

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

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Iowa City, Iowa, USA

Head Coach Fran McCaffery

Men's Basketball Press Conference



Q. Anything different about Purdue from first meeting?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think Gillis is playing really well. If you remember last time, I think he had just come back. He was out with an injury. He was a starter last year, really good player. That adds another physical presence and he makes three's. They have a very deep team, as you know. I think all the guys that had been playing well are still playing really well.

Q. What type of a match-up are they, especially inside?

FRAN McCAFFERY: They're a tough match-up everywhere. It starts with that, of course, but then Ivey is next level, and they have multiple three-point shooters. They have veterans coming off the bench. They're not a mistake team. They run really good stuff. They defend. It really takes your best to beat them.

Q. How are you feeling about your minute rotation? I think Payton didn't get in on Saturday.

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, it's really hard because he deserves to play. Ahron Ulis deserved to get back in in the second half, and now we're going to maybe add another guy like Ogundele or Riley Mulvey into the mix, so you just kind of play it by ear as the game goes on, what line-ups are clicking, what guys are playing well, and who you want to go with at certain times.

Q. Do you pre-determine minutes, do you have a plan going in?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think anybody that says they have a plan going in, they're lying to you. I know who my starters are. I'm going to try to play those guys, all of them, if I can, but sometimes the game takes a different direction. Saturday's game was kind of slow, slow and physical. They run a million hand-off ball screens, other stuff. Other

teams play differently. Sometimes the fast pace requires you to play more guys.

Q. You just said you don't really go in with a plan, but when you have two high-scoring teams like Purdue and Iowa, you go in thinking maybe this could be a track meet. I can go faster. I can shoot more than you. Or do you actually want to slow it down when those teams are so high-scoring?

FRAN McCAFFERY: We're going to try to play the way we play. I think Matt has certainly established himself and his program in terms of how they play. They can go either way. They have the ability to beat you playing half court or with the speed game with the speed that they have. We're going to run if we can. You hope to get some misses. They're not always easy to stop.

Q. Have you had a chance to talk to Josh Dix after Friday?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I did.

Q. What was your message to him?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I have been there as a coach certainly with guys that have had tough injuries, but I had one myself. I know what it feels like. I know what it feels like to be in a cast for a long period of time and wonder. I tore my Achilles tendon when I was playing. He hadn't really had an injury up until this point, so it was tough on he and his family. You go to a game, you're getting ready to go home, and all of a sudden you're in the operating room. It isn't really what you were planning on, but he is a really tough, tough kid, and his family is awesome. They've been great. Surgery went well, so I have complete confidence he will be back. It's going to take a little bit of time, but he will be back for us in the fall.

Q. What do you know about him that makes you feel confident?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I know him pretty well. We watched him a lot. Talked to him a lot. Spent time with him. He spent a lot of time with our guys. He is incredibly mentally tough. Nothing seems to rattle him. He was very matter of fact, very matter of fact, with where he was and where he is going, which didn't surprise me.

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Q. How do you assess Tony Perkins' progress this season?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Tony has been great. The thing that you can always count on him for is phenomenal effort, intensity. He has shown the ability to, if he makes a mistake, come right back and make a good play. He doesn't let it linger on him, which is not always easy for a younger guy. He plays both ends, competes.

Q. You're coming back around and playing a team for the second time, and there's been some time between that first match-up. Obviously, Keegan didn't play the first match-up, but how valuable or not valuable is that first film?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think it's somewhat valuable in a lot of ways, but you're right. It's not like we played them eight days ago. It's been a while. We both evolved to a certain point. There's more tape available on each other, but it's still the same guys playing. Same coaches; same systems. There will be similarities, and you just hope that your players learn from what we did well and what we didn't do well and what we can do better.

Q. Keegan can come back for this game. Are you excited for him for a challenge like this going up against some really good bigs?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I guess you could say that. I was excited for Kris the last time because he got a chance to jump in there and kind of take over for his brother. His brother wasn't going to play. He was terrific in that game. Made a couple of really big plays coming down the stretch. I thought that was important for him and for his growth. Kris adds a completely different dimension to our team.

Q. The fact that you did play well down the stretch, I know it was two months ago, but is that something that you can carry into this game, even without --

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think, it's something we can carry into every game. We recognize how good they are. They were ranked No. 2 at the time. It was a hostile environment. Our kids kept their composure. There was probably three times in that game where we could have folded and could have gone to 25 and it didn't, but this team is really explosive offensively, and a handful in the glass. Anything less than your best effort makes it hard, so we got to be ready to compete.

Q. You are third nationally in fewest turnovers per game and turnover margin, leading the conference. Again, obviously, your tempo is one of the higher

ones. How have you done this? What makes your players good at that?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, it starts with you have to want to be good at that. You have to understand how the game is played and how everybody fits and accept that. I don't think when you watch our team that you see any selfishness. We have a guy who was leading the nation in scoring most of the year. I don't think anybody would look at Keegan Murray and say "there is a selfish guy." He kind of gets his points in a variety of ways. He doesn't hunt shots. Nobody does. I think if you look at our bench, they all support one another. Everybody who is on the bench wants to be in the game, but whoever is in the game, they're cheering for those guys. I think it says a lot about the character of the individuals, quite frankly. Also, we work on and stress taking care of the ball and making good decisions, which sometimes it's hard when you are playing fast. A lot of coaches won't play fast for that reason because the higher possession games and playing fast and flying up and down the floor, you tend to turn the ball over more. We don't believe that. We feel like it just gives you more room to operate and find people and recognize what are the particular talents of your teammates that you can enhance by making a play for them.

Q. You also lead the conference in steals. What do you attribute that to and how did they get proficient at it?

FRAN McCAFFERY: We press a fair amount compared to a lot of teams. Our activity level is good. We try to encourage our guys to anticipate rather than react. I think they've done a good job of that. Our post guys are active defensively. We don't really have a true center, so those guys are defending. We can switch a little bit more. We can be up on ball screens a little bit more, things like that.

Q. It seems like you don't gamble. You anticipate. It seems like you're always kind of in the right spot.

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think there's a fine line there because you want them to be aggressive, but if you are constantly going for steals that you don't get, it usually leads to easy baskets and fouls, especially on post feeds. We want to get our defense back and get them set and hopefully play together in terms of being connected, and it's hard. Especially when you look at a team like this with Ivey coming 100 miles an hour and with the actions that they run when they go high-low or ball screen action to get their quicker, athletic guys downhill, it's a handful, and it just keeps coming at you. You hope that they're all working together because if they're not, it makes it hard.

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