

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

Wednesday, January 4, 2023

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

Coach Fran McCaffery Men's Basketball Press Conference



Q. You said you noticed something off with Patrick a few weeks ago. What did you see?

FRAN McCAFFERY: He has struggled with this for a while. I think he said it pretty well, in terms of how he feels and how his body feels at any point in time in terms of his eating and sleeping and so forth. His energy level isn't where it needs to be.

He's pretty transparent about how he feels, and so we're just trying to help him feel better.

Q. Did he try to fight through it? He didn't want to let people down maybe?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, he's always done that. He's always been able to. He dealt with this in high school. He's always been able to kind of fight through. A pretty tough kid in that sense. And pretty focused. So he would lock into the game plan and really work on certain things that he thought would be effective. But I think it's been really hard for him the last couple weeks.

Q. How do you balance being his head coach and his father?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I think father first, just concerned about his well-being. But then if he's struggling in the game, coach him up, then assess where he is physically, then that, of course, is going to affect his minutes if his stamina is an issue, which it has been recently. We keep an eye on it.

Q. I think a lot of players would just say they're taking a leave of absence due to personal reasons, but Patrick was very transparent and thorough with the way he feels. Were there conversations about his being transparent with the public and trying to lead by example on the continuation of why it's a stigma?

FRAN McCAFFERY: There was, and we talked about it at length. Quite honestly, my first inclination was to keep it simple and not be vague but just very simple and work

through it. It was really his, and quite frankly, Connor's, thoughts were to be open about it and discuss it directly, which I agreed with, and they of course talked it over with their mother, as well.

I think they felt it's more important to -- I think in terms of how everybody views it, but I think more importantly, his teammates in the locker room needed to know specifically what was going on, so he addressed them first. Then felt it was important to, as you said, be transparent: Okay, this is how I feel, and this is why I'm struggling. Then we all sat down with Matt and constructed how he was going to verbalize it.

I thought he did a really good job of that. I think it's important. The outpouring of support has been tremendous from a variety of different people, people we know, people we don't know, many of whom are experiencing the same things and going through the same struggles.

I think that's helpful for all of us. So we'll just take it day by day right now.

Q. Building on what you just said, it's been less than 24 hours since this has been public, but it does look like there's been an overwhelming response entirely -- not only supportive, but people saying, I know what you're going through. In a roundabout way, could this turn out to be a real positive for people?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I hope so. I've gotten so many messages from folks that said, okay, I've been dealing with this, people that I know, that I never knew were dealing with it; my son has been dealing with it -- I have two daughters, both of whom are dealing with it.

I think when you're in that position, I think you feel very alone. You're the only one going through it. But then when you find out that there's so many people in every walk of life -- Kevin Love has been very open about it, Lane Johnson from the Eagles. There's so many high-profile professional athletes that have gone through this. I'm sure a lot of them have gone through it, every said anything. We're kind of programmed to be that way. We just keep battling and we don't say anything, and we just compete.

But it's something that is real, and we are in a position, I think, as a program, as an institution, with the resources

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we have around here to help him. We have one of the best hospitals in the world, some of the best professionals available to him, and he's taking advantage of that. We are.

Very thankful for that, that we're here. We said the same thing when he went through his cancer surgeries and treatment, that we were lucky to be here. We'll get there.

Q. The leave of absence, is he away from the team entirely or --

FRAN McCAFFERY: No, he does not want to be, either. I wondered about that because sometimes when you take a leave of absence, that's what that means, right; you remove yourself from the situation. He's removing himself from the competition part, but it was important to him, and he verbalized this to his teammates, that he remain supportive of them, so he'll be at practice today, he'll be at the game tomorrow, he'll travel with us to New Jersey. So that was important to him.

Q. He's always been such a joyful guy; did you sense any of that joy diminish at all?

FRAN McCAFFERY: No. You guys have been around him, and he's the guy that makes everybody laugh. I mean, if you were with us at dinner, team dinner the night before the Penn State game, he's the one that's joking and laughing, and they're all laughing with him.

I think there are different times when it manifests itself, typically in the morning and at nighttime late. Pretty much during the day he's fine if you're around him. But it does affect his eating and sleeping, which is certainly going to affect his performance.

