

Big Ten Basketball Media Days

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Rosemont, Illinois, USA

Men's Basketball Panel

Fran McCaffery

Iowa

Jake Diebler

Ohio State

Chris Collins

Northwestern



It was just great to see them every day, and I'm going to miss it quite a bit.

THE MODERATOR: Chris, you're on the opposite end of the spectrum. Your youngest, your daughter, just went off to college this year. You and your wife are empty nesters. A little too quiet right now in the house?

CHRIS COLLINS: It's a little different. I was most worried about mom because, as all these guys will attest, you know, our wives are the rocks of the family. When you are in a coaching household and the things we have to do, the demands on us, the time, it's got to be a family deal.

I was worried about mom a little bit, but she's great. She's great. She said this is a little better than I thought it was going to be. It's good.

My daughter, she said I'm go to miss going to the games, but I said going to Cameron Indoor and being a Cameron Crazy isn't a good backup for what she's got ahead.

Just like Franny, my son is a senior. He's a manager. We're all a part of basketball families. Jake's dad was a coach. When you get that time, I know Franny had it, Jake talked about hopefully potentially having it, having my son, he is a senior, it's going to be a little sad not getting to see him every day in the gym. It's been a lot of fun.

THE MODERATOR: So your daughter goes off to college, and then as we turn it to basketball, one of the best players in the Northwestern history finishes his career.

We'll get to the players who returned this year, but as you look back on what Boo did for you, what do you hope the legacy is that he will ultimately have at NU?

CHRIS COLLINS: Just as a winner and as someone that came in. His freshman year we went 3-17 in the league. You look at the progression of someone in a day and age where people run from that now.

He stayed the course. He got better every year, and his junior and senior year to be a first team all league guy, all-time leading scorer in school history, you know, only got

THE MODERATOR: Welcome in the head coaches of those teams, Fran McCaffery, Jake Diebler, Chris Collins, kind enough to join us. Jake, I want to start with you. It was an interesting summer in the Diebler household. Welcomed a fourth to your family. Four under six now?

JAKE DIEBLER: Four under six, yes.

THE MODERATOR: 9 pounds, 9 ounces.

JAKE DIEBLER: I want one kid to play basketball. That's it. If I could get what he had with all his kids playing basketball, I would be in great shape. The best coach in my house is my wife, without question.

THE MODERATOR: How has the summer been? Anybody getting any sleep these days?

JAKE DIEBLER: It's been good. By number four you're used to not sleeping as much. No, we're blessed. Everybody is healthy. Our kids are having a great time. They've enjoyed being around the team and spending some time in the gym.

THE MODERATOR: Fran, you had the opportunity for a long time to coach your sons. First Connor and then Connor and Patrick together and then Patrick, and now Patrick is off to Butler. First, how special was that? How much will you miss it this year?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I'll miss it quite a bit. I really enjoyed it. I think the perception is that it's more stressful than it really is. They were great. They both were incredible contributors to winning teams. They were great teammates. They worked hard, and they put winning ahead of anything else.



guy to take a Northwestern team to two NCAA tournaments. How can you leave a better legacy than that? Just incredibly special player in our program.

THE MODERATOR: Leading to a couple of NCAA tournaments. The postseason and the end of the season really special for you, Jake, last year. You got an opportunity that you probably didn't expect. This team buys in and you go on a phenomenal run. What was that like for you and your staff to watch? How do you continue that momentum as you start your first full season as a staff?

JAKE DIEBLER: I think it was hard. There's no question. The focus for me personally and for my family and then for our staff was just to serve our players as well as we possibly could. I think our players appreciated that. Then there were some things that were validated for me personally during that process, such as how important player relationships are; The impact playing with pace and urgency can have.

So that gave me some confidence moving forward as we planned out and mapped out what this team is going to look like. But as far as momentum goes, I mean, there's so much newness, new staff, a lot of new pieces on the roster. I'm just really excited about what we've been able to accomplish so far this offseason heading into the final few weeks.

