

# University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

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## Coach Fran McCaffery

Men's Basketball Press Conference



**Q. At point guard, are you expecting one to emerge, or do you think this could be a point guard by committee this year, not necessarily committee, but multiple?**

COACH MCCAFFERY: We do have a lot of options at that position. I think we'll see Tony there at times. I think Dasonte and Brock and Josh Dix can all play that position. Normally you don't have that many options.

Fortunately, all of those guys can also make shots. So sometimes they're sort of forced to be in a distributor position because no one really scores at all. But at the end of the day, we just want to push it.

I think those guys are good assist guys with no turnovers. Their numbers from when they started here, and then obviously since the young guys got here, they're really good. And we track that stuff every day. So I trust all four of those guys to do a good job there.

**Q. How much has Dasonte grown in the last few months, do you think?**

COACH MCCAFFERY: I think last year for Dasonte, it was a good year in a lot of ways, but as the season went on, as you saw, we shortened the bench a little bit. In all honesty, I probably should have played him more. I said that before.

He and Josh Dix, I thought I should have played them both more. They both played a fair amount, but they both deserve to play more and should have played more. With Dasonte, we played him at both spots. Sometimes when you bring a guy in you only play him at one spot, he develops in that spot.

For him, we were moving him back and forth because he can score and he can distribute. I think the growth part of his game is he's moving the ball. He's getting rid of the ball more to our shooters, to our guys in the post, on the break, and he's been really good. So I've been impressed with him.

**Q. For people like me who haven't seen Ben Krikke play, what does he do, and how do you see him fitting with you?**

COACH MCCAFFERY: Well, he's a perfect fit for us. And that's why we went so hard at him out of the portal. Clearly, we needed that position with the departure of Kris Murray.

He's different than Kris, but he's big and physical. He's athletic. He's got an unbelievable motor. He can really score and never stops working. He's very competitive.

I think most importantly he understands motion, and as you know, if you're going to transition to motion, you have to have guys who understand how to play with four other people, how to play fast without making mistakes, how to move without the ball, how to screen and get people open, how to slip when they're switching and that comes with experience, sometimes. He's obviously an experienced guy.

So when you look at the fact that we have six new players -- four of them are freshmen, so you have the learning curve that goes with any freshman -- but when you get a guy like him, learning curve is a lot shorter because of the experience that he has.

**Q. You played Payton a lot at the 4 on your foreign trip. How did that feel to you guys?**

COACH MCCAFFERY: I don't know if we said we played him at the 4. Maybe he lined up at the 4, maybe he defended the 4. But he did the same things he always does. He runs around and scores and moves well without the ball.

I will say this, to go along with your question, he is making a concerted effort to rebound a lot more. He's always been good at that. Played him a lot at the 2 last year, it's a little bit harder from there. So his rebounding numbers have been consistently good, in particular, on the offensive end. If you want to rebound you have to rebound offensively, as well.

I think he recognizes that we might be playing essentially four perimeter guys and a big at times. So that's great because we can spread the floor a lot of guys can make



3s. As you know, somebody has got to rebound.

**Q. What are your early impressions of how all the new faces are coming together out of the 4 and should be early impacters?**

COACH MCCAFFERY: The young guys have done well. Not surprised. We expected all four of them to contribute. Brock has made a seamless transition. I think probably Sandfort, we all know what he is. Those two guys are Mr. Basketball in their state.

And Pryce can really shoot it but he's also incredibly versatile. Owen Freeman, he's going to be an impact player for us. A really good rebounder, physical. He's starting to figure it out. And Ladji, same thing. He's 260 pounds and knows how to play. He can put it on the floor. He can move the ball and cut. He's doing a little more posting up.

He played a lot on the perimeter even at that size in high school. But along with Owen, those two guys are first class rebounders, big time rebounders. We obviously need that. When you look at the fact that Connor, Kris and Filip played 3,000 minutes, that's a lot of minutes last year. And so we need some people to step in and make sure we can rebound in this league.

**Q. For the last four years, 20-point All-American guys, is it almost an automatic that things are going to change in terms of balance, in terms of responsibilities and so forth?**

COACH MCCAFFERY: I think that's a possibility, a strong possibility because I think our team is deeper this year maybe than it's been in quite some time.

We probably have 12 guys that I'd be comfortable playing, and that's not usually the case. So that could manifest itself that way where we have a number of double-figure scorers, none of them averaging 20. But we have a number of guys who are capable of averaging 20.

I think starting with Tony Perkins and obviously Payton and Patrick, those guys are all double-figure scorers returning.

So depending on the minutes that they get and how much we go to our bench with our young guys, that will obviously determine whether or not they can be 20-point scorers but they're capable of.

