

# 2/21/2011: 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:

## **Opening statement:**

*"This week was an interesting week for us because we went on the road to play a team that had beat us pretty badly at home. It was interesting to see how we would play against Northwestern, and then fall down 13 early, I was really pleased with how we responded. We got ourselves in a position to win the game, and then come back home and play against a team that's really hot right now and playing very well. Coach [John] Beilein has [Michigan] playing really well, and we played well enough to win. Unfortunately in both games, we didn't win, so that's the frustrating side of it for us. But I do think we're making progress. We've got individuals who are stepping up, and I remain optimistic."*

## **On what he likes about all three of his freshman players as a group:**

*"Well, I think there are a number of characteristics that I like. All three of them have character, and that's where you have to begin. They come to practice, they want to get better, they accept coaching, they listen. They give me everything they have. All those things sound frustraneous, but they're not always there. For those three guys, they bring it. Their attitudes on the road, at practice, before games, after games,*

phenomenally mature for being legitimate freshmen. So from that standpoint, I'm really happy, and anything short of that, it doesn't really matter what their talent level is, they're never going to be any good. So you take that to start, and then you look and say, 'Well, they also talent.'

"Melsahn [Basabe], from a statistical standpoint, has been the best. You know, I think the big steps he made were on Thursday when we played at Northwestern. He gets in early foul trouble, and a couple of times this year, he has gotten in early foul trouble and been a non-factor. Well, he was clearly a factor and was almost the reason we won the game, so I was really proud of him there. Then he backs it up with 19 [points] and eight [rebounds] on Saturday.

"[Devyn] Marble, I moved him into the starting lineup, not so much for him per se, although I think he certainly deserves a crack at it. You know, I was really trying to get Eric May going, and [Marble] was fabulous. In a stretch where we fell apart, he was the guy that made two key plays in that stretch to really get us back in the game and put us in a position to win. Both of those guys have made big baskets late, so they now have not only shown that they have the talent, but again, that's where the character comes in. They were able to make plays late.

"We were really struggling at Northwestern, and Zach McCabe comes off the bench and basically saved us. We were down 13, and as you know, when you're down 13, it goes to 20 or it goes to 5. Because of Zach, we got it down to single digits, and we were able to be in a position to win the game. All three of them are talented, they have character, and they all have versatility, which means they can play more than one position, and I think that really bodes well for the future for our team."

**On whether he feels the number of transfers to 4-year schools has gone up during his coaching career:**

*"Yeah, you know, I think it has. I think, like you said, I don't have the numbers, you don't have the numbers, but I suspect it has gone up. I suspect it has not gone up as much as we think. I could be dead wrong on that. I think the fact that a transfer has to sit out is a real deterrent to transferring. Other sports, it's just rampant, because you can just transfer and play for the other team right away. I think it's probably a function of how recruiting in general has changed.*

*"Now if you recruit somebody, there are way more people involved in the decision than there was when I was in my first year as an assistant coach. Out of respect, you call the high school coach, you talk to the kid, you talk to his parents. That was it. Now there are brothers, uncles, AAU coaches, AAU assistant coaches, assistant high school coaches. There is just no way of telling how many people are going to be involved in the decision-making process. What's more, it prolongs the decision and affects, you know, how we end up recruiting and how we finish our recruiting class.*

*"Like I said, I think those numbers are probably up, but it's a real deterrent. You really have to think long and hard. Having gone through it myself, that's the one thing that I worried about, was having to sit out. But you also have schools now that will get vanilla of it. You look at when I got this job, one of the things that has changed, when there used to be coaching changes, everyone left your players alone and your recruits alone. Now when there's a coaching change, it's an open season on all of your players – everybody that is on your team, everybody that you recruited. That obviously makes it problematic, and then one of the selling points there, and it's ongoing through a third party, is, "You can use a year to work on your game, learn the system, get in the weight room. You'll be a year more mature. You'll be better in Year 5." So there's a little more of that going on, so I suspect that's another reason why the numbers went up."*

**On how he felt about the Big Ten scheduling two games in three days for his team like it did last week:**

*"I look at it like this: I look at it from a practical standpoint. You can't have it both ways. You know, we want the Big Ten Network. We want to be able to tell recruits that all of our games are on national television. You have to be able to adhere to some of those rules that are a direct result of how we do our TV package. I think it was a brilliant idea by Jim Delany. A lot of people didn't think he could pull it off. Then Mark Rudner has the very difficult task of trying to schedule all of these games so there are no conflicts. That's another brilliant idea."*

*"You could argue, 'Hey, we're playing Thursday/Saturday. We're playing at odd times. We don't want the late game. We don't want to play on Sunday.' There's always going to be a negative byproduct to what we're trying to do, so you have to weigh the positives and the negatives. I would be a major proponent for having the Big Ten Network, doing it how we do it, knowing that when we're playing, we're on the Big Ten Network and there's nobody in competition with us, and living with the 8:05 starts or the Sunday afternoon games. That's just how I look at it."*

**On how this week works with Iowa's game at Illinois not being until Feb. 26:**

*"We won't prep for Illinois any earlier. You know, we're pretty locked in to when we prepare for every team, so what that will do is give us more time to work on our stuff. It will also give us a chance to give them two days off. You know, you get to this point in the season, you're a little bit tired. We won't go back-to-back with days off. They were off yesterday, we'll practice today, they'll be off tomorrow."*

*"It also gives our staff an opportunity to recruit. I went recruiting yesterday, I'm going to go recruiting tomorrow. So"*

*you just adjust. When you have a week off, you maximize it by helping your own team and then getting a chance to recruit. If you're locked up with three games in 5-6 days, then you deal with that and prepare. You just work extremely hard to make sure your guys are in the best possible position to win."*

**On whether the close finishes Iowa has had recently speaks to the character of his team:**

*"I'll tell you. I've been really impressed with our fight. You know, there are times when I get frustrated with our execution, and then there are times when we question ourselves. 'Was that the right play call there? Did we call the right play?' I thought, more so Saturday, I thought our execution down the stretch and the shots that we got that didn't go in were really good. I couldn't have asked for anything better. So to me, that shows that this team is really maturing. We all want them to go in. I want them to go in for these guys more probably than they do, just when I see that they're giving me effort and they're really trying.*

*"At the same time, you've got to go back and say, 'O.K. How did we end up in that position?' We were in complete control of that game on Saturday, fell apart for just a couple of minutes, five possessions, and then do a miraculous job. So it shows that we have the talent, we have the intelligence, we have the concentration. We have the mental toughness. What we have to do is eliminate [mistakes], and I've been telling them less and less, Earlier in the year, they were six-minute stretches where we didn't score, where we broke down defensively.*

*"So I do think we're making great strides. Obviously, you'd love to see it reflected with a few more wins, especially Wisconsin who was ranked, and Michigan who is making an NCAA Tournament run. I think it tells you that we are closer than our record may indicate, which a lot of coaches say, but I think in our case, it's reality."*