

12/13/2010: Fran McCaffery teleconference transcript (premium)

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Below is a written transcript of Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery's teleconference on Monday with the Big Ten media:

McCaffery's opening statement:

"I feel like we're making progress. I have a young team. It was great to see Matt Gatens bust out of the gate the way he did the other night, and we're going to need that from him. Jarryd Cole had a monster game this week and is playing like a senior captain. The young kids [Melsahn] Basabe, Zach McCabe, and Roy Devyn Marble have I think really performed very well and play like experienced players. I like the direction. I'd like to see a few more wins, but we're getting better."

On how he deals with players like Eric May who are normally consistent but are coming off an "off" game:

"Well, he's an interesting player. Forget about the last 24-48 hours. For him, it has been ongoing. Starting from the beginning of the season, what I've tried to get him to do is trust his talent. I told him that at the Xavier game in particular, when I thought he had a very poor first half, and I think you can argue that he was the best player on the floor in the second half, which is a big statement considering the talent that Xavier has. So what I've tried to get him to do is challenge him to trust his talent, get out there and attack the rim, and be aggressive."

"He's a team player, so he has a tendency if he misses a

couple of shots early to stop shooting. He's not as aggressive attacking the basket. He has been a guy from the beginning of the season that has really affected the game at both ends of the floor, and that's who he is. He's leading us in steals. He has six steals in a game, seven steals in a game, he gets rebounds, he can score inside and out. His 3-point percentage is good, so I encourage him to shoot more. Very rarely do you have to encourage people to shoot more.

"I was disappointed in his game the other night because I didn't think he was aggressive. Not because he played poorly, but because he wasn't aggressive. I told him that very demonstratively after the game and went back to him later and said, 'Maybe I was a little bit too hard on you.' But the first thing he said was, 'No, you aren't. You were not hard on me. You need to be hard on me.' I said 'You need to be a guy that we can count on every night to at least be the most aggressive player on the floor at both ends. Now, if a couple of shots don't fall, and you turn it over once or twice, that's going to happen when you're aggressive, and I'm going to live with that and encourage you to keep doing it.' But as you saw, he had a couple of turnovers in that game that were really tentative turnovers, and we have to have him playing not that way.

"When he's playing aggressively, we are a different team. And I think by the same token, he knows that. He's feeling some pressure, self-induced. I tell him, 'Nobody's putting pressure on you. Just be yourself and be who you can be. Go out on the floor with a little bit more of an attitude that I'm the best player, or at least one of the best players, and you keep thinking that way.' That's what the great ones do. They walk on the floor with an air of confidence, not an air of arrogance."

On how Cully Payne is progressing after surgery:

"I think it's a little too early to tell, but he is feeling a

lot better. That's typically what happens with this type of surgery. I was a little concerned because he had the hernia and he had the torn oblique, so I thought it might really be problematic for him. But he's in great shape. He was in a lot of pain for about the first 7-8 days, as you can imagine. But subsequent to that, he is feeling really good. He's in practice every day, paying attention. He's on the bench. He's very well-liked by his teammates. He's active in the locker room, at practice. It's anywhere from four-to-eight weeks, which, that's a big difference, especially when you're right in the middle of the season. But we'll see how it goes. It might be four. It might be eight. It's probably somewhere in between."

On the possibility of redshirting Payne should he be out at least eight weeks:

"I'll look at it then, how many games do we have left, that type of thing. We'll make a determination at that time."

On what the in-state rivalry games mean to the program and to his players:

"Well, I think they mean a lot to the players because anytime you're in state, you have a lot on in-state players on all three teams. There's obviously a tradition of competition going back a long way, especially with us and Iowa State. But Northern Iowa and the job Ben Jacobsen has done has made this a tremendous rivalry, and the same for Drake, they are a terrific young team that I really like. I really like the talent, they've had some ups and downs, but I think recently, have played extremely well.

"It's an opportunity for our fans to see those teams come into our building – we have two games and then one we have on the road, and then it flips the following year. We'll have some fans down in Des Moines on Saturday, and all the other fans can travel and see our games. Both games [played] have been

terrific games, right down to the last couple of minutes, Iowa State came down to the last possession. It will probably be the same thing this weekend.”

On whether this week is used to break down multiple opponents, or specifically just Drake:

“We’re always looking ahead as assistant coaches. I only go next game. But Andrew [Francis] is watching Louisiana Tech, Kirk [Speraw] is watching Illinois, Sherman [Dillard] has got Drake. He has been concentrating on Drake while we were getting ready for Iowa State and Northern Iowa. I’ll just watch Drake. We won’t practice. We will have an extra day off. Individual players may take more than one day off depending upon their academic needs and how many finals they have, do they have two in one day, do they have consecutive days, they might need a little extra time. I will take this opportunity to do a little bit of recruiting, so that I think is important, to be able to get out and see some games.

“Other than that, it’s just taking a little bit more time to work on what we do maybe a little bit more than preparing for the next game, in terms of game planning. When the games have been coming as quickly as our games have been coming, you don’t have as much time. I think that’s a struggle that we all have as coaches – how much time do we have on the next game, and how much time do we take straightening out our motion offense or our transition defense, those kinds of things that may have been problematic in recent games. What we’ve done is really work on some things that we thought needed improvement that we do. We’ll start really focusing on Drake in practice, probably a little bit later on in the week.”