

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Sunday, March 13, 2022

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

Iowa Hawkeyes

Coach Fran McCaffrey

Tony Perkins

Jordan Bohannon

Keegan Murray

Postgame Press Conference

Iowa – 75, Purdue - 66

MODERATOR: Coach McCaffery will be joined by Keegan Murray, Tony Perkins and Jordan Bohannon.

We'll first hear from Coach McCaffery.

COACH FRAN McCAFFREY: I don't know if I've ever been more proud of a team than this group, how they worked, sacrificed and incredible unselfishness. But I have to say we played a tremendous team today, incredibly well-coached team who had a great year and anything short of effort that we put forth today, we would not have won. They were committed to the game plan, they were committed to each other, and there's no better feeling as a coach than to watch them celebrate the way they would celebrate after the game for the Big Ten championship.

Q. Question for Tony. How's it feel to finally get a chance to celebrate on the gain bridge court? I know your senior year was cut short because of COVID. To get a Big Ten title in this way, just how's it feel for you?

TONY PERKINS: It feels good, very emotional because I was supposed to get this same treatment my senior year of high school but now that I'm doing it at this level, it feels good. I wouldn't want to be nowhere else.

Q. Jordan, a lot's been made of it you coming back for the sixth season. What does this mean to you now? Describe the emotions with the teammates and raising that trophy. It seems like it's almost a dream.



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JORDAN BOHANNON: It really is a dream. This is something individually-wise obviously I wanted to do when I came to Iowa City. Everyone on the team was so committed this offseason and we knew that we had something special here. I love these guys, I love Coach. Everything that we have done has been the right way and that's just what makes it so perfect. Everyone here is committed to doing things the right way. And understanding that we had one of the best players in the country, best players to ever go through Iowa to my left and he just stepped up in huge moments throughout the whole season for us to get here. The guy to my right has just been phenomenal all year, stepped into the line up and just gave everything he had these last four games. And I'm just beyond thankful to be in this position.

Q. Keegan, what does it mean to be named (the Big Ten Tournament) Most Outstanding Player? You had this kind of fairytale year. What does it mean to have this kind of honor now?

KEEGAN MURRAY: Yeah, for me it's obviously a big individual honor, but I really couldn't have done this without my teammates. I feel like back at it, like I've had to learn from a lot of guys last year just what it takes to be great at this level, good at this level and guys especially in this tournament have just really had faith in me. That's all I could ask for. I take a bad shot, they tell me to shoot the next one. I miss a shot, they say shoot the next one. That's just the kind of team we are, the kind of guys we have in our locker room. It's a team trophy, it's not an individual one.

Q. Jordan and if anybody else wants to answer as well, did you know on Thursday coming in here that you were going to win this tournament?

JORDAN BOHANNON: Obviously that's something that you have on your mind every time you step foot on to this type of stage. We're playing unbelievable basketball right now. And what makes this so special too is not only obviously Tony's from Indianapolis or from Indiana, he's from The Nap. There's so many Iowa kids on this team that put their blood, sweat and tears into this jersey. You think about just some of the lineups we had out there at points of

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this season, especially tonight. There's four Metro kids out there on top of Tony, hometown kid here. That's just really special. You don't see that too many times in college basketball. You have guys that are just committed to a school and continue to work for each other and want the best for everyone out there, you know, if you get subbed out or not. It's just an honorable team and this is a once-in-a-lifetime team for sure.

Q. This question's for Keegan. The last seconds of the game I saw -- I think you were mouthing oh, my God. What was kind of going through your mind during those moments?

KEEGAN MURRAY: I mean, it's kind of like everything just got put together for me, just all the hard work that we put in, just the offseason that it took to get here, everything just kind of went on the one there. I couldn't believe it. We struggled earlier on this year a little bit and now we're doing really well and it's just a great feeling.

Q. Jordan, like you said, you came back for the sixth year and I know that there's more that this team wants to do, but how much does it really -- when you think back to what your brothers accomplished now -- I ran into Matt yesterday, he says you've accomplished more than what they ever did. What does that mean to you when you grew up with three older brothers and now what you're doing, the youngest brother right now?