THE MODERATOR: I know these guys could probably attest to this, right? How different it is when it's yours and you're in charge of not just position groups or scouting, but you're in charge of everything. So how different has that felt to you this offseason?

JAKE DIEBLER: It's been different. I have a great appreciation for guys who have been doing this a long time and just the mental conditioning required. I think that's something as an assistant coach you felt like you worked extremely hard and you were always on, but it's different when you are a head coach.

You just don't know until you have to do it. So a ton of respect for -- in our league there's so many head coaches who have been doing it for a long time. A ton of respect for them because there's a lot that goes into it.

THE MODERATOR: Fran, you have been at this a long time. I've known you in your coaching profession since you were at UNC Greensboro a couple of decades ago and then on to Siena and then Iowa as well. How different does this year as a whole feel when you look at the additions of the four new West Coast schools and everything that's kind of changing in college basketball and

college sports?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, it's completely different, and I've been doing it a long time, as you pointed out, Rick. It's something that I love to do. It's part of who I am. It's part of what my family is. They're all players and been around it. My wife was.

It's different. There's more teams in the league. Each team has a ton of new players. Recruiting is completely different, as we enter into the new world of the portal and NIL. Guys weren't free agents for the longest time, and now they are.

So, you know, you go back to the player relationship side, that's what it comes down to, being able to keep the guys you have as best you can and communicate with them, be positive with them, help them get better.

You look at a guy like Boo, like Chris was just talking about, what with a fabulous career. I think there were some bumps in the road in the first year, and he fought through it. He left a lasting impact, and that's what you want your guys to do. That's what we encourage.

I look at a guy like Payton. He could have gone to the NBA. He left his name in the draft. Probably would have been a second round pick. Probably would have had a two-way contract offer. I know he had more than one on the table. He wanted to come back and lead this team and be a part of the culture that we've built, and that says a lot about who he is.

THE MODERATOR: Let's get more into your roster. Starting with Payton. Also with Owen Freeman, a guy who last year I think at one point they were going to rename the Big Ten Freshman of the Week Award the Owen Freeman Award because he won it each and every week. What do you expect from those two guys, and how much more development and growth can each of them have this season?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, you know, you look at Payton, and it's his team. He's the leader, and that's what he came back to do, as I just mentioned.

Owen, he was just a freshman, and he was playing really well. He got in foul trouble a little bit, but he grew, and he learned. He's an incredibly hard worker. He's changed his body a little bit. He's stronger. He's doing more off the bounce, shooting the ball outside more. I'm seeing a much more complete player, and that's by design. That's what he wanted to do. That's what we wanted for him.

We have some other guys too. Josh Dix I thought last year



really established himself as one of the better players in our league. Led the league in offensive efficiency, which is not easy to do in this league. Incredible player. Plays both ends. So we're counting on him to do a lot of things as well.

THE MODERATOR: Chris, as I promised, yes, we talked about Boo and the player that's gone, but I think folks may be surprised to look at how much of your production is back even with Boo's departure, whether it's Nick, whether it's Brooks, Ty. You have a ton of guys with experience who have been through this grind before. How much do you lean on them to make sure that everybody else is on the page that you want them to be on?

CHRIS COLLINS: I think you lean on it a lot. Having continuity, a culture. You talk about guys that have been a part of now two top four finishes in the league, two NCAA tournaments, advancing in the NCAA Tournament. A guy like Brooks Barnhizer, an all league caliber player who is now a senior. They're ready to step up as older guys, and they set the tone every day.

The coaches are one thing, but when the players come to the gym and they set the tone for how you practice, the seriousness, it helps us as coaches having those veteran players. I know they're anxious. As great a player that Boo was, I think they know coming into the your, it's going to be what can you guys do without him on the floor?

I think that's been a motivating force for this core group to say, no, we're a program now, and great players move on, but it's time for other guys to step up and see if we can stay competitive in a really tough league.

