

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

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Coach Fran McCaffery Men's Basketball Press Conference



Q. You ever coach twins very many times, Coach?

COACH MCCAFFERY: Yeah. I coached the Ross twins when I was at Notre Dame.

Q. Are they competitive usually a little bit more sometimes than the guys that --

COACH MCCAFFERY: They were a little different than Kris and Keegan. Kris and Keegan are very competitive with each other. Joe and Jon were not as. They were competitive, but it's interesting to watch Kris and Keegan go at each other.

Q. How has Kris' game evolved, and how do you see him helping the team this year?

COACH MCCAFFERY: Kris is going to be a major factor on this team and he needs to be. That was sort of the plan for him. And he's worked really hard. He's a versatile guy. He's long. He can guard different positions. He can rebound. He can shoot the ball. Can put it on the deck.

He just needs some time to gain his confidence by getting out there and performing the way he's capable in games. But that's going to happen for him.

Q. What's his position; where do you want to play him most minutes?

COACH MCCAFFERY: He'll be playing forward. He might end up guarding a 5 depending on what lineup is out there for our opponent. He spent a lot of time last year guarding guards in practice. So he's used to that.

Q. Keegan is obviously stepping up into a much larger role. From what you've seen, is he ready for that?

COACH MCCAFFERY: Yeah, he's ready. He's a confident kid. He stays within himself. Nothing seems to really rattle him at all. Very focused. He works hard in the offseason. He never tries to do the things that he can't do on the floor. I mean, he certainly has the talent to be a guy that could do

that, just completely try to do everything in every possession.

But he really has a keen understanding of how to play. If there's space, he goes. If there's not, he moves it. He's equally effective with the ball, without the ball, in the post, on the perimeter. Probably best in transition. I think the more space he has, the better he'll always be.

But he's shooting the ball well, which he shot well last year. He didn't shoot as many jumpers, but he'll shoot a lot more jumpers this year.

Q. What intrigues you most about this team?

COACH MCCAFFERY: I think the depth. We've got a lot of guys who are good. The practices have been very competitive. I've been switching the lineups quite a bit. Everything we do in practice is competitive. So every segment is one team wins, one team loses. And they've been going at each other.

So it sort of gives you an indication of who have is ready to compete and then who's capable of playing multiple positions like we think they are. But we forced them to do that. And so we can go with a bigger lineup, a smaller lineup. We can go without a five-man, traditional five-man and three guards and two 6-9s. There's a lot of ways we can go. I think from that standpoint it's a different kind of team.

Q. Ulis and Perkins gave you valuable minutes for you last season especially later in the year. How will that experience help push them into more time this year in helping the team?

COACH MCCAFFERY: It definitely was helpful to get them minutes. And they got quality minutes. There were times when they didn't play as much. We wanted the veteran guys.

But it was one of the advantages, quite honestly, of last year because nobody had to redshirt. We might have redshirted one or two of those guys. Maybe one of the guys you mentioned and Kris or something like that. But at least we were able to maintain their eligibility and play them where we needed them.



Throughout the course of the season somebody gets hurt, somebody else gets hurt, somebody gets in foul trouble, and they formed not like young guys. And I think that's what stuck out about both of the guys you mentioned.

Doesn't mean they didn't make any mistakes, but they competed really hard and they knew what we wanted them to do. And they're both playing at a very high confidence level right now.

Q. When you lose guys like Wieskamp and Garza it's kind of natural for the outside world to think that you're rebuilding. Have your guys taken it upon themselves and have you seen a confidence and swagger from them to say, hey, we can be an upper-tier Big Ten team even though we lost some guys?

COACH MCCAFFERY: I think what I've seen is a young group excited for opportunity. You knew those two guys were going to play a lot. They were going to be 35- to 40-minute guys. And they took a lot of shots. So somebody is going to step up and figure out how we're going to score without those two guys on the floor.

But they were all a part of a very successful team and they saw how those guys worked. They saw how they prepared. And I think they're just excited for the challenge to be a team that is cohesive.

We were a connected group last year. And this team saw that's absolutely critical. So for them I think their attitude has been terrific since June when we got back. Actually, since the season ended. We did a lot of stuff in the spring. And I think they're anxious for the chance to get out there and be in a different role.

I said this at Big Ten media day. I don't know if I've ever coached a team where everybody will have a different role than they had last year. It's fairly unique when you think about it.

Q. How will Connor's role change?

COACH MCCAFFERY: Well, Connor's role won't change that much. He may be coming off the bench. It would change a little bit there. But he's still going to play four positions. He's still going to be the guy that is constantly talking to guys on the floor or on the bench.

