

3/4/2011: Fran McCaffery teleconference transcript (premium)

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Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery held a teleconference with the local media on Friday prior to the Hawkeyes' game on March 5 against No. 6 Purdue at Carver-Hawkeye Arena.

Below is the complete transcript from the interview:

On whether he feels his team as progressed at the rate he had hoped it would at this point:

"I think we have progressed. I had hoped we would progress more. I think anytime before you begin a season, you hope to be in position to win a championship or, you know, be above .500. There is a number of different goals that you might have. I didn't have a win total in my head as far as what I thought this team could accomplish. All I wanted to do was prepare for the next game and try to get better. I think we've done that. I think the league is really good. It's really hard to win on the road. I already knew that.

"But I think individual players have improved. We have gotten better in terms of our mistakes. You know, we were making more mistakes earlier in the season. I think [Melsahn] Basabe and [Devyn] Marble, in particular, have really developed. I think [Zach] McCabe has been an excellent freshman. I think Matt Gatens, defensively, has been phenomenal. I'm really impressed with his development there, his focus and concentration. I think Jarryd Cole has improved as much as anybody, and that's something that was probably least expected. When you have a

senior, you figure that's about what you're going to get. He has been terrific. I think [Andrew] Brommer has gotten better.

"So I think a lot of positives, not necessarily reflected in the record, so that is something that I wish was better. But I feel good about our improvement."

On whether Purdue are as good or better since Iowa last played the Boilermakers in January:

"I think they're about the same. The interesting thing about them, [JaJuan] Johnson, I mean, if he wasn't a lottery pick, he is now. He has played at an unbelievable level, to me. E'Twaun Moore started the season shooting the ball extremely well, had a little bit of a shooting slump, and I think the impressive thing for that team is that they didn't have a slump when he had a shooting slump. Now he's killing it again. When we played them, he was shooting 44 [percent] from 3, now he's shooting 41. You know, he's back playing like a first-round draft pick, which I think he can be.

"But the other guys, I think Lewis Jackson has had a phenomenal, phenomenal season for them. I think he was the key to them having the kind of season and get them to the point where they get the kind of seed that they should be able to get. He was right in the middle of that. But everybody else, [Ryne] Smith is making shots, [D.J.] Byrd makes shots, when they're open, otherwise, they just defend. And then they got guys coming in who defend, and [Kelsey] Barlow's a driver, and [John] Hart's making jump shots, and he defends.

"Everybody has got a role, and they play it to the best of their abilities, so that hasn't changed. You know, their intensity defensively, and each player's willingness to accept the specific role that Matt [Painter] has designed for them hasn't changed. They're a team, in my estimation, that has really understood the concept of committing to winning. That team is trying to win. They don't have a bunch of individuals

that are playing for themselves."

On if he has talked to the team about finishing strong despite being 10-19:

"You know, to go back to what I said earlier, I just go to the next game and try to get better and play that game. I don't get involve with history. I think every coach in the country wants his team to finish strong. There are teams that, I remember a team that we lost by 23 on the last day of the season, and won the conference tournament, went to the NCAAs, and almost beat the No. 1 team in the country.

"Is it important? Yes. It's probably more important for us than that team. That team was going to be a 20-win team. But I'm not concerned about a road trip that happened last year. I'm just trying to get this team to play better than we played the other night. The other night, we played extremely well for 30 minutes. But with eight guys, you run out of gas."

On the importance of Eric May in particular having a strong finish to this season:

"Well, I think it would be important for our team, and also for him. The thing about him that is impressive to me is that while he has struggled more from an offensive standpoint, he has been able to be an effective player with his ability to keep fighting, with his ability to play defense, with his ability to give us effort. Pretty solid play from an experienced player.

"He's just not making as many shots as he was earlier in the year, and that's obviously upsetting to him, you know, more so than it is to me. He's trying. He's taking good shots. He is getting the ball to the rim still, and he's just not getting them to fall like they were. He's still playing defense. I got him playing point guard through four men. That gives us the versatility that we need, and he's not a big mistake guy, so that helps us as well. He has given us quality minutes. He has

just not been as productive as he was, or as productive as we would like him to be, offensively."

On what it would look like in the future to look back at having a player like Cole this season:

"Well, I think that's a real good point. Not that it means anything to you, but I think back when I was at Siena, I mention a guy like David Ryan, who nobody ever talks about. He was a rock, an absolute rock. So was Tay Fisher, who has got more publicity because he got to be on one of the championship teams. David Ryan set the table for everybody else by his character. And I'm going to tell you what: Jarryd Cole, and I said this to you the other day, is sincerely one of my favorite players that I have ever had, for a number of reasons.

"His maturity, I don't know that I've seen that in anyone before. For someone who has been through what he has been through obviously, it's his third coach, he has been on losing teams, but his positive approach has never been questioned. He has never been negative one second. He never points fingers at anybody else. He takes full responsibility and total accountability for everything that he does, which gives him credibility in the locker room to be able to say something to somebody else who may be doing the opposite, and he's always able to do it in a way that it's taken by that player appropriately and has a positive outcome.

"The only disappointing thing for me is that I won't get to coach him next year and won't have him around because only good things happen when Jarryd Cole is around."

