

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

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Coach Fran McCaffery Men's Basketball Press Conference



Q. Fran, now that Rebraca has had a year in your system, how do you think he'll be more productive?

FRAN McCAFFERY: He's been great all summer, all fall. Energy level, confidence level, every aspect of the game. I've said this before; he has way more offense in his game than we saw last year. It was good at times, and it was pretty good in general. But I think you'll see a more aggressive offensive player.

But defensively he's spectacular. I mean, guarding ball screens, close and recover, guarding smaller people. He's all over the glass. His energy level is great. He's in great shape physically. He's mature. He's been around. He's playing with a great deal of confidence right now.

Q. What's been the difference for Connor to actually have a full healthy off-season dedicated to basketball only?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, I think it's been a dramatic difference for him. He'd still be playing baseball now, so all summer long, all fall, he's been on the court.

He's in more basketball shape, so that helps, especially when you're playing more than one position.

But I think from strictly a basketball standpoint, he's been way more aggressive offensively, shooting the ball really well, which is understandable. When you're playing more, you're more comfortable. Certainly, he's been around, so he knows what we need. He knows what he's capable of. He's been playing primarily with the younger guys, so he's been doing a really good job with the leadership aspect with them, while at the same time he feels a need to be more productive offensively, so he has been. That's been good to see.

Q. As a coach, to have another coach on the floor, he is so valuable it seems to your team because he knows the system, but he just has a nuance about him.

FRAN McCAFFERY: He does, and he's able to

communicate that, and he has the respect of the guys in the locker room. He says the right things at the right time.

But he just thinks about the game at a whole 'nother level in so many different ways. Like anticipating what teams are going to do to us, especially in the league. As you know, you've seen it, Michigan State plays different than Indiana plays different than Wisconsin. He knows what we're going to see from all those different teams, from all those different coaches, and having him out there -- we always talk about there's a difference between talking and communication. So when somebody is out there on the floor, you want chirping out there. You want guys talking.

But you've got to be saying the right things. It's got to be valuable information that's being translated from one person to another, not just making noise so it looks like you're playing hard. That doesn't do anybody any good. You've got to communicate. That's what he does.

It's all day, every day. We have some younger guys that are really good, and that type of information on a regular basis really makes a difference, and it shortens the learning curve for those guys.

Q. What have you seen from Kris with his increased role this year?

FRAN McCAFFERY: You know, he's playing with a lot of confidence. I think what he did last spring was really good for him. Then he went to the Damian Lillard camp and had a chance to play with those guys.

He's a very even-tempered guy, but he's also really smart. So he knows what he's capable of, and he knows what our team needs from him.

He's accepting that responsibility. He's been way more aggressive offensively. Not that he wasn't last year; he certainly was. But I think defensively he's always in the right place.

Last year he was late sometimes getting in foul trouble, limited his minutes. He hasn't been doing that. He's been really aggressive on the glass, because we certainly need that without Keegan. We need to go back to his freshman year without Luka. We need he and Filip to really pound the glass.



Q. In what ways do you expect Filip to take another step forward, and do you feel him growing in that role?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, I think Filip is just going to be a more confident guy and he's going to be more aggressive offensively. I also think his minutes will be great. He played a lot of minutes last year, was a starter for us, but he's going to be out there a lot. We need him out there.

Q. Patrick really came on last year offensively especially. What have you seen; has that continued?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, Patrick was -- we were tinkering with where to get him weight-wise. We kind of wanted to get him up to 211, 212, 213, and he was. He didn't like playing at that weight as much, and he's down to 205, 206. He's more comfortable in that range.

But I think you'll see a guy that from a confidence standpoint, shooting the ball from three but also when to play off two feet, when to play on one foot -- I think for him when he would rip and drive he was pretty much committed to going off one foot. A lot of times that's good, sometimes it wasn't.

But when you get the defender on the side of you, get to the front of the rim and you jump stop -- because he's a really good passer and he's not a turnover guy, so you can create from that because everybody is turning facing the ball, and then you can also make a post move, utilize your footwork. When you're 6'9" and you're at the front of the rim, now you can shot fake, step through, shoot your turnaround jumper, shoot a jump hook, shot fake, go right up, and then next time come off one leg and dunk it or shoot a low finger roll.

I think for him, you're going to see a guy that's, I think, more complete offensively.

Q. With Payton Sandfort obviously growing another inch, you've got the potential to have four guys on the floor, Payton, Patrick, Kris and Filip, 6'8" across the board. Do you see that as a feasible --

FRAN McCAFFERY: Those guys are on the floor a lot, and I like that about our team, but you could also see Ahron, Tony and Desonte on the floor, going smaller.

So we have some flexibility there. Then you throw Connor and Josh Dix in there, two 6'5" guys that are tough, that can play more than one position, and both can shoot the ball.

We've got a lot of different ways we can go with this team,

and that's primarily going to be where we're headed. We've got to get Josh and Riley ready, and those guys have made some progress, as well.

Q. How do you see the point guard situation in terms of who's going to play and how much, or is it just too soon to even know that?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think it's pretty soon. I mean, Ahron Ulis has been really good, Desonte has been really good. I've put Tony there some. Then we put Payton at the 2 spot, and we can go that route if we want to. Connor can play it.

So we have a number of different options there that I'm very comfortable with.

I've been really impressed with Ahron Ulis's professionalism and his mental approach from the end of last year until now.

I think it's what you would have expected from a junior who has played a decent amount. He tailed off at the end of the year, not his fault because -- I told you guys before, his wrist was really bothering him, so he was having trouble finishing, having trouble shooting the ball coming down the stretch, so he didn't play as much. But it feels good now.

Desonte is not playing like a freshman. He's very aggressive. He makes some freshman mistakes once in a while, but he can really get to the rim and create, and he can score. When he puts it on the deck, he goes to score.

We've got a lot of different guys who can score the basketball, and that's always a good thing.

Q. When did you cross the confidence line with Tony Perkins because he played some really good basketball for you down the stretch, and what about this year? Where is he going to go from here?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I think the first step for him was his freshman year when we had some injuries, and we put him in there and he produced. Young kid, just on the road, produced, had a really good summer. Was playing well, and so we made a decision to put J-Bo back at the point, and I think that was clearly what's best for him and what was best for our team.

Then I felt like in that sense, we were going to slide Tony into that 2 spot, and he was absolutely terrific.

I think he understood that we needed to make that change, and he needed to be a guy that was involved in stepping up and helping take our team to the next level, which is

exactly what he did.

Q. In terms of players, is Tony one of the toughest, and how important is it to have that toughness on the court as much as possible?

FRAN McCAFFERY: You know, I'd like to think that that's going to be a staple of our program. We're going to be tough. He certainly fits that mold. You look at the guys that have played for us over the years, if you're going to win in this league, you'd better have that mindset.

He's absolutely fearless. He was like that in high school. I mean, he had as good a high school senior year as anybody I've ever recruited. Nobody saw it because it was all what was going on.

But that kid is a gamer. I'll go to war with him any day.

Q. How important is it to get something from your two post players this year?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, it's going to be really important against certain teams. It won't be as important against other teams. But as you know, you look around our league, there's some pretty imposing 5 men. Not only in terms of talent but physical size. You look at Edey and Dickinson in particular, those guys, Cliff. There's just a number of guys that are a handful.

I thought Josh last year when we needed him to step up in those situations produced well, whether it was against Kofi, whether it was against Edey, he was good. Riley has got to get there.

Q. In the past you've gone through your all Big Ten caliber player on the court and then they've left and kind of shifted to whoever else is the next one, whether it's from Uthoff to White to Jock to the last few years Garza and now Keegan. Who kind of makes that transition? Is it kind of organic right now as to who might elevate, or do you see that person taking that step forward for what Keegan Murray brought?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think it could be a number of different guys. I think Kris, Patrick, Tony would probably be the first three that come to mind. But it's not just those three.

In terms of all-league, those three would jump to the front.

Q. You put out a letter for us with accomplishments in the last five seasons. Do you feel like your program is perhaps as good as it's ever been right now and poised to continue the arc upward?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I think that was the plan when I came here, when Mr. Barta hired me. That's what we hoped would happen.

I think you've seen a shift with how some coaches are doing it. They're building a team one year to another. I don't view myself as an AAU coach; I view myself as somebody who's going to continue to build a program.

So my hope is to continue along that path of success and continue to get better. I think this team is very capable of doing just that, but then the challenge will be to do it next year and the year after that and the year after that.

Q. One of the strengths of your team in the past has been how many players you've been and them being selfless. Do you see that in this group?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, we wouldn't settle for anything less than that. I don't think you would ever watch our team and just say, boy, that guy was selfish.

At the same time, everybody is completely confident in taking a shot at any given time. There might be some times where you would say, boy, maybe they should have milked the clock a little bit more and Peter Jok stepped up and pulled from three; Payton Sandfort pulled up from 26 feet; Bohannon, how many times did we see him do that.

So I look at myself as my primary responsibility is to get our guys to play with supreme confidence. That's the only way they'll ever be the best version of themselves. I say that all the time.

You also have to know that your teammates put winning above anything else, and that's where the unselfishness comes in. We're going to move and share the ball. We're going to push it and sometimes shoot it quick. We're always in attack mode. That takes a certain level of intelligence to know, okay, yeah, we want to play fast, yeah, we want to attack, but we don't want to drive into packs of people and cough it up because live ball turnovers typically lead to lay-ups at the other end.

You look at last year's team, our offensive productivity was really good, but we also led the nation in assist turnover ratio, so I think that's indicative of the character that we have in this program.

Q. I think you look at the versatility and experience combination kind of leaps off the page. I guess just with the style that you guys like to play, how much does it help to have that sort of versatility on this roster, and how would you compare it to maybe some

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

of the other rosters you've had in the past?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think you have to have it. I think you always worry in this league, going back to one of the previous questions, do you have enough rebounding? Everybody wants to play small these days. It's OK to play small because why, because you're going to shoot a lot of 3s, you're going to drive the ball. But can you rebound effectively night-in and night-out. That's the challenge.

Payton Sandfort is a really good rebounder. Tony Perkins is a really good rebounder. Connor McCaffery is a really good rebounder. Filip Rebraca is a really good rebounder, Kris. Patrick was solid; he's got to get a little bit better, and he has been. He's really focused on that.

If you're going to play smaller and go with that versatility that you're referring to, we can't just all be dribble draw and kick-and-shoot 3s. Somebody has to rebound the ball, sometimes you have to go back and get it and you've got to limit the other team to one shot if you want to run the fast break.

I say this all the time: We can run on makes, but we'd prefer to run on misses.

Q. Have you seen or do you think you'll see tangible positives from Keegan Murray and the impact that he potentially could make in the NBA?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah. I would say definitely. It's a little different now because there's more factors involved in the recruiting process. I think a lot of people look at Keegan and say, wait a minute, his high school ranking was 347 and he was the fourth pick in the draft, he came into a system where he was allowed to showcase his entire skill set and develop confidence in a system that was successful.

That's always going to pay dividends on the recruiting trail. Young prospects, especially anybody in the 6'7" to 6'9" range is going to be excited about that.

Q. Talk about the challenge for Kris this year, overcoming comparisons to his brother and maybe some of the other challenges.

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think that's a very fair question. I would hope that people would just judge him -- we're watching Kris. Kris is playing for us. We're all Kings fans. We love Keegan and hope he's the Rookie of the Year. We're so proud of him. He was MVP of the Summer League. The leading scorer in the game the other night, his first game. We just couldn't be happier for him, but he's not here -- Kris is here, and it's Kris' turn.

I think it'll be great for him. He'll miss his brother. Those guys were incredibly close, but we need him to do a lot of different things for this basketball team to be successful, and he's going to have that opportunity. He's on a big stage. He can get it off the glass and push it himself. He can shoot 3s when he wants. He can post-up when he wants. He's going to be out there most of the time unless he's in foul trouble. Like I said, he's been really good with that defensively. I've been really impressed with him being in the right place. I'm excited for him. I think he's excited for it, as well.

Q. Defensively your team made strides last year; do you think they can take it up another step this year?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think we can. We have the ability to do that. We can put pressure on the ball. We can be in the passing lane. When you start looking at defensive numbers, it comes down to rebounding because if you're giving up second shots, typically that's a high-percentage shot. It's an offensive rebound kick-out, open 3, it's an offensive rebound put-back that's a high-percentage shot.