He understands what we're doing as well as anybody I've ever coached. So when you're in a crunch-time situation, and execution is absolutely paramount, you have to have your guys out there that know and understand what we're doing, what we're trying to do and what we need to do if

the play breaks down, who lines up where, where we're going with this, a press offense, a side-out-of-bounds play, out-of-bounds play under the basket or late-game possession.

Or defensively. A lot of times you're not on offense, you're on defense, you need to stop. Are we switching, not switching, are we trapping? How are we playing ball screens, where are the screens coming from? All that kind of stuff that he just knows and understands what needs to be done and he is able to communicate that in a way that's effective because he has the respect of his teammates and he's always looking out for them.

There's never anything selfish-related. It's always what's best for the team and how can I help my teammate. When you're like that you command a lot of respect.

Q. Do you see him following in your footsteps and going into coaching?

COACH MCCAFFERY: I think he would be really good at it. I would certainly support him. He's in a little bit of a unique situation because he's a double major. He's finance, political science. He's got a 3.9, been a Distinguished Big Ten Scholar. So he'll have options.

You'll look and say, as your son, would he be better off going to Wall Street or working in Chicago or following what he loves; does he want to coach? Support him in any way that he chooses to go.

But I do think he would be really, really good in this business. Others have said the same thing. So I could see him doing that. And I've said this before, and not trying to be funny, but I don't think his mother would want that. But she would eventually support his choice.

Q. Patrick has gotten a lot of attention on social media for his commercial. What was your reaction when you saw it?

COACH MCCAFFERY: My first reaction was how much did they pay you. When I heard the number, I was, like, I'd probably do a dance, too. So good for him.

Q. Do you have an idea about the starting lineup or is it still pretty fluid right now?

COACH MCCAFFERY: Still pretty fluid. Still pretty fluid.

Q. You've got six scholarship players from Iowa City, Cedar Rapids -- and I realize two of them come from your own house -- but that's still a pretty big core from so close. Do you have any observations on what it's



like to have that kind of talent basically just down the street?

COACH MCCAFFERY: From the first minute I got here, we had some talent in this state. West High had some terrific teams, and won multiple state championships.

But it wasn't just them. And you know, Keegan and Kris in particular, and Jordan for that matter, you know, they were dramatically under-recruited. But most of you guys in this room saw them play and you couldn't help but be impressed.

And you start from -- I think those guys wanted to be Hawks. Patrick and Connor, the same thing. Connor, even though he committed to us early, he looked at some other options, primarily in the Ivy League because of his academic profile. But at the end of the day he wanted to play right here in this building. And that wasn't going to change. The same for Patrick.

So I think it's important that when you're evaluating, which as we all know it's my responsibility to evaluate the entire country and also internationally -- but you try not to miss the guys in your backyard if you're trying to get somebody in California. And so I've always really worked on that to try to make sure if somebody's really good and they're from around here, we want to get them in the black and gold.

So, I'm thrilled with the guys we have. And we've had guys from in-state, not necessarily right around here. When you think about Woodbury and some of the other guys, Peter Jok -- when I first started recruiting Peter Jok, he was the number one player in his class. It didn't look like it was going to be an easy get for us. We recruited him hard for four straight years. Ends up leading the Big Ten in scoring. And Uthoff, you go right down the line -- I only had about two months to recruit Uthoff. Got him on a transfer.

We're always going to be very aware of guys that are around here. But also I think it's a reflection, if you're going to do that, you have to respect the quality of play and the quality of coaching, whether it be for their high school team, whether AAU team, because we watch them with their AAU teams, too.

So when we're watching those guys, it's very important that we know and understand and respect the quality of coaching they're getting, that helps, obviously, in the transition. So pretty much all the guys that we've recruited locally, they come ready. That's important.

Q. Jordan's switching positions this year, what type of production do you have in your head for him? What's possible, do you think, for Jordan at the 2 spot?

COACH MCCAFFERY: The thing about that, that's certainly the plan. He made 80 3s last year; let's see if he can make 90 or more. That's just what he does. It's not to say he wouldn't handle the ball at the point. We've got a lot of ways we can go. We just have multiple options at the point.

You think about Joe and Ahron and Connor, and Jordan is our best 3-point shooter, or he was the best 3-point shooter last year in terms of number of makes. And we need him to be in that capacity.

Sometimes he's better with the ball. We have such great options at that other position. But we also have Tony Perkins and Payton Sandfort, guys that we need to get minutes for in the off-guard position. When you think about the ball in Joe's hands with J-Bo running around and Payton or Patrick, we've got to make sure we have options to throw the ball to.

