

# University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

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## Coach Ben McCollum Men's Basketball Press Conference



**BEN MCCOLLUM:** From a coverage perspective, you all have been great. Professional and easy to deal with. We appreciate everything that you have done, and I appreciate media probably more than most coaches do. I don't pay attention probably.

But I appreciate the relationships and the coverage.

In saying that, I think we've had a good summer, had a good fall. We have a long ways to go, consistent with every single season that we've ever played. We had a great practice on either Monday or Tuesday, had a terrible practice yesterday. We kind of turned it around a little bit.

I think we're going to have a great one today, which will be awesome. It's kind of the ebbs and flows of preseason.

What we really try to focus on is trying to consistently improve, trying to focus on that process piece, trying to -- if we have a successful day, not focusing on that necessarily but making sure that the next one is just a little bit better.

We're competing. We're fighting. Hopefully you'll see that today at the practice for a little bit, and then hopefully you'll see it once we play Robert Morris, I believe, on the 4th.

I'll open it up to questions.

**Q. When it comes to Alvaro, we didn't get the chance to really see him this summer. How would you say he's progressed within your system, and how do you envision his role, stretch 4, playing the 5? Give us a look into Alvaro.**

**BEN MCCOLLUM:** It's a unique situation when you come into our program. We demand a lot of effort. We demand a lot of different things. He can give that.

Before we start to put a great deal of emphasis on just the teaching of the X's and O's, which we still do, we need to make sure that guys are meeting the standard, which he currently is.

It does take a little while with even transfers or high school kids to acclimate to the type of intensity that we want to play with, and we won't move on from that until we get that.

So with him specifically, he is getting himself there. Like with other successful players, he can get himself to a high level of intensity very quickly, and he can do it for a minute.

Can we get that to two minutes; can we get that to three minutes; can we get that to four, and can we keep that consistent, because his high end is high end.

How we'll use him, he can play anywhere from the 3, 4 and 5, depending upon if we want to go big or if we want to play small because of his ability to pass and his ability to stretch the floor with his shot, and then his just overall basketball IQ.

Again, we probably haven't at this point used him to the level that we need to use him in practice just because we needed to get that other stuff going first, and not because he wasn't playing hard. It's just a matter of can we get to that standard consistently, and now we can approach it with a little bit more, okay, we'll put you in a position to be a passer; okay, we'll put you in a position to be pick-and-pop; now they create rotations, and now he becomes a passer again because of the stress that you put on the defense, or maybe he posts a smaller matchup if he's at the 3.

There's so many different things you can do with a guy like him.

**Q. Speaking of Alvaro in the front court, maybe other than Trevin you don't have a ton of size up front. What's your expectation in terms of how you protect the rim, or does it change your offensive philosophy maybe like it did last year when Cam was your center? How do you plan to protect the rim?**

**BEN MCCOLLUM:** That's a good question. I'm open to suggestions if you have them.

I think the big thing for us is we have to be a little bit unique in that it's more of a keep-it-out-of-the-paint type of thing, keep it out of that 15-foot, keep it out of that 18-foot area so it just doesn't get there so you don't necessarily have to protect the rim, so you kind of protect the paint rather than protecting the rim and shot blocking.

That's why we have bigger bodies on the perimeter, because we can get a 6'4" point guard but it's really difficult to get a 7-foot guy that can protect the rim -- one, it costs a lot of money; two, we had to retool the entire roster.

You still have to get guys that can play in the Big Ten, not necessarily specific to what you want. But if we can keep it out of the paint consistently, if we can avoid as many rotations as possible -- even at the Division II level and Division I we didn't have a great deal of shot blocking so we've always had that -- I don't know if it's problem, and were able to find ways to be able to defend and keep it out of the paint.

**Q. What type of identities does this team need to have for it to be able to compete in the Big Ten conference?**

BEN McCOLLUM: They need to have a chip on their shoulder. You need to play with a little edge.

I think that when you take over a position, there's naturally a great deal of excitement, and I think if you're not careful, it can create a sense of arrival, and I said this at the Big Ten meetings.

Understanding that I've always worked better with a chip on my shoulder, like either doubted or whatever, and same with those guys, and so making sure that we continue to have that edge and don't have a sense of arrival, more so than anybody in the league, that's what we're going to need to have to be successful in the Big Ten.

**Q. Is Tavion going to be suspended? Just curious how you're dealing with that from a disciplinary standpoint.**

BEN McCOLLUM: So initially we'll follow the school code of conduct, and then after that, we'll have some team rules. In regards to whether or not there will be a suspension, haven't necessarily made a decision in regards to that until I completely get the information.

With discipline issues, kind of for future reference, the way we've always done it is -- the way I've always done it is I've always tried to take each case a little bit differently than the last because there's so many circumstances surrounding each thing.

Oftentimes coaches have, if he does this, then this happens to that kid, but all circumstances are different. Maybe if somebody else does this, it's worse, or maybe it's less or whatever that may be.

Guys that have these specific things in mind, a lot of times are scared to make the decision when it actually happens.

So now it's up to me to make the decision based on our team rules.

Obviously he's disappointed, and we are, too. The good part is he's going to learn from this and he's going to grow from it, and that's my job as a coach is to teach kids how to grow and be better in those specific situations.

**Q. Back to Alvaro, because we haven't really gotten to know him as well as the other players yet, but what made Iowa and your program and the school a fit for him when he obviously had some impressive callers?**

BEN McCOLLUM: The people. I think our coaching staff got around him, and he loved our coaching staff. He loved the connection. He loved the genuineness.

When we have recruiting -- we do a good job with our visits, and he described it as it's not a commercial. And so it feels very real because it is. It's a very genuine visit.

I think guys that end up choosing us over other schools really value that genuine connection and what they're going to receive once they get here. Even though it's not necessary for everybody because it is a tough program, and to be able to win at the level we want to win at eventually, we need guys that are here for the right reasons, and that's why he chose that.

**Q. If I could follow up, what kind of season did he have at Robert Morris last year? We can see the numbers, but I'm sure you've seen more than that.**

BEN McCOLLUM: Yeah, I think the year before they were at the bottom of the league, and then he was the one returner, and they completely flipped everything and then he was MVP of the league.

It kind of goes with the theme of what we try to recruit is either undervalued or underappreciated, if that makes sense, and then with him, he triggered everything because he was a stretch 5 in that league. He could stretch the floor. He could pass. He could rebound. He could defend. He got a lot of deflections.

Probably most importantly, he's fiercely competitive, almost to a fault. That's probably his greatest strength and it's also probably his greatest weakness is he's got some Spanish flair, and he's got some flair to his game, which I love and appreciate.

But we have to harness it and hone it in, and we're getting there.

**Q. Can you talk a little bit about Peyton and the**

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process that went into his decision to play for you and the challenges that that presents for a young man playing for his dad? I know he's dealt with some of that I'm sure at the high school level, having his dad be Ben McCollum, and what do you actually expect him to contribute this program, this team this year?

BEN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, the first part, so he was recruited, and initially our whole deal was that he wasn't going to play for me. That was always kind of the thing.

He did get recruited, mostly low major stuff. He didn't post them because it's not my style and it's not his.

But then naturally it also hurt his recruitment. I think his junior year he was being recruited when I was at Division II, and then we got Drake and then all of a sudden some of those schools that were calling didn't call anymore, specific to just because they assumed that he was going to play for me. But it's like, no, he's not going to.

Then he was going to play at Drake, and then obviously I got this job, so at that point it became pretty late.

You know, it's fun. It is. I think probably the hardest thing for him is I've always found there's two types of parents; there's the parents that their kid can do no wrong and then there's sometimes the parent that their kid can do no right. Sometimes I probably trend on the second of those two, and so probably my staff is a little more on the left side, if that makes sense.

He's been great in practice. He's even above where I thought he was just because he's so good defensively, and he understands that there always is going to be like a lead guard, and that was the hardest position for us to recruit was somebody to play with Bennett because people just thought Bennett was going to have the ball too much or whatever.

Now you have that position that -- not necessarily this year but into the future where you have a guy that'll defend. You have a guy that'll compete. He was voted our hardest worker in the preseason. All those different things.

So it's been fun. When I see him at practice, though, you know it's your son, but you don't treat it like that. I think that would be unfair to him, both ways. After the fact it's kind of nice, and I think my wife is really jealous because she's like, well, I used to see him all the time and you didn't get to see him and now you get to see him every day. Yeah, but it's a little different in practice because I'm not as nice there.

**Q. I wanted to ask, with the players that followed you**

**from Drake to here, how have you used them as ways to be a leader and help introduce some of the new transfer players that haven't worked with you one-on-one in season before to get them accustomed to the culture and then also to help instill a lot of the things that you want to build around this program?**

BEN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, that's been probably the trickiest thing is when we came to Drake, and I know everybody wants to compare the two, so I'll just do it anyway, when we came to Drake and we brought four players, three of those players, two of them had played for me for five years. That was their fifth year. One of them for six.

They coached the team essentially. I felt like I did a good job of coaching. But they were able to really instill that.

We have one that was with me for four years, and then we have a bunch that were there for one year that were led by three others, and then Bennett, obviously, as well.

They've taught them some of the effort that needs to happen. I want to challenge them to coach more, to coach the team a little bit more from that effort, from that toughness standpoint, from, hey, you need to be here, you need to be there, rather than -- like we had a great leader last year named Daniel Abreu. Daniel Abreu would just, boom, boom, boom, organize everything. It's like, well, Daniel is not walking through the doors here.

So we need somebody else to step up and be a leader in those. But as far as understanding me, understanding all that stuff, they've done a great job as far as that goes.

**Q. I wanted to ask about the '25 class between Trev and Tate and now Trey who reclassified. Is it your expectation that they play soon? Is it like something that they come along throughout the season? What are your expectations for them?**

BEN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, they're pretty good. Like that class is pretty good. We're pretty excited about them. I think we've got some steals in that class, if you will.

Trevin, obviously, 6'11" can do so many different things. Tate, 6'7", can shoot, can finish. Whether or not they play? The hopes are that eventually they can this season. If not all of them, a couple of them.

I think when you bring freshmen into the fold, you have to be a little bit careful because if you just throw them out there -- you can throw them out there in scrimmages and they're going to make 10,000 mistakes, and then you can just kind of let them play through the mistake, but in a game they're not going to really be allowed to play through



that mistake, if that makes sense, and if you pull them quickly, you're going to shatter their confidence because you've got to allow freshmen to play through mistakes in my mind.

So once they get to a point where we feel like, okay, these guys are ready and if they make one mistake we're not going to yank them, then that's probably the time that they'll stay in the game consistently.

But all three of them have been fantastic, even better than we expected.

**Q. What is the biggest difference that you've noticed? You had that one off-season at Drake and now you had this whole summer and fall to get ready. What is the biggest difference here at Iowa that you're seeing from other years in your career in the preparation to the season?**

BEN McCOLLUM: I think anytime you move up levels there's more distractions. That's probably what it is. Not for me necessarily; it doesn't really distract me a whole lot. But as far as the players themselves, because it's difficult to hide from it. So you have to understand what it actually is and do I value somebody's opinion in regards to this because they're still 18- to 22-, 23-year-olds that are fairly sensitive to things.

That would probably be the biggest difference. And expectations. I think that there's a natural expectation that you're just going to go win the Big Ten and it's just going to show up because that's what we did at the Missouri Valley Conference.

I'm not saying we're not going to compete and I'm not saying we're not going to be there or be good. But it is hard to be good, and that's where I think sometimes when you have those distractions, sometimes maybe your guys don't understand, like, no, it's actually supposed to be hard. It's supposed to be a struggle, and that's the cool part about being able to win championships. It's not the actual championship itself that's great, but it's the struggle and the fight to be able to get to that level. So you have to avoid some of those distractions to be able to do that.

**Q. Who's impressed you the most?**

BEN McCOLLUM: I would say at this point Trevin. Trevin has been great. He's really gotten himself into shape. He can really, really pass it. The game slows down for him. He can shoot. Yesterday I think he was two for two or three for three from three. Just does a lot of good things. Great attitude. That's probably even one of the more overwhelming things that I didn't expect.

You know if guys are winners, they're naturally going to win. But his attitude is through the roof. He's been great in the preseason.

**Q. When it comes to the psychological aspect of coaching players, some guys respond by getting yelled at, screaming in their face. Other guys will kind of go back in a shell if they do that. How long does it take for you to realize how to individually coach your players, and do you try to recruit guys with the same attitude to minimize that part of it? How long would it take you to really understand how to coach certain guys and certain teams?**

BEN McCOLLUM: It doesn't take long to figure out a personality -- I think that's something that as a coach you naturally have to study. I had a stepfather that was a narcotics officer so he would investigate me every second, and then I've got a mom that's a judge. So I probably come by it just by them because he just makes quick reads and he kind of figures it out, and then my mom was very similar in respect to that.

I think how long it takes to get out of them what you want out of them based on how you coach them is the tricky part because some people aren't going to develop as quickly as others, and some teams aren't going to develop as quickly as others.

Some need to solution find for themselves, and then some need a little bit more structure. So everybody is pretty unique.

The big thing the way my style is I'm fairly intense, so I need to make sure that I'm careful in regards to that, that I don't necessarily use a ton of fear but still add the intensity to it.

So what I mean by that is you try to tell guys what to do rather than what not to do. So if you can consistently, hey, we'd like you to do this rather than don't take that shot, a lot of times it eliminates those weaknesses, but it takes more time to do it that way. Fear coaches probably get a little bit more results early in the season, and then late in the season those same fear coaches you'll see those are the teams that finish 2-8, and we'd like to finish 8-2. That's our style. Well, I shouldn't say two. Which two are you going to lose? That's dumb.

**Q. I understand that you had an outside scrimmage with another team. What were the positives that came out of that, and what areas do you feel you need to work on?**

BEN McCOLLUM: The positives are we got a lot of guys in. We were able to see guys in different environments to a really well-coached team who I've played in the past when he was at Lincoln Memorial.