**Q. Between those four freshmen, any of them start to really elevate? Do you see them carving out a role with this team early on?**

COACH MCCAFFERY: All four of them are going to play. They're all good players. They're not mistake guys. They compete. Sometimes you have a guy whose body is not ready. They're good, they're going to be good, but it's going to take a year. I wouldn't say that for any of those guys.

And they all bring something to the table that's a little different. That's why I recruited them in the first place.

So I think in any given year -- and I mean this -- one of them may start, but any given year, depending on what we had, all four of those guys I would feel comfortable starting as freshmen because of their feel for the game and their body and their talent level. So I think they all deserve to play; they all will play.

**Q. Have you seen Brock play on the court? When it comes to [inaudible] and winning a state championship in Illinois what is it about his intangibles that you saw that you liked and hopefully that you're seeing now here?**

COACH MCCAFFERY: There's few players that are as good as he is with the ball in his hands. He just makes plays for people, consistently. And he keeps the aggressiveness that we want offensively all the time. He keeps coming at you, and he keeps attacking you. His decision-making is really good, typically.

He's had some days where he tries to hit too many home runs and turns the ball over a little bit, but he comes right back. He's going to keep coming at you.

The other thing is he can score. A lot of really creative guys off the bounce, they can't shoot the ball outside. They can't hit the pull-up and they can't hit a 3. He can.

He understands if we're running sets, if we're running motion. He understands time and score. And it's not often easy for a young guy to be a leader. He just has innate leadership ability.

**Q. Over the years a lot of players have talked about you instilling confidence in them; you talk about instilling confidence in your players. As a coach, how do you do it early on with a freshman? And what's the key to get them to have that level of confidence?**

COACH MCCAFFERY: I think the most important thing, when they first get here, it's new and you have to be patient. That's the great thing about when the rules changed and we could start doing things in June, we could get those young guys ready.

There's no screaming and yelling in practice. It's teaching. It's we're going to get better. We watch film together and they learn and they grow. And they develop confidence because they're not on edge that if I turn the ball over I'm going to get yelled at. If I miss this shot I'm going to get yelled out or I'm going to get yanked.

The only thing we will address, was it a bad shot. If you took a bad shot, well, that's going to be addressed. But if you're open, and as you know, I don't care what the shot clock shows, if you're open shoot the ball.

In the last four minutes things might change. Now we have to think. We've got to think a little more time and score, protect the lead or go to late-game package if we're behind.

But I stay pretty positive with them. They stay pretty positive with themselves. I will oftentimes correct them if they passed up a shot. If they passed up an opportunity to attack. If I felt at any point in time that they were getting tentative, I would address that just as directly as I would if somebody made a mistake.

I think everybody's comfortable in their own skin in this environment. And obviously as we get closer to the first game, there comes a little bit of a greater sense of urgency to do exactly what we need done.

But when you play the speed that we play and we're trying to score in the 90s, there's going to be some mistakes but as you know a couple years ago, we lead the nation in assist-to-turnover ratio. Connor did it twice. We're going to make more free throws than our opponents attempt.

So that style is going to create some situations where guys might go off script a little bit. But if you don't have the luxury to do that, you'll never be the best version of yourself. And that's my responsibility to get them to play with supreme confidence.

**Q. What do you expect from Tony Perkins this year?**

COACH MCCAFFERY: I expect a lot from Tony. I think he expects a lot from himself. We've had good leaders in the last couple of years, whether it be Luka or J-Bo or Connor. Kris and Keegan in their own way, they were both more quiet, but incredibly hard workers, incredibly consistent and played like veterans even when they were young.

So who is going to do that this year? It's going to be Tony, Payton and Patrick. They're our three veteran guys. So that's what I need Tony to do, especially if he's going to play some at the point.

**Q. How have you seen some growth out of Tony and Patrick with this being their senior year, last year in the program?**

COACH MCCAFFERY: Well, they both have another year after this if they want it. It's the new world. But they're mature guys. They're smart kids. They want to win. They both have competed in a program that had a winning culture.

Even when Tony wasn't playing as much his freshman year we had Luka and Weezy and those guys, we were a high seed, and he got a chance to experience all that. How you conduct yourself in practice, how you conduct yourself in the offseason, how do you handle a loss, how do you handle a bad night, you had a bad night? And then how do you help those young guys get through that?

At some point you're going to have a stinker; how do you respond? How do you come back from that? And sometimes it's more important that those guys do it than the coaches themselves. You hear it from your teammates.

Patrick and Tony have been really lucky. They've had great examples. Connor was really good for Tony. Connor knew exactly how to talk to him. And he did the same for a lot of other people. And he was a terrific leader. So hopefully Patrick and Tony and Payton can step up in that area.

**Q. The conference has expanded again. What do you think about the expansion within the conference and if you're only playing teams one time a year basically the entire conference one time a year?**

COACH MCCAFFERY: I would say this, Tom. Don't overthink it. That's the world we live in. Conference expansion. We're not the only team that did it, not the only conference that did it. Everybody else did it. We can debate all the reasons for it. We know what the main reasons are.

I think it makes our conference pretty impressive. We're bi-coastal. A lot of big name programs, a lot of teams with expectations to make the NCAA Tournament. A lot of interest from a TV standpoint, from a fan base standpoint. You think about the number of alums throughout the country from all those places and how they'll support this conference.

So I don't look at it like, okay, do I like it, do I not like it; should it have gone differently? I deal with what it is, what the facts are. This is who is in our league, this is who we

play. They'll give us a schedule. It won't be the same teams every year. We'll prepare to play those guys when we see them on our schedule.

**Q. For most of the last four or five years, for what little it's worth, you guys have been undervalued in the preseason. Is this another such year?**

COACH MCCAFFERY: I think potentially -- and I think most coaches would also answer that question the same way -- we're not really concerned with what people think of us in the preseason. In all honesty how are you guys supposed to evaluate teams any more when rosters changed eight or nine guys?

Used to be pretty easy to do that. Okay. They've got four starters back and they've got their top two subs and X number of points back. They're probably going to finish in the top of the league.

But now who bought who? And what does that lead to? And sometimes it's really good. Sometimes it's not. The guy doesn't fit. So we have to wait. So we just approach it this way. We really like our team. I have a tremendous sense of maturity in that locker room. We've got a lot of different guys who can play. We have a lot of different guys who can bring things to the table.

Often times when you're not maybe thought of as much, it's because they don't think you can score. We don't have a problem there. We can score. We have a lot of guys who can make 3s. We have way more size than we probably have had in the last five years. So we should be able to rebound pretty well, which obviously triggers the break. So I feel really good about this team.

**Q. How important is it to always maintain that experienced core of players in this time of transfers and everything?**

COACH MCCAFFERY: I think it's really important because those guys remain in your system. You can sign a bunch of old guys that come in and they're all playing as individuals. They all sought something in particular that they were not happy about where they were. I'm going to get more shots I'm going to be the man. Then all of a sudden you're not and you have no chemistry and camaraderie in the locker room and everybody said, boy, I thought that team would do better.

They weren't a team. They were a bunch of individuals. So I think if you have a veteran group coming back and you have some veteran guys, maybe if they have some veteran guys that played but will now play more and certainly it's a lot easier especially when you're trying to

implement a system.

**Q. You mentioned Payton Sandfort might be one of those guys that could step up in the scoring, what have you seen about his game what you've seen lately makes you believe that?**

COACH MCCAFFERY: He's got a complete skill set that's why we recruited him in the first place. He's always been a great shooter. He was recognized by our league as Sixth Man of the Year. That's an impressive thing to have on your resumé because our league is so good and it's so deep.

I think you could look last year and there's probably three or four games that you could argue he won for us almost by himself. That's as impressive as well.

So he's physically in a really good place. Now he's in year three with going through the lifting cycles. So his body is in a good place. I think he's very confident in himself. And we need him to be special this year.

I think he expects that himself.

**Q. Just as looking at Ladji, watching some of this film, seems like a uniqueness to his play and different style of player you've had the past few years, how would you describe Ladji and how he can play?**

COACH MCCAFFERY: The thing about Ladji he's been impressive since he got here. There's more in there. I think my biggest challenge so far with him has been to get him to be more aggressive both physically in terms of posting up but more aggressive as a scorer because what he has done, he's been a physical defender and he's been a phenomenal rebounder, but he can score. And he can pass the ball. He moves the ball. He doesn't fight the game. He understands the game and makes plays and is a guy who comes from a very successful high school program that also had really good players.

So he wasn't asked, okay, you have to give us 25-10 or we have no chance to win. He wasn't nor was anybody else on that team that guy because they were all trying to get 12 to 15 points and win.

He knows how to win and there's times when I would just like to see him be a little more aggressive, shooting the ball, driving the ball, posting up, and I think we'll eventually see that.

**Q. Has there been just an individual or two that you've been really encouraged by, they've stood out as what they've done kind of up to this point?**

COACH MCCAFFERY: I think you could almost say that at the end of each week. We've been going since June. There's been weeks where I've said Brock and Price were really good then Ladji and Owen. I think Krikee is a guy that's really been consistent. He's been impressive. We hope and expected he would be that guy, especially because we had such a need in that area.

He has been special, I think, pretty much every day, and the other guys, I think, that you would have expected to be, Payton and Patrick and Tony, they have been, those three guys. But the freshmen have had very few days where you said, boy, it's going to be a while before they help us. They might have a bad day or two, but not many.

**Q. I think the first two games overseas Owen had like 31 rebounds. What have you seen from him from that perspective? How has he been able to be so good?**

COACH MCCAFFERY: What's impressive about that is he only played half the game. So that's really a lot of rebounds when you think about it. Now, the games were kind up and down and free-flowing, but still he was pounding the offensive glass and getting putbacks and scoring the ball as well. He's a guy that when we signed him we felt like, okay, he's going to be an impact player as a freshman. And again especially when the freshman is 6'10", Aaron White was 6'9", 195 when he was a freshman and we didn't know what he would end up being. He ended up being a really good player, not immediately. Took him about 30, 40% to get through the season. Owen is already 235 and he's pretty bouncy. And right now he's just trying to figure out where to go in the offense. And I just keep trying to tell him to trust his talent, just move without the ball and don't be afraid to shoot. His shot looks pretty good. He didn't shoot it as much in high school from the perimeter as I think he should have. He's worked on that and he's making perimeter shots, too.

**Q. Krikke was such a dominant player, leading (indiscernible) in scoring. At that position, is there ever concern going to the Big Ten and much bigger players that he wouldn't be able to keep up the same kind of production from that position?**

COACH MCCAFFERY: If he were 6-6, 195 and doing that at Valpo, but he's 6'9", 245. There's not many guys any bigger than him in our league, and he's quick and he's smart and he's tough and he's aggressive, to be honest with you I think it will be easier for him here because he got doubled and tripled way more there than he will here.

**Q. You mentioned Tony and Patrick could come back. How do you handle those conversations? Obviously**

**one will be with your own son, and how soon do you need to know because you're also filling out a recruiting class?**

COACH MCCAFFERY: You know what, I think that's a very fair question but one that doesn't really have a direct answer because I'm not going to sit down Tony and say, hey, what are you going to do two years from now? I need him to play well today in practice and be ready to lead this team, the same with Patrick, and you're right, that could potentially present problems as the season ends and they both say we're just going to play professional basketball somewhere, even if we're not drafted in the first round.

Or we're going to shop ourselves and try to make money at another university that's paying a lot of money. And that's not something we -- that was not a conversation we would have had five years ago, but that's reality.

So it's not something that I want them obsessing about. It's not something I'm going to obsess about. If they're here, that's great. If they go somewhere else, we'll get somebody else.

**Q. With the mixture of the youth and the experience, have you seen that chemistry grow quite a bit since June, and how do you --?**

COACH MCCAFFERY: I tried to mix the lineups up a little bit so that they're not always playing with the same guys because that's what's going to happen when the season starts. We're going to be rotating different positions. We'll go big. We'll go small. Might have a bunch of young guys out there at some point in time. I've had the young guys together some and they've competed well.

**Q. It seems like just reading between the lines of the freshmen have done a good job playing alongside one another, transition has been really good. Helps that Owen and Brock played on the same high school team when you're planning your recruiting class, how important is it to have conversations about, okay, this might be a better fit for the guys that we already have committed, or what's your kind of approach to that?**

COACH MCCAFFERY: We're always looking for a fit. Not to say that you wouldn't sign a guy that had a particular skill that was separating him from everybody else. Maybe they just have tremendous athletic power, or they just have phenomenal speed and quickness. But the style that we play, we need versatile guys that can dribble pass and shoot play more than one position, defend more than one position. So we tend to shift more in that direction in the recruiting process. That said, if you do have like last year, for example, we knew Connor, Kris and Filip would be

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

gone. Connor and Kris had no eligibility left and we knew Kris was going to go in the first round. So he was not staying here. So that made it a little bit different in terms of how we approached recruiting than maybe we will this year.

**Q. You mentioned NIL. How much specifically for you and your staff, how much of a challenge is that to make sure that guys don't go somewhere else because they're having money thrown at them? Is there any way you can combat that, I guess?**

COACH MCCAFFERY: It's really hard to combat if a guy really wants to shop himself because there's nothing to preclude him from doing that. The only thing we can do is try to do the best we can to be as fair as we possibly can and work to that end so they get compensated when they're here.

If everybody's looking for more money, you can find it somewhere. It's the flaw in the system, as we sit here today but they haven't fixed it. So that's the reality that we're dealt with. But I think it's possible you would always lose a guy potentially because the money is so dramatically different, but I also believe if you take care of your people they'll have some sense of loyalty and want to stay. And that's how we're going to approach it.

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