

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

Thursday, January 5, 2023

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

Coach Fran McCaffery Men's Basketball Press Conference



Iowa 91, Indiana 89

Q. What does it say about the team that they got down 21, 22 early on and didn't fold?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think it says a lot about the character of our team because you guys have all seen a lot of games over the years, the biggest mistake teams make in a situation like that, you always hear us say, don't try to get it back all at once. What does that mean? You start quick shooting the ball, you start taking an inordinate amount of threes and then now they're running it back and they're dunking the ball and all of a sudden 21 becomes 31 and you have no shot.

We just tried to press them a little, be active in our zone, and execute our offense the way we planned, because early on we couldn't get anything to drop. We had a couple good looks, they didn't go, and they were capitalizing.

I was just really pleased with our composure at that point.

Q. The frontcourt matchup was pretty big. How did your guys execute against a couple of the best big guys in conference?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, Trayce is a handful. They go to him, which anybody would. You're going to go to him. He's a veteran guy. He has tremendous athletic power, size and strength. We wanted to play man-to-man and give some help, but then we had to go to the zone, and sometimes Filip is in there by himself. Great job by Filip lasting as long as he did. He played 38 minutes.

It was a great matchup with Filip and Kris and Trayce and Race while he was in there.

Q. With Filip, Connor and Kris, you had a sixth-year senior, a fifth-year senior. How big was that leadership during this comeback?

FRAN McCAFFERY: It's really important because we had to play a lot of young guys tonight, too. What can you say

about Payton Sandfort; he was phenomenal. Josh Dix was phenomenal. And Dasonte was really good in the first half. Ulis was solid as always.

I thought when they're in there, at crunch time, your young guys, they have to execute. I thought that last timeout, they called the wrong play. That was on me. We only had four seconds, and I was trying to run a quick hit, didn't work. But again, we didn't panic.

I said this to the team, we had probably the best defensive possession of the whole game, and they shoot a shot that barely hits the backboard, it bounces, the kid, he lays it in with half a second to go up six. I think a lot of teams would have quit right there and they did not. That says a lot about our team.

But those guys you mentioned, yeah, they're the heart and soul of the team.

Q. You talked about Josh Dix, how he stepped up. Defensive intelligence as far as double-teams go, as far as closing out the corner, what can you say about playing a young guy like that in crunch time and him executing at that level?

FRAN McCAFFERY: You've heard me talk about him. He's a really good player. If anything I look at his box score and say, I need to get him more than nine minutes because he never comes in and makes mistakes. He does everything right, and he plays three positions and he knows three positions. He handles the ball. He defends, physical. He's a tough kid now. You're right, his performance in the nine minutes that he was out there was phenomenally impressive.

Q. Payton knew he was probably going to have extra responsibility tonight. Does that in some strange way free a guy up to play better?

FRAN McCAFFERY: You're right, he did know he was going to play more. He practiced well prior to this game and played with a lot of confidence.

But I do think knowing he's playing -- we needed a bigger guy. We needed another scorer. We needed a versatile guy that's smart. His tip-in was huge. His buckets early when we were struggling were a big part of this victory.

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

He's not a mistake guy. So if he's hitting shots, he's really special. But he'll beat you in a lot of different ways.

Q. What about Connor's baseball pass at the end, kind of make that up on the fly there?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I thought -- he did the same thing in the Big Ten championship game. Probably equally important was the possession before, because remember, we were out of time-outs, so we've got to get the ball inbounds, so you can call a press offense if you want to and let the ball bounce and line up and let them get their defense set, or you can grab the ball and throw it to Payton, which is what you want anyway. He used to do that all the time; he would just grab it and throw it to Bohannon. So that was huge.

Now granted, okay, we wanted Payton to get the ball. He makes both. Then the next time you know they're going to be up. They have to be up. Did you see him? He just kind of went like that to Kris, just let it go.

A lot of times the inbounder in that situation is afraid to throw it: I don't want to throw it away, what if I underthrow it and they steal it and they hit a three. He just said, look, they're face guarding, we're going that way, and then another snappy play by Kris; he caught it and just dribbled and the clock went out.

Q. I think you guys only allowed three offensive rebounds in the second half. Connor only had two rebounds on the night, but you guys still out-rebounded Indiana. What's that say about the rest of your showing up?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, we had guys blocking out, we had guys that were physical. When you're in zone, you're kind of all over the place. That's why a lot of coaches don't like to play zone, because you don't have direct block-out responsibilities. You've got to go find somebody because you're flying around.

That's a big part of the game because they're typically a team that pounds people on the glass.

Q. Kris and Filip said they felt like you really needed this one; does this feel like maybe a launching off point for you now?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, but like I look at it differently. Every game like this, when you watch, every game in our league is like this. We just had one. We lost it. You watch the games today, Ohio State-Purdue. That's the way it is.

You've got to figure out a way to win some of them, and like Pat said, it's going to come down to a lot of times your veteran guys and the decisions they make and how they help the young guys along.

Q. What does this do confidence-wise? In two of the losses, Wisconsin and Penn State, you were down, came back and then weren't able to complete it, but to do it tonight, how does this help your confidence?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, we got the Wisconsin game to overtime. We got the last possession and didn't score at Penn State. So being able to finish one off and have sort of a jubilant locker room I think is really important.

Q. You went with Payton to start the second half. That group plays I believe almost 12 minutes and ends up grabbing the lead. What did you like from that lineup?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I thought they played both ends. I thought they executed offensively. They were doing a lot of switching. They were physical. They were physical on half-court defense as a team, and those guys have just fought through.

It takes a lot of energy to continuously run motion and then to press and then to be active in the zone and then to rebound both ends. So you're right, 12 minutes, that's a long time, but I just felt like that group was really connected.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports