

# University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

Friday, March 3, 2023

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

## Coach Fran McCaffery Men's Basketball Press Conference



**Q. You have a couple seniors you're going to recognize before the game. What do those guys mean to this program?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, let's start with Filip. I can't imagine a better fit for a guy who transferred than Filip Rebraca, not only in terms of arriving when we really needed what he brought to the table, but how he fits with our style of play, with his teammates in this league. Just a guy who is the -- he personifies class in everything that he does, his approach. He's been zero maintenance from the day he got here, incredibly hard worker, and toughest guy in the building. He's just one tough guy and just keeps getting better. I think that's what's fun as a coach to watch.

He came here with a desire to prove that he could play at this level, and he certainly has done that. I think he's an all-league player.

Connor obviously is a little different because we had this conversation last year (laughter), but I'll say it again. I'm just so thrilled that he came back because he was looking at his options. He graduated with two degrees, and am I going to go into the business world, am I going to start my coaching career, do I keep playing, and obviously he's been incredibly impactful with this team, especially with the injuries that we've had and really being an incredible leader along with Filip in that locker room.

His performance has been outstanding. But we've said it before, the true value is in his ability to be on winning teams, no matter who we have. When you look at four years in high school, five years in college, over 200 wins, that's pretty impressive.

**Q. Fair to say you'll never have another senior class with a 24 year old and a 25 year old in it?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Probably not, and I didn't expect to, but there's a lot of those guys. Think about Walker from Nebraska, he's seven years out of high school. He's tremendous.

Those guys are different. They're so professional in their approach because of all the experience that they have. It's really important -- you talk about, okay, the importance of that in a locker room, when you have young guys, they rely on that type of interaction, communication. It's great to see. It really helps them as they move forward.

**Q. How different is an 18-year-old as opposed to a 25-year-old when you're dealing with them on a daily basis?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, there's so many things that you're dealing with, whether it be adjustment to being away from home and the academic side, the social media side, the length of the season, when we start practice, how many games we play, the travel. There's so many things that are coming at you, and some are just better equipped to handle that right away. For some the transition is seamless; others it takes a little longer. That's where the maturity of the other guys in the locker room really helps.

When you have a guy that's been around, they just don't rattle. They don't rattle with the crowd, they don't rattle on the road. They stay the course. Nobody is going to go undefeated. You're going to lose, you're going to have a bad game personally, your team is going to have a bad game, you're going to have great days, and the ability to maintain that maturity and understanding of what's coming next is absolutely critical.

**Q. Coaches when their sons are on the team, they usually only get four years with them. You got the extra year. What has that extra time with Connor meant to you?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: It has been an absolute blessing. I don't know any other way to put it. It's been so much fun on a number of different levels. Obviously he's been an incredibly valuable player, which is great, but watching him enjoy this experience with his friends. He's had tremendous friendships, whether it's Luka Garza and Austin Ash or the guys that are on this team, Keegan and Kris, his brother Patrick. You could just keep going. That's what you want for your children. Especially for he and Patrick to be doing it together, it's been great.

**Q. With the Big Ten Tournament coming up and winning it last year, what do you expect from your**

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

**team this year?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: All we're thinking about right now is Nebraska on Sunday. We'll deal with the Big Ten Tournament Sunday evening, I guess.

**Q. I know every year there's parity, and you can say things, but this year seems like -- is it even more unusual?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, you're right. We say that every year in this league, but no more than this year. This is indicative of the quality of players and coaching top to bottom. You just never know what's going to happen.

As good as Rutgers is, you're not surprised when Minnesota wins. We went up there, and they fought us every possession, and we were thrilled to get a win. People sometimes look at a record and say, well, they're not any good. Well, yeah, they've had some injuries, and that's one of the reasons their record is what it is. It wouldn't be that – and if they had Garcia the whole time.