Q. The lives that your players lead are not normal to start with. What would you do as a coach to try to let everybody know along the way that you've got to take care of yourself?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I had a conversation this morning with one of my former players, who I coached in the '80s, we went through this with him. He's a very successful family man, high school principal now, he's in his 50s, and we kind of stumbled through it in those days. We really didn't know what to -- we just put our arms around him and loved him up and helped him. We were there for him. We communicated with him. We did get him with a professional who really helped him. I talked to him this morning.

Now, we're I think in a way better place in terms of people talking about it, people knowing and understanding what's available and knowing that it's not a journey that you're going to go through by yourself.

I think knowing that, it's very helpful, I think, to your ability to function properly and start to feel better.

I'm very confident that he will because of the things we have in place and the way he's handled it so far. I'm hopeful that it does shed light on something that is way more prevalent than I think most people realize, and you're right; I think when you specifically look at the lives that our players lead and how public it is and the pressures that they face day in and day out, you think, okay, well, he's in a shooting slump - he being any player. Well, there may be a number of reasons why they're struggling shooting the ball or maybe why they're struggling physically and their stamina is not where it needs to be.

There are a lot of factors involved, and I think in some ways, it gives us pause and the opportunity to analyze maybe some other things that are involved in a particular player's performance on any particular day.

Q. I know it's very early, but are there any benchmarks or anything you're looking for in terms of when he might be able to come back?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think he was very determined to not say, okay, it's going to be two weeks, it's going to be 10 days. It's going to be when I feel better. When I feel like I'm better and I'm feeling better about myself, I'm feeling better physically and I can help our team, then I'm going to come back.

He also was very adamant, I'm not walking away from the game. I love the game; I'm good at it. But right now I'm not where I need to be.

I think that took an incredible level of maturity to be able to stand up and say that.

Q. Given what he's been through and what he's overcome, can that help him now in some ways?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think, absolutely. I think certainly he's overcome a great deal of adversity, and like I said, he dealt with this in high school because that was shortly right after his original diagnosis and subsequent surgeries and treatment.

Q. You mentioned that he's battled this for a while, and you mentioned the Kevin Love thing and how athletes have been more open about this. Is that something he followed when he was starting to go through these mental health things?

FRAN McCAFFERY: He's very well aware of that, yes,

and very recently, one of his former teammates, Tyrell Terry, essentially retired from the NBA. They were on the same AAU team. We recruited Tyrell for a while. He went to Stanford. Was the first pick in the second round, terrific young guy. They traveled around the country together and got very close. That team was very close.

I think that hit him hard when he announced his retirement. He's 24 and he essentially retired from the game, and he's an NBA player.

But I do think Patrick was very open about, I don't want to walk away from the game. I'm not doing that. I'm coming back. I just need some time.

Q. On the court, do you expect Connor to slide into the starting lineup?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah.

Q. Transitioning to Indiana, starting the Big Ten slate off with two road games, opportunity to get back home, what type of challenges do they present?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, they're a really good team. I think we all know that. One of the best players in the country in Trayce. Veteran group. Got a lot of guys back from last year. Really good team last year. We had two great games with them last year.

But getting Race Thompson back, I think that was big. They've got some really good young guys, as well. Miller Kopp is a fifth-year senior, shot maker. Trey Galloway is a really good player. Tamar Bates is really stepping up in his sophomore year.

They've got a lot of size. They've got depth. They're a team that I think most people felt would challenge for a National Championship at the start of the year.

For us, we recognize the challenge but also appreciate the opportunity.

Q. Is there any update on Josh Dix?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think Josh will be fine. He did not practice yesterday. He'll do a little more today. I think he'll be a go for the game. But it will be a decision made tomorrow.

Q. Josh Ogundele, is he available?

FRAN McCAFFERY: He will not be, no.

Q. Payton has the same kind of length that Patrick

does, shooting ability; what do you expect him to maybe --

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, I would expect Payton to step up. He's going to have great opportunity in terms of minutes, and you're right, his flexibility will be very beneficial because we're losing a guy who's 6'9", we need a guy who's got size and can swing to the front court but also step into the backcourt and make threes. So that will be important.

I'm really excited for the opportunity for him as well as Josh Dix and Dasonte Bowen. All those guys are going to have to step up. They're going to play a ton.

Then obviously we may go to Riley Mulvey and Carter Kingsbury. Carter of course played some in the Wisconsin game. Riley is making some moves to where I feel like it could be possible that he plays, especially with the fact that they have a number of 6'9" guys.

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