

2/24/2011: Fran McCaffery teleconference transcript (premium)

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Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery held a teleconference with the local media on Thursday prior to the Hawkeyes' game on Feb. 26 against Illinois at Assembly Hall in Champaign, Ill.

Below is the complete transcript from the interview:

On how Illinois has evolved since the Hawkeyes' last meeting with the Fighting Illini in December:

"It's an interesting team in so many ways. I've watched them over and over, of course, and I look at them, and I like their talent. I like the fact they play together and they defend. I think they're in a situation right now where the league is tough, and they've lost a couple of close games. But they're still a team, in my estimation, that is one of the best teams we've faced so far this season. I like their personnel. I think Bruce [Weber] does a terrific job with them and I think they're going to test us in every way possible, especially at home where they have played so well."

On what problems Illinois' shooting presents to Iowa defensively:

"You know, I don't think anything more than the obvious. You know, when you have bigs that can shoot, it stretches the defense, and they have athletes that can get to the rim. So what it does is it compromises your defense in many ways, in particular with pick-and-roll stuff. When you have guys that can pick-and-roll, pick-and-pop, and you've got roll in place

action where you have a seven-footer roll to the basket and 6-9 guy who can come in and make shots, or vice versa, then they swing it where there's help, and then that guy can make a 3 or drive it, it makes them really hard to guard, and then they also offensive rebound. They're a very, very talented offensive team."

On whether he believes his team is becoming more consistent:

"You know, I don't think there's any question about that. Our scoring droughts are shorter. I think we're making fewer mistakes, and I think we're playing better defense. I think you're right, but I think it's unfortunate that it hasn't been reflected in more wins. But I've been pleased with how the guys have remained focused and continue to work and continue to believe in each other."

On how he handles going to specific locations where his programs have historically struggled:

"You know, I think it would be different if I was involved in that. But you're right. I have dealt with that. I remember when I got to Siena, where they call it "The Dreaded Buffalo Trip," and you'd go to Buffalo and play Niagara and Canisius, and we never win. We went there and split. We went there and won two. You know, I don't really pay much attention to location, other than I do think that crowd in particular at Illinois, you know, with all due respect to Canisius, is going to be a lot more intense than what we walked into."

"I do think this team is very talented, they have some upper-classmen of course who are talented, but they're also fighting for their NCAA Tournament lives, and they know that. They've got to take care of business at home. So we're walking into a very, very difficult situation. I would look more at it like we're playing a team that's talented, that is right there, that needs a few more wins, and we're going to be playing a team that is fighting hard and determined to get a win with

their home crowd behind them, more so than six years ago, we lost at Illinois. I don't put much credence into that."

On what the leadership of Jarryd Cole has meant to the Hawkeyes this season:

"Well, I'll be honest with you. He was one of the most impressive guys. When I first got the job, he had a way about him that made me feel good that I was going to have a leader like him, and that manifested itself in a lot of different ways.

"Obviously, he's a good player. But when your senior is your hardest worker, and he always conducts himself professionally in everything he does, whether it's in the classroom, off the court, when we're on the road. He says the right things to the freshmen. He says the right things in the locker room. He has always got a smile on his face. He has never not given me every ounce of effort for any drill, any minute of practice. You just can't say that about everybody. I mean, you might not say it. You wouldn't say it if somebody wasn't giving you effort, you would just not say anything. This kid has just been a blessing to me in my first year, to have a leader with that kind of character, and that also played well.

"It's assumed that, 'Hey, I'm a senior. I'm one of the better players, Coach is going to have to play me.' He kind of came in, and went out and earned it. He said, 'I'm going to prove it to the new coach, and I'm going to start, and I'm going to be a good player.' This is a guy coming off a serious injury now. I mean, he had some major offseason surgery. This wasn't not minor. He had to get in phenomenal shape, and he just has been everything that I could have hoped for, and the only thing I can say is I wish I had him back."

On if he's content with Devyn Marble remaining a starter over Eric May:

"Well, I made the switch to get Eric going, and I thought he

played well. I thought he has had good practices since. I thought Devyn Marble played extremely well in that game, so he keeps his starting job. The thing about it is they're both going to play a lot, and I told them both not to get drawn up on who is starting and who is not. Just contribute and be ready to go when you're called on."

On if he had been able to get what he had hoped out of this week:

"Yeah. I got to make two recruiting trips. The kids got two days off, which they desperately needed. We've got a lot of shots up, and we were able to sharpen a lot of our offensive sets and things of that nature that were getting a little sloppy, and really focus on that. We worked a lot on situations. Let's face it: We've been in a lot of close games lately, and it comes down to executing your out-of-bounds plays, your side out-of-bounds plays, O.K., if we need two, we need three. All of that kind of stuff.

"You can't practice that stuff enough. I don't care how experienced you are or how good you are, and so that gives us an opportunity to practice all of those situations. I think we benefited from it."

On if Illinois' constant shifts in line-ups affect preparation, or if the focus is more on personnel:

"You know, for us, I look at the first time we played them. [Jereme] Richmond wasn't starting. It looks like he might be starting now. To me, he's a terrific player and we talked a lot about him. [Bill] Cole, we didn't know if he was going to start or not start. He was starting, he didn't start against us, comes off the bench and hits four 3s in a row. We talked a lot about Cole. They have literally eight or nine, maybe 10 guys that can start legitimately, and they're all going to play.

"They're a team that we just look at collectively and get the

guys to know and understand what does Brandon Paul do, what does [Demetri] McCamey do, that they have different players on any given day that can be the guy who beats you, and not every team you play has that kind of depth."

On if he sees all three freshmen as "inside-out threats" next season and beyond:

"I do. I really do. I think Zach McCabe is a guy we talk less about than we do [Melsahn] Basabe and Marble because those two guys are starting. But I think Zach is an integral part of our program as we move forward. He's real close to being a terrific player. He has had a couple of games where he struggled, he has gotten down on himself a little bit. I've talked to him. I'm going to keep playing him, I want to keep going to him, and I think what you'll find is a guy who really develops. I'm really excited about all three of those guys."

On whether he would want to play in a lower-tier postseason tournament should Iowa be invited:

"You know, I think we got a letter of inquiry, and I think anytime you have a chance to play in postseason, I would be interested. I have to see how we finish up, what is our health, things of that nature, but it gives you an opportunity to give your young guys an opportunity. I know the group that runs the CBI [College Basketball Invitational], Rick Giles and his group, are really first-class oriented. I think they run a heck of a tournament. It's something that I would consider, but it's something that we would have to talk through, I think."

On if there's a specific lineup Illinois puts on the court that impresses him most on film:

"No, and I'll tell you why. I remember preparing for them the first time and kind of feeling like, 'O.K., I got a handle on who the starting lineup is.' And then they come off the bench with Richmond and Paul and [Meyers] Leonard, and I'm like,

'Wow. These guys can really play.' Then I'd pop in another tape and those guys started in that game. One game, [D.J.] Richardson gets 19 [points], then the next game Richmond gets 20. Those teams, like I said, are really hard to prepare for.

"I don't think you can go into the game and say, 'All right, this is the lineup we're going to face, and this is who is coming off the bench and this is what their roles are.' Because it changes constantly. You just have to be ready for a collective group of talent that plays well, and plays well at home. They've got a lot of different shot-makers. Very few teams have that many shot-makers – guys that can make a shot at the end of the clock, make a shot at the end of a game.

"When we played them here, I never coached a game where a team made seven 3's on seven straight possessions. I mean, that never happened before, and it was different players. Down the stretch here, McCamey was the guy. He was the guy. But you watch another game, and it's any number of different people. I mean, a guy that nobody talks about is Richardson. I think he's terrific. Any one of those guys can hurt you."

On what makes McCamey an effective distributor:

"Well, he doesn't rattle. I mean, he has got size, he doesn't rattle. You can't trap him. If you trap him, he's going to score or keep dribbling around you. He has always got his head up. He can make a deep 3, or he can drive the ball to the basket and finish, or if he goes off the dribble and the help comes, he immediately gets rid of the ball. Those guys are a nightmare to try and guard because you know, you can keep the one side, you can trap him, you can ice him, you can do any number of things, and he's going to figure out a way to make a play, and that's why I think he's going to play in the NBA."

On whether Basabe would be the first freshman he could that averaged more points in college than high school:

"Wow. You know what, I'm thinking, I'm going through some of

my great ones over the years. Probably, he might be. He might be the only one. I'd have to really write down and look, but that's jumps out at me."

On whether Basabe being possibly the only player to do that for him would be an accomplishment:

"It is. I think it is an accomplishment, and I think it just goes to show you how much talent he has and how much is there. He just keeps getting better, and I will tell you, I love him, but I'm on him hard, and that's what he wants. It's funny. His mother is constantly telling me, 'Stay on him. Stay on him.' Because he'll listen. Some kids, they think they accept coaching, but they really don't. But he wants us to push him hard to continue to get better because he sees himself getting better, and I'm excited for him. I'm excited for him for what he has done this year so far, but I think more importantly, where he's heading."