Q. Outside what he does on the court, what's the value leadership wise to have a guy like that back here?

COACH MCCAFFERY: Jordan is a kind of guy, he's produced the minute he got here. You have a veteran guy. No matter what the circumstances are, he'll handle it. Nothing's going to rattle him. Tough road environment, tough week of road games, whatever it takes. You can't rattle this guy. And that's incredibly valuable when you're competing at this level.

Q. What intrigued you, sold you on Rebraca?

COACH MCCAFFERY: He was really consistent as a scorer and rebounder, but I think the most important thing is his skill level. He can dribble, pass and shoot. He fits our style. He's got a frame. He's 6'9", 230. He's an older guy. He's been through it. He might be 24.

There's a guy, he's played internationally, played in this country at the Division I level. And he wanted to challenge himself to play in the Big Ten. So we're thrilled to have him.

Q. Jordan has been a player who has been spoken out about NIL. Now that it's come to fruition, how would you evaluate how your players have handled it? And how well do you think they'll play as they balance that with basketball, school and other things?

COACH MCCAFFERY: I fully supported NIL from the very beginning. It's great to see those guys making money. I hope they make more, they make as much as they possibly can.

I do think there's a fine line with getting in the gym and getting in the weight room and understanding the focus that's required to be the best player that you can be, because a lot of the NIL stuff is social media driven. So it requires you to be on social media, which I don't have a problem with because our guys have made pretty good decisions there.

But that can't become the number one focus, especially when we start playing games. But I don't have any worry whatsoever that our guys will lose focus on what they're supposed to be doing, and I fully support them in their pursuit to make as much money as they can. And Jordan has done pretty well and I'm thrilled for him. He worked really hard. Proud of him.

Q. How much does NIL come up on the recruiting trail, and how are you addressing?

COACH MCCAFFERY: It comes up. Everybody wants to know about it. It's still early. So you don't have a lot of concrete data. But our institution has supported it.

There are some rules that are in place that should be followed. But as we've all seen, the NIL, to-pay-for-play line, is blurred. It's not supposed to be pay-for-play. It's supposed to be NIL.

So are we moving to that end? We just pay the guys, whatever? So those are questions -- people just want to know, are guys making any money; are guys having opportunities. And they are. And I hope that they become more abundant.

Q. Going back to Rebraca, how have you seen him grow since he got here? And what kind of roles do you see him playing this year?

COACH MCCAFFERY: He's going to have to play a very important role. We need him. A veteran guy -- even though he's not been here -- he's a veteran guy. He's big and strong and can do a lot of things. So he was recruited to be a major factor. And he will be.

At first he was just trying to learn his way. He went home and got sick, took him about a week or two to get back. He was a little under the weather, but he's back strong now. He's been back for a while and really, I think, in a good place. He had a good practice on Saturday. We're excited about him.

Q. You mentioned several times about Patrick and how you expect him to take his game up. What has he shown in practice so far and how will he be different?

COACH MCCAFFERY: He had a great summer. But he's had ankle issues since we started. He sprained one, then sprained the other. He has been limited for about four or five weeks. So we need to get him back out there.

Q. Is it too early to, Josh, Riley, what kind of competition have you seen in terms of the big men?

COACH MCCAFFERY: Josh and Riley are working really hard. Josh has been a lot better. He's sustaining effort more. He lost a lot of weight. He's down to the 260s. But he has to get even better in that area and he knows it. He's really pushing himself. I've been proud of him.

Riley, he's a pup. He can run and he can really pass the ball. So you can throw it to him in the post and he moves it on the perimeter. He moves it on dribble hand-offs. He can hit cutters. Defensively he's ahead of where he is on offense. So it's good to see a 6'11" guy with length be a factor defensively.

He's 240, but he's still getting pushed around a little bit. He still should be a senior in high school. We'll get him ready at some point.

Q. What's it like to have recruits in on a weekend like the one you just had?

COACH MCCAFFERY: It's great. The atmosphere was phenomenal. They all ran on the field with everybody else. They just had a lot of fun. That's what you want. You want it to be a very informative weekend. They're here with their parents. Watch practice. See the campus. Have meetings with various people. But then go have some fun and see what the campus life is like. And they got to enjoy that.

Q. A few weeks ago when you were talking about how exciting it is to have a new team, whether the downside of that is maybe not coming together on defense, that cohesion might not be there. Now that you've been able to have longer practices, how have you seen that area come together and cohesion overall?

COACH MCCAFFERY: I think it's coming. I don't think it's there yet. It's coming. Again, I've been juggling the lineups. We see what lineups click. Step one is, are they competing consistently on every possession defensively. And then you can worry about slides, and where were you're playing this action or that action wrong.