On the contributions made in practice by senior T.J. Sayre:

"Well, he's everything we could have hoped for. What we wanted with that last walk-on position was to get a bigger guy. You know, a guy who had some size, who could come in, and in practice, make a difference, and be good enough to make a

difference. It's one thing to be 6-6 or 6-7, but you got to know how to play. You've got to be able to remember every team in the league's offense and run it effectively and be able to make a play.

"He has been everything that we could have hoped for there. He has got great basketball IQ, he's a good athlete for his size. He was able to compete with Melsahn and Jarryd and Brommer in practice, remember everything that we ask him to do, and he does it in a very quiet, competitive way. I've really, really enjoyed having him around."

On if he remembers coaching a game where 0 3-pointers were made and if he tells the team to keep taking looks if they're there:

"Right. There was no time that I said, 'Hey, why didn't you throw it inside? Why didn't you drive it?' I thought the 3-point shots we had [against Michigan State] were open shots by good shooters that I would have expected them to shoot when they caught the ball. You know, we have not been drilling it from 3 in terms of percentage, but I don't think any of us expected 0-for-12. [Michigan State's Keith] Appling has not been shooting the ball that well, and he goes 4-for-5. [Austin] Thornton had not been shooting the ball that well, and he makes the one he took. You know, there are games that way.

"But I think the thing that affected us more than that was we had been shooting free throws extremely well, and as you know, we were shooting them very poorly early in the season. We go out and miss 13 free throws. I don't know how many were front ends, but I know at least a couple of them were. You know, we lose a game by 19 points and miss 13 free throws and miss a couple of front-ends, not that you expect to make every foul shot, but that will impact the game in so many different ways. We've gotten back, we worked on that yesterday, and we'll work on it again today."

On who he hopes fills Cole's void next season in terms of leadership intangibles:

"Well obviously, Matt Gatens is going to have to do it. He'll be a senior. But I think there are a number of different players that can do it. I think Eric May, who will be a junior who, has a lot of experience. I think Basabe has earned some credibility. I think Bryce Cartwright, who will be a senior, he is very well-thought of, very well-liked by his teammates, I think he has earned the respect through his performance, but more so with the way he has carried himself. He's a good person. He's a positive person. I think he's somebody."

On if he has been pleased with home attendance and what he expects on Saturday:

"I have been pleased. I've been really impressed and quite frankly, been very appreciative of how the fans have responded to our team. I think it's a combination of things, and sometimes when you lose some games, especially when you lose in those gut-wrenching overtime games, or the 2-3 point losses, you need those fans to keep coming back, and they have done that. We've had two stinkers at home – Minnesota and Northwestern. Actually, Minnesota wasn't as bad as Northwestern because Northwestern, we were bad at both ends. We held Minnesota to 62 points, we should be able to be in the game. We couldn't make a shot that day."

"So I think they have responded well. I think they have made a difference. We have played so much better at home, and I think they like the style of play. They like these kids, and they understand we're a little under-manned in terms of size and experience and depth, but they appreciate that they compete, and they're playing the game the right way, and they're trying to make progress and move forward, and [the fans] have responded in an incredibly positive way. I appreciate it, but I think more importantly, it's not about me. Our players really appreciate it."

On if improving the offense is the biggest priority and if he recruits offense first over defense:

"You know, I think if you looked at my track record, even if I said I wasn't doing that, that's what I end up doing. It's just how I am. It's how I think. I think if you analyze our team, I don't think you can question our effort. We have not made a ton of shots, whether it'd be in the post, off penetration, or from 3-point range. We need more shooting, and I think the two guys that we have signed already will greatly impact that. There's no question about that."

"Now do we need defense, do we need a shot-blocker, do we need a physical post-presence, do we need another offensive low-post? Yeah, we need all of that. But the one great equalizer is the 3-point shot. You can have three bad possessions in a row and go from down one to down seven, and then all of sudden, somebody hits a 3 and you're down four, and you're right back in it. And that's something that we're going to look at hard because you want every piece to fit perfectly."

"You can look at the tape just like I do, and it's no different. You've watched us play. You know what we need. I know what we need. You can always address certain parts, but the one area that will take an impact is we've got to get some 3-point shooting here, and I think [Josh] Oglesby and Aaron White will do that. But they also bring us a 6-6 and a 6-8 body, both of whom can play more than one position, both of whom rebound, so we're addressing a lot of things. But when it's all said and done, we've got to get some points."

"We have got to be able to eliminate those scoring droughts that have plagued our team, less so in recent weeks than earlier in the season when they seemed to be prolonged. You know, they're much shorter in span now, but essentially the same thing ends up happening. We have a 2-3 minute stretch where we can't buy a basket, they hit two or three buckets, their three-point lead now goes to nine, and it's hard to come

back. If you put some shooters out there, it changes everything."

On whether Devon Archie has any chance of playing against Purdue:

"He practiced yesterday and looked pretty good. So what we were going to do yesterday was he got the approval to practice, and then we would evaluate him after practice, then see how he was feeling today. Does he have headaches, does he have dizziness, does he have nausea? If none of those things are affecting him, then he'll go ahead and practice again today, and then we'll evaluate him again, does he have any headaches, any nausea, anything like that, then he could go ahead tomorrow. But he looked awfully good yesterday in practice."

On who he'd pick to be Big Ten Player of the Year:

"[Purdue forward] JaJuan Johnson."