

2/28/2011: 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:

"We only played one game this week. We played a very good Illinois team on the road. I think, you know, from our perspective, we competed well in a difficult environment and overcame a 10-0 drought to start the game, and came back and were right there. I thought I had some good individual performances. I thought [Bryce] Cartwright and [Melsahn] Basabe in particular, and I thought [Matt] Gatens played well.

"I will say this about Illinois – it's a team that I've been impressed with from the very beginning. They had a couple of tough losses, and people tend to jump off the bandwagon as quick as they get on it. It's a team I would not want to play later on in March."

On who Ohio State's Jared Sullinger reminds him of, and what Sullinger's strengths are as a player:

"Well, you know, I don't know if there's anybody that comes to mind right away, and to be honest with you, I don't like to make a lot of comparisons. I think Jared Sullinger is who he is. He's a guy that will very likely be the first pick. He's going to be a lottery pick if he's not the first pick. The thing that impresses me most about him is his composure for a young player. He just absolutely never panics. Everybody wants

to jump to, 'He's strong, He has got post moves, He can pass.' He has got the skill-set, and he has the body. But his basketball intellect is well beyond his years.

"He has been taught well by his father, who was also his coach. Thad [Matta] has done a real good job with him. They use him right. He is surrounded by a great team. That helps him because he's picking you apart. I mean, he can dominate a game and not be in double-figures, with rebounding and passing. Because when you play them, he might be the best I've ever coached against at recognizing the double-team and dealing with the double-team, so you got to pick your poison when you're playing against them.

"The thing that stands out for me, as I said, is his demeanor on the floor and understanding how to play. And the other thing is, I think he is totally and completely committed to winning, and ironically, he ends up getting a lot of the credit. He does not, in my view, pursue, you know, personal publicity or gain in any way. He wants to win and he knows that the other stuff will come."

On how someone like Sullinger becomes team-oriented and all about winning:

"I think it was how he was raised. If he has been raised the right way at home and he's coached the right way and he hasn't been coddled, and he has character, he is going to be that way. You know, we sometimes get carried away with what I kind of just talked about. It's not an individual game. It's a team game, and when you have five players that play together and players that come off the bench that accept their roles and players who don't have issues off the court, and a good coaching staff that coaches them up, then that team is going to win games.

"That's how he has been his entire career. He has always won. If he loses, he loses with class and he figures out a way to

win the next time. I think it's a maturity that's developed over time, but it's really a function of his background. When you see somebody like that, it's special because there are others that aren't going the same way. They're going for theirs, and the results are what they are. They've had a phenomenal year, and they're going to continue to be a team that I think has a legitimate shot at the national championship."

On how he would rate Iowa's home crowds and if he feels the Hawkeyes have had a home-court advantage:

"I have been absolutely blown away by our crowd. I had heard a number of things before I got here about attendance dwindling and crowds weren't into the game. They have been absolutely phenomenal for us. The student body, our season-ticket base, you know, Hawkeye faithful. We had 14,000 at our last game. We had a phenomenal crowd for Wisconsin, Ohio State. We had a sellout for Illinois. We had a stinker against Minnesota and had 13,000 showing. I have been really impressed with how our fans have responded to this team.

"I think what they have done is recognize that while we may be a little bit short in terms of size and depth, that our players have really competed and they've adapted to a new style and they share the basketball, and they really worked on defense and become a better defensive team.

"As I said the day I was hired, we have a sophisticated fan base, and they're able to discern the difference between a team that's just running around and a team that's hustling and playing with a purpose. And while our record doesn't show it, I do feel like we have made great progress, and I think it's a function of just how good this league is. We've got a real stiff test coming up on Wednesday, and we're preparing for that now."

On where incoming recruit Aaron White fits in following a win

over the top-ranked team in Ohio last weekend:

"Well, he's going to be right in the middle of it. He has a chance to start, and if he doesn't start, he's going to play a lot. That's just where he is. He had 36 [points] in that game you were just talking about, and he's just a guy that does it with no fanfare, you know, no big deal. He has got great court demeanor. He has got a complete skill set, so he can play sort of an undersized 4 or a big 3, he can traffic rebound and push it on the break himself, he can pass it, he has 3-point range and he's really athletic with the ball. So he's the perfect fit for our style of play, and we're really excited about it."

On what the scouting report was on Sullinger when Iowa played Ohio State back in January:

"Well, what we did that game was we were so concerned about 3-point shooting, we went one-on-one in the post with him. In the first half of that game, Melsahn [Basabe] blocked a few of his shots and he may have outplayed him. In the second half, he got us. I mean, he just basically picked us apart. They went to him early, they went to him often, and he either scored it or found someone, one of his teammates, and was really effective."

"That changed our thinking for the next time that we went to play them, and I think that's the difficulty when you play this team. O.K., so we go in with that game plan, it's working, and then during the course of the game, we had to change it, and now we got to play them again, and that was relatively quickly. We just decided, 'Look, we have to go get this guy.' We held him to a lower number. He didn't have a ton up there, but they beat us by 18 or 20 as I recall. So it's kind of like what I said to one of the earlier questions – you pick your poison."

"And the beauty of him is, he just wants to win the game. If he gets 10 [points] and they win, that's great. If he gets 30

and they win, that's great. He'll do what he has to do based on what the other team does to him. If you double, he picks you apart. If you don't, he'll cross you up and spins and dunks and gets to the free-throw line. I mean, I think the thing that you're always concerned about with him is if you give him too much single coverage, he's going to shoot 40 free throws, and then if he does that, you have no chance."

On if he ever thinks about where the Hawkeyes would be without Cartwright at the point this season:

"Oh, there's no question. You know, when we got him, we were excited about him for a couple of reasons. He had a pretty decent freshman year at Fresno State, goes to Paris [junior college], has a solid season. He didn't burst on the basketball scene with a lot of people wanting him. But we had an extensive conversation. His junior college coach used to work for [Iowa assistant] Kirk Speraw, so we got the straight scoop from him. He loved the kid and said, 'I think this kid can be really good.' And again, it goes back to one of the questions I answered earlier. One of the reasons why we thought he could be so good was No. 1, he had talent, but No. 2, he had character.

"You know, I spent some time talking to his father, who coached him growing up, and just a terrific guy. You know, he grew up in the gym. His father ran a [recreational] center, so he was a guy that just grew up in the gym, played in Compton, competitive situation, really good high school program, really competitive AAU, and never backed off competition. Ironically, for him, part of the reason why he was still available in June was, in his mind, he was a Big Ten player. He wasn't a mid-major player, and up until that point, those were the only offers that he had. He was willing to wait. 'Something was going to happen. Something's going to pop up that gives me the opportunity to be on the stage that I feel I deserve to be on.'

"When he came here for his visit, he conducted himself with class and character, and we knew he was an athlete, and he had an opportunity to go from a guy who was going to play in the 20-25 minute range to the 35-40 minute range, and he has made the best of it. I mean, if you think about what he did on Saturday, eight points and nine assists after being in bed the entire day before – he couldn't practice, he was throwing up, he had a fever. I mean, that's a tough kid right there."