That's the positives. We don't necessarily scout our scrimmages. That's kind of been a historical thing. I can remember my first season at Northwest, we played a school, MidAmerica Nazarene, and they were one of the best NAIA teams in the country. Every year they were 35 wins and would go to championships and win championships, and it was like, okay, let's schedule these guys.

We went down there, and I think we beat them by 35, 40, something like that, which Division II, which again, I know you're aware of, but a good NAIA team should generally beat an average Division II team pretty consistently, and we beat them by 35, and I'm like, man, we're going to be pretty good.

We ended up 12-15 that season.

So what I talk about, like, the fear coach perspective or certain things, with those scrimmages, then we kind of adjusted the way we do it. Specifically to the first scrimmages, we don't scout. We kind of allow our guys to solution find. We kind of allow them to suffer and see if they can work through some problems. Those scrimmages don't usually feel good.

The difference is now we're at the Division I level where people pay attention to your closed scrimmages, whereas in the past if they paid attention to the scrimmages versus William Jewell College when we got beat by 15 and then went 38-0, we realized it's kind of a consistent theme in our program.

I don't know that we read into it as much as what we did achieve from it is we need to work against switching. We need to work against a press. We need to, when runs go against us, we need to be able to function on the floor together and not need a time-out because in a loud environment we're going to need those things.

Then there's a few guys that probably made their way into the lineup late in the scrimmage where it was the last couple segments where they played great. We're pretty excited about that part of it.

**Q. You mentioned it's difficult to be good in the Big Ten and the expectations that maybe come with that. What are your expectations for your first season here? I know it might not necessarily be a black-and-white answer, but what are your expectations of what you**

**want to do in year one?**

BEN McCOLLUM: I think the biggest thing that I want to do is, one, make the state of Iowa and the University of Iowa proud of the kids that we coach and proud of the toughness that they show and the communication and the connectivity that they show. Then two, bring everybody with us in regards to that.

I think a lot of times when you have successful, consistently successful programs, it's not just the coaches. It's not just the players. It's the community. It's the students. It's the state of Iowa. It's anyone that's a Hawkeye fan. They rally and understand, hey, this is going to be hard and we want you a part of that, and we want to build it into something special where it can sustain success.

Those two expectations for me is what I'm searching for. We've talked about how we get out in the community. We want to serve and give to the community, and to you guys, so that either it's reciprocated or it's not because either way we plan to have some success, but it's a lot easier when everybody is driving forward and everybody is like, man, let's go, let's do this thing and let's fight together.

Hopefully we have a community that will do that. We have fans that will do that. And I know we have players that will do that.

**Q. I wanted to ask you about no matter where you've coached your efficiency has remained high in recent years, but the tempo has changed depending on the personnel around you, whether it's a faster Northwest Missouri State or you slowed it down a little bit based on the personnel last year. Where do you anticipate going this year with your current lineup, and how does Bennett Stirtz play into it because he's been able to dictate the tempo at pretty much every location he's been?**

BEN McCOLLUM: Yeah, and he'll still dictate the tempo. A lot of times we play as fast as our point guard wants to play, to be perfectly honest, and last year we wanted to play a little bit faster but obviously couldn't get a shot, which you're well aware of.

Specific to this year, kind of probably depends on the lineup. We can play a lineup where we have five shooters at a time and still be big. If you go a Bennett, a Brendan, a Cooper Koch, Alvaro, Trevin. Just arbitrary names. But those guys all shoot. So now you played five shooters. But then maybe you play a lineup where people can shoot but they're not like shooters. So maybe your tempo slows simply because you just can't get a shot at the rim.

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I will say this: Our defense dictates a little bit of that tempo, meaning it takes a while to get a quality shot against us if you have a team that's actually patient and doesn't take early average. That dictates some of that pace.

We will try to score in transition as much as we can. We don't probably want to get into being Alabama that's going like this. I will say that. That probably isn't going to happen.

Maybe it'll happen in my tenure if we get freaky athletes and the Big Ten speeds up. But we'll play to whatever wins the game. If a team plays fast and we need to play slow to change it, then we'll do that. If a team plays slow and we need to play fast, then we'll do that. Whatever it is to win the game. But we're going to be efficient. That's what we need to make sure that we are consistently so that we can set our defense so you won't score as many points.

Take good shots, you're efficient, the ball goes through the basket more, you can sprint back easier, you set your defense, your half-court defense gets a stop, if you get the stop on defense, now your offense is better because you're playing in transition offensively, ball goes through the basket more, and then you come back. So it all kind of works together based on your personnel. If you guys want to talk basketball, we can do this all day.

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