it, Well, it's three games in three days. It's basically one game in one day, then you have the opportunity to play again. If you win that, you have the opportunity to play again.

It takes a tremendous amount of mental toughness. I remember the last time we did it when I was at Siena, we were down double-digits in the first half of all three games. We ended up winning all three games.

It's staying the course because you think, Well, our team won three games, everything went perfectly. It's not going to go perfectly. We're playing too many good teams.

It's staying the course with what got us to the point where we are, our improved defense, our ability to share the ball, understand how to utilize Luka with great point guard play, a team that really understands how to compete and play together.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, coach. We appreciate your time today.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports