

# University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

Thursday, November 16, 2023

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

## Fran McCaffery

### Men's Basketball Press Conference



**Q. You got your first look at the freshmen against a top-10 opponent. How do you think they fared and handled themselves?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Handled themselves well. As I said after the game, I am not surprised. A lot of confidence in those guys. They have a lot of confidence in themselves.

They've been here a while now. Since we start in June and we play three games overseas, they had that luxury.

You're right, it was the first time, hostile environment on the road, but they're not a group that panics. They kind of stay the course.

Freshmen are going to contribute as we expect them to. That's what has to happen.

**Q. How is Payton doing, and do you expect him to play tomorrow?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, he'll play.

**Q. Ladji with the 3-pointer, is that something you knew that was in his game?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, he's always been a good 3-point shooter. You look at him and think, well, he's a bruising power forward and he can play that way. He can back down and he gets traffic rebounds. He's big and strong. But he's always had really good perimeter skill. He can put it on the deck, doesn't panic when teams are pressing or tapping him. He's a really good passer and really good shooter.

**Q. How will that make him harder to defend as he moves on?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: It gives us a lot of flexibility because we can move him around. We can play him at 5 if we have to, but he's primarily a forward that can stretch the floor. He runs really well and is a really good athlete. He was somebody that when we started recruiting him, we felt like

he could really be special. He's proven to be that.

**Q. What's Ladji's personality like?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Pretty quiet. I think some of it might come from how he has grown up. You think about it, he spoke French growing up and then he spoke Spanish when he was in Barcelona, and then when he went to Jersey, he was speaking English and Spanish because he was living in community with Spanish-speaking folks. Then he comes here and everything is English.

Just a delightful guy, great personality, great smile, but on the quieter side.

**Q. Ben obviously a skilled big, but automatic from mid-range the other night.**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, it's amazing how good he is at that, whether it's a floater or a pull-up or he uses the glass really well. He never stops moving so he's open a lot.

**Q. You hear a lot that the mid-range game is a lost art. Do you agree with that?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, I think it depends on who's shooting it. Some guys are really good at it. We've had some guys that were really gifted in that area.

Matt Gatens was a terrific 3-point shooter, but he could shoot the pull-up. Devyn Marble could shoot the pull-up. We had a lot of guys that had -- I think Mike Gesell was a better pull-up jump shooter than he was a 3-point shooter. He was pretty good at both.

But I don't put that kind of doubt in their mind, like don't shoot this shot. In the pros it's kind of gotten away with analytics; lay-ups, dunks and 3s are really the only shots that they want you to take.

But if you have Steph Curry he can shoot wherever he wants, stuff like that.

I don't really say much. To me, if you're open, shoot the ball. Some coaches get hung up on why would you shoot an 18- or 19-footer. That's a bad shot. As I said, it depends on who's shooting it.



**Q. Did you know that was in his game coming from Valpo?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah. I don't care what league you're in, that's a really good league. We all know that league. He led the league in scoring. We watched a lot of film on him before we signed him. I should say before we offered him. But it was a no-brainer. For what we needed and what he brought to the table -- his activity running the floor, moving without the ball, making plays for himself, making plays for other people, and relentless ability to -- if he misses a couple, just get right back to it. Nothing lingers on him.

**Q. What did you learn about your team the other night, to be in it down to the very end?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, you can't quick shoot the ball on the road. That would be the only negative. They hit four 3s in a row. We missed a fair amount of shots in a row. They're running in transition back at us, which is what everybody knew they would do. Sometimes you need longer possessions. As much as we kind of go and shoot the first open shot, nobody took a bad shot, but maybe under those circumstances a longer possession would have been better.

You learn from that. You get down seven, you can't get down 17. It makes it really hard.

**Q. Patrick theoretically this offseason could have been done playing college basketball. I think at Big Ten Media Day he said it was something he had to think about. What were the conversations like with him this offseason just trying to decide what he was going to do?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I mean, to me he was always going to come back. It was a more difficult conversation the year before with Connor who had been here five years. That was a more lengthy conversation than this one.

He needed to come back. He loves the game. He's really worked hard. You look at his body and how it's changed over the years -- that's been a more difficult process for him than it would be for other people. He needed to be able to get his body to where it is and then go perform.

I think he also knew that this team needed leadership, and he could provide that. I'm really thrilled he's here, and he's doing a terrific job in all of those areas.

**Q. Could he come back again?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah. I guess I'll have to pay him.

Get that number up.

**Q. I think you said after the game you were hesitant to put Payton back in. Did he talk you into it?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: No. I think that's the last thing you would ever allow. Anybody with any kind of injury, let alone a head injury, they all want to come back in. I'm good, Coach. That's why you have professionals on the bench. We have our trainer, we had our team doctor. You don't do those tests on the bench, you go in the back and you get it figured out.

Those tests are pretty thorough. Like you've got to have all the right answers. If you have a concussion, you won't. I was glad he went back in. Would have been nice if he shot three free throws, down five. That would have been nice, too.

**Q. You have four freshmen that are going to figure prominently. How rare has that been for you over the years?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: You know, that's a good question. I haven't really thought about it. I've always played freshmen, especially the really good ones. A lot of times two or three. But this group, we recruited them with that in mind, and they came here kind of with that in mind.

Recruiting has changed with the portal stuff, but freshmen still want to play, and they're looking at a lot of different factors, not the least of which is NIL opportunities. But sometimes there are fewer opportunities for freshmen than maybe there used to be because everyone is waiting to sign the 23-year-olds.

But that hasn't changed how they look at it. Those guys came here saying, wait a minute -- you look at Ladi and Owen, Owen committed a long time ago, but Ladi is like, wait a minute, they're losing their front line; I've got an opportunity. I want to go there and play. And he is.

**Q. It's one thing to tell players that they've got -- they're good shooters and they've got the green light, but I think all four of your freshmen have not hesitated to shoot the three. To me that seems different or maybe even rare. Is it?**

FRAN McCAFFERY: I would say this: Not for them. You know, I think you look at those guys as individuals and okay, that's a group of freshmen and it's rare for a group of freshmen. Who are those freshmen? Those four guys -- I'm a good shooter, I'm going to shoot. Coach brought me in here to shoot. I don't say anything to them.

Pryce pulled up, was in the game a minute, we have a 2-on-1, he pulls up from 3. I don't say a word to him. I was shocked he missed it. So was he. He'll make a lot more of those than he misses, I'll tell you that.

**Q. Did you see that in the summer when they were here? You talked about the progression --**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, but I saw -- I'm pretty sure on the Adidas circuit he was the best 3-point shooter there was. Used to be you would have to have a general idea, hey, he's one of the best shooters, but they actually keep stats now. He was the best shooter.

He played on a good AAU team. I saw them a lot. Obviously I was recruiting him hard. Then you look at what he did his senior year in high school. To be Mr. Basketball, his numbers were pretty staggering.

**Q. Did you find out about him through Payton or --**

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I saw him. He was the starting point guard when we started recruiting Payton, so I literally watched him grow up. As we've said before, interesting trajectory. He was the starting point guard as a freshman and the starting center as a senior and played everything in between, which I think ultimately was really good for him if you look back.

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