The shooting percentages against your team and effectiveness in terms of point production are going to go down. But if you limit them to one, and we put pressure on the ball and we get our defense back, we can get everybody underneath the ball and communicate, switching, not switching, how we're playing, ball screens, all that stuff is great, but you have to get the rebound.

Q. What have you seen out of Josh Dix so far?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I'm impressed with him. The kid, we all saw how horrific an injury he had. Not many people come back that quickly. He was really smart and diligent with his rehab. He didn't rush it. It was hard for him in the nine weeks we had him here in June and July that he didn't get the chance to -- he was on the court but he was just doing 1-on-0 really. On Sept. 1 he started going 5-on-5, and he hasn't missed one minute of practice since. He has had some great days of practice where he has been absolutely spectacular, and there have been some days when he's clearly learning, but physically he looks really good.

Q. When you look at recruiting, name, image and likeness has the potential to probably reshape men's basketball more than any other sport. Have you noticed challenges in that arena, and if so, what are the --

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I think the challenges -- I mean, I think everybody in this room knows what the

challenges are, because it's pay for play. That's not what it was supposed to be. I've been adamant about the transfer portal rule is a bad rule, especially in conjunction with name, image and likeness, because that's where the pay for play comes in.

There was nothing wrong with the rule before. It was not a penalty. I've said that before. I'm an example of it. I transferred. You transfer, you don't lose any eligibility. You get a year of lifting, you get another year of an opportunity to be a student, a double major, start a masters. You're in school for an extra year. There's no negative there.

But to declare every college basketball player a free agent is foolish, and that's what they've done.

Q. We're hearing about new guardrails for the transfer portal and NIL. Do you know anything that's going to come down?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I do not. I don't see any. I hope you're right. I don't see it.

Q. A lot of college basketball at the top, top players are five-star freshmen or transfers. Plenty of good programs like yours use developmental or have developmental plans. Not that one is right or one is wrong, but what do you feel is the difference with a program like yours that has the developmental program?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, my hope is that when you recruit somebody -- and not everybody is great the first minute they get here. There was never that expectation. When I first got into this, you're supposed to be pretty good and then get better. You look at Luka (Garza), he was pretty good his freshman year. Obviously he was just under 12 points a game. It's not like anybody thought, boy, this guy is definitely going to be the National Player of the Year a couple years from now, but he was because he kept working.

You put him in a system and you watch film with him and you help him in the weight room and you do skill development with him, and that's what culture is, and that's what building a program is. That's what we've continued to try to do.

I think if you do it that way and you treat your guys the right way, they'll be less likely to leave. We've had some guys leave, but it hasn't been mass exodus like it has been at some places.

I think our department, our coaching staff, we really are

cognizant of making this a tremendous experience for our players across the board, whether it be academic support, how we feed them, how we travel, giving them every opportunity to be successful.

But if you coach them up right and you're honest and transparent, I think most of the kids that we bring in -- I always said the first thing that I look at in recruiting is character, so if you recruit character guys, then they'll behave the right way.

But there is an expectation that there's a lot of money out there, and hey, it's nothing personal, but I can get X number of dollars somewhere else. Those days have come for certain players and certain programs. It's not even like their prospects are demanding it, but they somewhat are expecting it, then all of a sudden it's offered, OK, I'll jump on it.

I think we have to continue to work hard and be competitive in the NIL market, which we have been. I've been very active myself in that arena. It's all new for every one of us. But I want my guys to know that I'm out there fighting for them to help them be in a position to profit from what is, I think, a really good rule, the NIL, so that our guys do profit from their name, image and likeness.

I've said this before publicly and I'll say it again today. I'm not going to give a bunch of money to a high school kid that I'm not giving to one of the guys that's already played for me. I'm not going to do that. That could be foolish over the long haul. Maybe we'll lose a guy or two. But if we get to the point where we're paying our guys a substantial amount of money and then we can offer the same money to that other guy, OK, we'll do it then.

That's happened this spring and summer to guys that we were recruiting. That's the world we live in. Things change. A lot of you guys have been doing what you're doing just like me for a long time. But a lot of changes over the course of the time that I've been coaching.

A lot of them are really good, some of them maybe not as good, but let's be honest; we just signed a \$7 billion TV deal and the NCAA Tournament was a multibillion dollar TV deal before that. So it was inevitable that the players should share in some of that revenue.

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