They're a young group. So they're going to make some mistakes, but as long as they compete they can cover those up with activity. And sometimes with length. But you have cover up for each other when somebody gets beat off

the dribble or somebody doesn't play a ball screen correctly. And you've got to rotate and rotate with communication. That's something that we've focused on.

Q. You said you've been kind of fluid with these lineups. Do you see a leader in the clubhouse or does that work itself out?

COACH MCCAFFERY: The leaders are who you would expect them to be on this team. It's going to be Connor and Jordan.

Joe Toussaint is in his third year. I think he's been way more verbal. He plays so hard; he's going to command the respect of those around him.

The young guys are trying to figure it out. Keegan is a guy, he's just never been a big talker. But he's a guy that plays hard. He plays smart. He plays well. So that guy is going to have credibility whenever he opens his mouth.

And so I've encouraged him to do that because his teammates will respect that because they respect him. Last year he was just trying to fit in, we had guards, Wieskamp and J-Bo, and the veteran group. And then all of a sudden he's on the all-rookie team and everybody's like, wow, this guy's really good.

And he is; he's tremendous. So it's okay to be a star, and we'd encourage him to do that. But be a guy that really, really can impact a game in different ways, not just with points and rebounds. And he has all of the skills necessary to do that.

Q. You talked about Joe Toussaint, and how have you seen maybe his approach change now that he has the potential for more minutes, and how his role may change?

COACH MCCAFFERY: I don't think his approach changed at all. He is who he is. I mean, he's a killer. That's what you want. He goes after people defensively. He attacks the rim. He's constantly trying to beat whoever lines up in front of him. And sometimes as a point guard, you want them to, all right, back it off a little bit. But one of the reasons we recruited him was because who he is.

He's a warrior, that guy. And you never want to take that away from him. But I think maybe -- and you would expect this -- his leadership has continued to improve over time. And it should.

Q. The NIL, correct me if I'm wrong, it's not supposed to be used as recruiting inducements. How do you handle that situation? We know there's some

programs that will do that. You go in that household and you're asked that question, how do you handle that?

COACH MCCAFFERY: It's problematic. It really is, because some programs are using it as recruiting incentive. It's not supposed to be part of it. But I don't think there's anybody in this room who didn't predict it.

It's not like anybody's surprised by it. It's not like in any way to be restricted, you can make X. No, it's unlimited how much you can make. But it's supposed to be off your name and your ability and essentially your character.

So when you're a program that's consistently trying to do things the right way and make sure that this is done properly and by the rules, knowing that others are not doing the same, it's concerning.

I don't have an answer for you as to what the solution is because it's fairly evident nobody is going to do anything about it anyway. I'm just happy that our guys are making money and that's a fact. I can tell any recruit's family that our guys are making money. We're not getting into the specifics of it.

I just hope it continues to improve in a way that, if you think about it, you're in the business world. It's an opportunity to grow -- we always talk about networking and the recruiting process and meeting folks.

You think about it, it's kind of ridiculous. In years past we would try to keep our boosters away from the student-athletes; you're not supposed to talk to them; you can't talk to them.

Some of these guys are CEOs. And when you're a business major you would want to get to know that guy. And so now you're doing commercials and watching the marketing side and the business side and do you have an agent? How do you negotiate a contract? Do you sign a contract? Is it a one-time thing? Is it ongoing? And you get a real, real education very quickly as to how the real world operates.

So it is something, I think, that has become an important part of the educational process in many ways. I've enjoyed watching it. Again, we talked about earlier, let's make the main thing the main thing. Let's understand: We're here; you're on scholarship; we're going to try to get better; we're going to try to prepare for the next game and win, but you're also here to get an education and max out this opportunity. And that's part of it.

Q. Did you know Rebraca's father at all before?

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COACH MCCAFFERY: No, I got to know him through the process. I remember him but I didn't know him. He was very involved in the process.

Q. I don't think I ever saw him play, but is he a similar player, Filip, to his father?

COACH MCCAFFERY: His father was bigger. More of a straight five I'd say. He was good. His father was good.

Q. Going back to the NIL, have you had to walk away from a potential recruit because maybe there were --

COACH MCCAFFERY: No, I've not had to walk away from anybody.

Q. You mentioned the depth. What have you seen out of Payton --

COACH MCCAFFERY: Payton's been great. Shooting the ball well. Moves without the ball. Handles it. Passes it. Tough. He's been really good.

Q. Do you see him competing for minutes?

COACH MCCAFFERY: Yeah, I said we've got a lot of guys. He's one of them. But he's ready. He's ready. It's not like it's going to take him some time. He's ready.