JORDAN BOHANNON: You can only imagine the type of pressure that was put on me coming out of high school. My brothers all won a state title. I was from a phenomenal high school, hometown kid and went to Iowa City. All three of my brothers won a conference title and I heard it every single day wherever I went, whether it was from my brothers or from reporters or from the troll on Twitter. It's just nonstop for me. It was a big deal for me to come here because Coach has always been about being level-headed, never too high, never too low, and I think that's what's been so important for myself this past five and a half, six years. This is the farthest I've been.

I was going through a lot personally, obviously team-wise, too. You look back to our sophomore year, we weren't very good. Now to here, you know, we've been through everything adversity-wise and now we're kind of living through the moment of a dream that we all dreamed about since we were little kids. Like I said, I'm just so happy for everyone part of this team, so happy for Coach. We've done everything the right way and so many great teammates.

Q. Anyone can answer this question, but this was the

fourth game in four days, but from the start, the team seemed really locked in, diving for loose balls, getting 50/50 balls. How would you describe the energy and the effort that you played with today?

TONY PERKINS: I'll always try to set the tone, energy at the beginning of the game and boost everybody's energy based off of defense and rebounding. So that's a big part of our team and what we do and we like bringing energy because that's what gets us the leads and the wins.

Q. This is for Keegan. You played 40 minutes, you guys played an extra game, yet last eight minutes or so you looked like the pressured team. What do you attribute that to?

KEEGAN MURRAY: I think for us, I feel like we're just in better shape than a lot of teams. For me, I'm not going to get tired. It's a championship game, I'm not tired at all. I can go home and rest tomorrow. I mean, I feel like all of our guys had the championship mindset tonight, that soreness was out the window for us and anything that was bugging us was thrown out the window and we want to get the championship. All of our guys bought into that and won.

Q. I guess for Jordan and Keegan, and Tony, whoever: What were the emotions like seeing your name on the screen as a five seed? All of a sudden you play Thursday, you probably fly out Tuesday I'm guessing. How much do you process the fact that you've got basically a Big Ten schedule here, you know, three-day prep for the NCAA Tournament?

MODERATOR: He wasn't listening? All right, we'll go to Jordan.

JORDAN BOHANNON: You know, it's what the Big Ten Conference kind of set us up for. We played 20 conference games. A lot of days we had COVID -- or no, it wasn't COVID, weather cancellations, so we played a one-day prep and it was no problem for us. We have so many guys that are able to step up in big moments. Coach calls a lot of guys off the bench and they're ready for their number to be called. I think that's what makes our team special because we have a lot of guys that can step up. Just like tonight, Jelly stepped up huge coming in playing 10 minutes. I think that's why our conditioning level is so well because some guys can play their butts off for four to eight-minute stretches and then another line comes in. It's been working for us and this three-day prep is -- honestly, it's a nice rest because we've had four games in four days, so I don't think we'll be too worried about it.

Q. Jordan, I wanted to ask you about two of the biggest buckets of the game I thought were from

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Payton Sandfort, young guy jumping in there hitting two huge threes. Can you talk about his development and the importance of those shots?

JORDAN BOHANNON: Phenomenal player, another Iowa kid. Coach has made an important value for him and his staff to get these Iowa kids here and change the culture of the Iowa program and the standards.

He hit that first three and he was celebrating and obviously there's still a lot of game left. He looked to the bench and after the game -- or after he came back down the court, I was like what are you doing, why are you celebrating? You're going to hit another one, get ready for your next shot, and the next possession he hit another three. He stepped up in big moments. He's been huge this entire season coming in. It's so hard for guys to come off the bench and provide what he's been able to do, so you've got to give a lot of credit to him. Not only him, but a lot of other guys on the bench, too.

Q. Keegan, the defense I think would be qualified as the story of the day, the number of steals you had was 12 or 13. The number of your turnovers were few. They had 17 or 18. Where did this defensive performance come from and what was the process coming in?

KEEGAN MURRAY: Yeah, I think for us, we stuck to our game plan really well. We forced them to be uncomfortable and that was kind of what our goal was. And obviously they out-rebounded us by a lot and we obviously turned it over a lot, so it kind of balanced it out in itself. And I felt all of our guys were active and bought in. We held them to 66 points and they're a really good offensive team, so that helped us win, for sure.

Q. Fran, after the game, big hug with Connor, emotions kind of pouring out. Describe that moment and what it meant to you.

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: It was incredibly special. I had the same with Patrick, I had the same with my wife, my daughter, my other son. I think back to first time I ever took him on the road, I remember we won it. We won the SoCon Championship in 2001 and I'm holding Patrick and he was a year old and had the net around his neck. It's been a long journey with them, going to tournaments and traveling with the team and then participating for the team.

But to celebrate at this level together on this stage, it's really difficult to describe how awesome it was and how emotional it was.

Q. Fran, what were the key moments to you in today's game? What that kind of turned it for you guys?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: I think it was the start of the game we were ready defensively. It's a tough team to defend, you know. We wanted to do a better job on the glass than we did. We got out-rebounded 48-30, so that's not something you're preparing to do, but if you're going to combat that, you better not turn the ball over and you better disrupt them, get them to miss shots, get them to turn it over. They had 17 turnovers, we had six. We had 13 steals, they had four. So that can balance out the size disadvantage and enable us to get our break going. We kept fresh bodies out there. The guys who came off the bench really contributed. We got in a little foul trouble. I thought Josh Ogundele was spectacular, I'm so proud of him. Riley, he tried, he was in there mixing it. That was good experience for him because he's going to be a good player down the road.

Q. Fran, kind of a big picture to build off that first question you had, you're obviously not from Iowa and I wonder what it's kind of been like for you to reestablish roots, you know, and raise a family there and kind of become a different version of the same guy maybe. I don't know.

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I think one of the things that Mr. Barta and I talk about all the time is when he went looking for a coach, he wanted somebody who wanted to be here and wanted to represent the university, the state, but also someone who recognized and was aware of the tradition. There have been some unbelievable coaches and players that have come through here and had really strong teams, long-standing winning teams, Hall of Fame coaches. So whoever took this job had to take pride in that and had to understand it. At the same time, he wanted the program run the right way, which we've done.

Now, the family side of it, I had a young family, so that was an integral part of the decision. Okay, we're going to move across country and we're going to raise our children basically in the state of Iowa. Well, anybody who's from there knows that that's pretty special. People there are awesome. We were welcome from day one. They had great experiences in elementary school, middle school, high school, athletically, made great friends, and then they chose to come play for me. And I gave them the option to go somewhere else if they wanted to, but they grew up basically in Carver-Hawkeye Arena, so they wanted to play there and they wanted to put that jersey on. So it's been an amazing ride for all of us and that's why it was so emotional today.

Q. Was there a moment this season where -- clearly the depth that you play with allows you to play fast and today it really paid off. You played like 12 guys in the

first half. Was there a moment this season where just you saw things just kind of coming together, all the pieces as they are now? Because it seems like everybody has a role.

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: You know what, I really felt good about it early in the season. I think we all looked to, okay, I made the lineup change. Clearly that was -- that was important, it worked, it really established Tony, put the ball back in J-Bo's hands and Joe Toussaint was great coming off the bench, so everybody accepted their role.

I felt early on with the schedule we put together, we played some pretty good teams, we played some teams we were supposed to beat, but you go on the road at Virginia and you win there, that tells you something. I thought even though we lost at Purdue without Keegan, I thought we established that, hey, this team's pretty special. We've got some other guys that can really play and that was important for our confidence. And we won all those games we were supposed to win and then won a big -- won the ACC-Big Ten matchup and then played okay. But we lost a few games at the start of the season in the Big Ten. I think we looked at, okay, who do we play? We played at Purdue and Illinois at home, two of the best teams in the country. How did we do? Well, we lost close games. So we knew we could get there and we believed we could get there. Then as the season progressed, I think you saw that happen with everybody playing confidently and producing.

Q. First of all, congratulations. Four games in four days, a grueling test. And you talk about your bench, the fact that you had to play so many guys, and there were guys that played today that didn't play earlier in the tournament but they play in the biggest game in the tournament. Not only you have to have trust in them but also the guys out there playing have to have trust in them. Is that learned through practice and, like you say, the preseason games and different opportunities for those guys to play?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, no question. I think my main responsibility as their coach is to develop each individual and get them to the point where they can play with supreme confidence. Understand and know your role. What are you coming in to do? Josh knew he was coming in to play two of the best post players in the country and he knew he was going to have to move his feet. He knew he was going to have to be physical. He makes two huge buckets for us and he played with ultimate energy and was one of the main reasons we won the game. Riley came in, tried to hold the fort down. He was a little overwhelmed, you know, a little surprised when he shot the three. I might have pointed that out to him, but that kid's going to be good and he knows it.

And I think it's an expectation we have when we go to our bench. They read the scouting report, they go through the scouting report, sometimes they're on the scout team, we'll ask them questions in preparation, how are we guarding this play, how are we guarding this action if they do this, what are we working on on offense? Make sure they understand the game plan so when they go in they're not confused, they're not tentative, they're coming in to impact the game. Clearly they did.

Q. Coach, kind of following up on that question, four games in four days, you talked yesterday about how much focus it takes for a team to make it this far. Now that you're the champions. How would you evaluate how your team stayed the course and the effort and energy they played with today?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: They couldn't have done it any better. That's the truth. We're processing information rapidly when you're playing back to back to back to back. I mean, that's not easy to do because this league, as we all know, is incredibly challenging. But each team presents different challenges. Everybody plays differently. Everybody has different stars at different positions.

Can you understand what we want to do to them and what we need to do defensively. You know, can we press them, can we run on them, can we execute our half court offense, are we going to run more sets or more motion, what are they going to run against us, is it all ball screen action, is it transition team, is it a team that's going to run the clock down, how are they going to guard ball screens, how are they going to guard Bohannon, how are they going to guard Keegan Murray. All this stuff has to be absorbed, processed and then executed. It's not okay to just do one without the other. So masterful job by a very mature group.

Q. Coach, the players talked about kind of the passion and intensity that Tony plays with and how they kind of feed off of that, but what's allowed him to kind of come into his own of late and what about his personality kind of makes him play with that chip on his shoulder?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: I wish I could say there's something magical. I think you identified it, that's just who he is. That's one of the reasons we recruited him in the first place, he just comes after you. He is fearless. He plays both ends, he has an uncanny ability to make a mistake and come right back and do something really well. He's committed to winning, he's not selfish at all.

And you feel so great for everybody, but when you have a hometown kid win the Big Ten Championship in his home

state right where he's from, all of his family were here, I mean I'm just so thrilled for him. He's a young guy with great character.

Q. Purdue was obviously going out of its way to contain Jordan on the perimeter. How important was Sandfort's perimeter offense, specially those back-to-back threes?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, I think really important, I mean, that kid, he's just a tremendous player. I think we recognized his shooting because he's such a good shooter, but he's a really good player. He rebounds, he can bring it down, he makes plays for other people, and he's fearless. But that's kind of the team we have. Patrick hits a big three. Joe Toussaint was so amazing in both halves. We kind of relied on Keegan, J-Bo and Tony. Kris and Filip were great, but they were in foul trouble, but they were phenomenal defensively and they did what they could. Kris was aggressive offensively.

But it's that kind of team. I go to Payton, he produces. I go to Connor, he produces. I go to Joe, he produces. Go to Josh, he produces. And it doesn't always happen that way, as you know.

Q. Looking at how this tournament has unfolded as a whole, what has this said about this conference?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: I think it just is an example of what this conference is and what it's been: The most difficult conference top to bottom. Like I said, not only is every team really good and really hard to beat, but every team is dramatically different. I think that's what makes it exciting for the players, exciting for the people that are watching and it's why we've got so many teams in.

Q. Coach, you played against two teams, Indiana, who tried to beat you up inside. You go against Purdue, tried to do the same thing. How have you guys been able to overcome the obstacle there?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: We're going to run, we're going to get it in go. I think defensively I think we were better today at going down and doubling and rotating than we were yesterday. Trayce gave us a hard time, but I thought we did a better job today.

Now, we didn't keep them off the glass. We got them to miss a few times, but they got a ton of offensive rebounds, that's what they do. I think it's our style of play, we turned them over. I think our ability to execute offensively in particular at crunch time was crucial.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach, and best of luck in the

tournament.

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