THE MODERATOR: Brooks is one of those guys that does a little bit of everything well. We saw Nick Martinelli become that player at points last year. What do you need from those two guys who I sometimes mirror each other with the different strong hand?

CHRIS COLLINS: It's great about those two guys. They're kind of like old school just ball players. They don't really have positions. They're tough. They're competitive. It doesn't look pretty all the time, but they win, and they get stuff done, and they set the tone for the rest of the team. They both have good size. Their skill sets, they can shoot, handle, pass. It allows us to be a little creative moving them around the floor and finding ways to have them be successful.

Then with Ty Berry and Matt Nicholson, you have four guys that have really been a part of a lot of Big Ten games. So we're really going to have to lean on their veteran leadership as we head into this year.

THE MODERATOR: Jake, Chris just used the term tough, talking about competitiveness. You talk about Bruce and a guy who maybe as tough and competitive as anybody in this league. How much is he simply the heart beat of what your team is?

JAKE DIEBLER: Without question. I say this about Bruce. Bruce isn't an every day rep. He is an every-rep guy. Every single day in practice, doesn't matter the drill. If you are going live, if you are not going live, he goes hard every time.

To have that in your program, there's so much value around that, and he sets the standard for us of what it means to work. We're going to lean on that. I've been most impressed. His voice has been really powerful for us, and he's gotten better and better at using it.

We're going to lean on his leadership certainly.

THE MODERATOR: What have he and the other veterans returning to this team done for you in terms of making sure that everybody is buying in? As Fran pointed out, it's a different era. Every team is going to have chemistry, if not issues, chemistry issues to deal with to make sure that you get on the same page before the year starts.

JAKE DIEBLER: I think it's really important. We've been intentional about who we've invited into our family. We have a group of great guys. Now we have to build that chemistry in between the lines.

The chemistry for us is they're off the court. We have to build it between the lines, and listen, I think we have -- we may not have Ohio State veterans, a lot of them, but we have some college basketball veterans.

So we're going to lean on that experience. It's been very good for us in practice. The way that the guys who have years of experience in college basketball, how they're communicating to those who don't has been fun to watch and great to see.

THE MODERATOR: Fran, I've asked all the coaches that have sat up here what they think it's going to feel like come March when you get ready for the Big Ten tournament and you look back on what this 18-game grind inside these -- this league with the additional four teams, with the travel will actually feel like.

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think it will benefit us in the long run. The competition, the travel, we're kind of used to that. Okay, we got to go to the West Coast. Maybe it's a little easier for us. We're in the middle. It's just part of what

college basketball is right now.

We're chartering, so it's not really that difficult from that standpoint. From a fatigue standpoint we're smart with how we look at practice and time commitment and having the exposure to play against those kinds of teams now on a regular basis, that's what happens in the NCAA Tournament. So we'll be better prepared I think.

THE MODERATOR: And the opportunity, Chris, for every team, at least every couple of years, depending on where the home and away schedule sends you to play in places like Pauley Pavilion and other arenas that some of these Big Ten players have never seen before and certainly never played in before.

CHRIS COLLINS: Like Fran said, I think ultimately it's going to make the league even better. I know the players are excited to go to some venues maybe you haven't played in before.

Honestly you wish you could kind of play everywhere. It's impossible now with the amount of teams, but the league is so good. I mean, you come into the league. Everyone is, like, Who do you think is going to be good? My answer is, Everyone. You look at the level of coaches in this league, the programs, the traditions, the fan bases. You know, I think it's never been more open than it is this year. It makes it fun to be a part of the league like that. Probably gives us a little less sleep and makes our hair a little bit more gray.

Look at Jake right now. I want to look at him. I'm in year 12. I look like him ten years ago.

JAKE DIEBLER: This is what I have to look forward to.

CHRIS COLLINS: Maybe you won't have as much receding, but it's going to get gray a little quicker. It's awesome to be a part of this league. You want to test yourself against the best. I know our guys are looking forward to it.

THE MODERATOR: Genetics plus the new Big Ten. You have nothing you can do about it. Guys, really appreciate the time.

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