We just have respect for everybody in this league, whether we're home or away. Who shows up, if anybody is hurt, it doesn't matter. We still don't know what the Big Ten Tournament is going to look like in terms of seeding until Sunday.

**Q. Tominaga has really come on strong for them the past season. What stands out about his game and how difficult of a cover is he? Seems like he's one of the more crafty guys in the league.**

FRAN McCAFFERY: He's really crafty. He moves so well without the ball. Everything he does has a purpose to it, whether it's curling or back cutting; he realizes if you're top blocking him, if you're chasing him. They do a good job, also, of looking for him and trying to get him the ball. He's a terrific shooter, but he is not a shooter. He's a good player. He keeps coming.

He's been an important part of the development of this team, especially after they had the two guys get hurt. He's stepped up along with Griesel and Walker, but Wilcher and Lawrence, they have a bunch of guys that are really playing well. Sam Hoiberg is playing extremely well. It's opportunity for other guys when guys go down, and they've made the best of it.

**Q. I don't know how often it happens where you play a team at the very beginning of your conference slate and then you get them in the final game, but what have been your impressions of Nebraska throughout the season?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: When we played them the first time, I think they were feeling pretty good about their ability to contend in this league. Then they stumbled a little bit when the two guys got hurt, not much, because you had to figure it out. You take two starters out of the starting lineup, that's going to be an adjustment. They adjusted quickly. I think you have to give Fred a lot of credit there, because they never complained about it, they just kept plugging, put some guys in there; okay, Wilcher, your role has changed. He was a good player, always was a good player. Tominaga, your role has changed. Other guys like Breidenbach has got an opportunity to play more; Hoiberg has got an opportunity to play more, and they fully intended to step up and perform, which they've done. They've had some great wins, a couple tough overtime wins, they've come back, which says a lot about them.

When you get behind 17 and come back and win in overtime, it says a lot about the character of your team.

**Q. Do you have an idea of maybe what kind of coach Connor might be in the future?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, I think he'll be one that connects well with the players, that will study the game. He'll be even keel, competitive and demanding but fair. I think he'll enjoy every day in the profession. He won't look at it as a grind. The grind is the fun of it in so many ways.

**Q. What do you guys have to do better this time against Nebraska?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Pretty much everything. We were terrible in that game. That's not to say that they weren't good, because they had a lot to do with it. We didn't shoot it well. I don't think we executed very well offensively. They're not an easy team to guard. They have a lot of different weapons. So our defense has to get better. Our ball movement, our execution. Anything short of that obviously it will be hard.

**Q. Filip to do what he's done, just to go from last year to this year, the big jump, I know you believed in him, but was it simply just confidence? What's been the biggest noticeable difference over the course of the season?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think obviously he's way more confident because he knows exactly what to expect. Pretty much anybody that goes from the first year in the league to the next year, you're just going to have a much better feel for what we want and what's necessary. You have to remember even though he's an older guy, he learned our offense for the first time last year, and he's going against

Kofi and Dickinson and those guys. Big adjustment from where he came from.

But really smart, tough, skilled player. But he's way more confident in his ability to make plays, which is what he did before, and which we continued to try to encourage him to do. The way he plays out of a short role, the way he plays out of the post, the way he plays in transition, his comfortability handling the ball, getting rid of it, keeping it has been tremendous.

**Q. To go from 0-3 to start conference play after the Eastern Illinois loss and now you're potentially a win away from locking up the 2 seed in the Big Ten Tournament, how did this team stick together?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I don't think there was ever a doubt that they would. We had a tough loss against Wisconsin early. We weren't at full strength, but some guys had an opportunity to play well and step up. I felt like we had enough talent, enough depth to perform well in this league. We had some really good wins at home. The win at Rutgers was huge at the time especially. Had some games where we didn't shoot it well but came back and didn't let it linger and just stayed the course like we always try to do. I was really proud of the guys and how they responded, and most importantly how they continued to believe in each other.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports