

# 10/27/2011: Big Ten Media Day notebook



Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery speaks during his press conference at Big Ten Basketball Media Day on Thursday at the Crowne Plaza O'Hare in Rosemont, Ill.

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

ROSEMONT, Ill. — As expected, the 2011-12 college basketball season begins with Ohio State picked as a heavy favorite to win what would be a third straight Big Ten championship.

The Buckeyes have won both the regular season and conference tournaments in each of the last two seasons, and Thad Matta has firepower returning to his lineup in players such as Jared Sullinger, who was chosen as the Big Ten's Preseason Player of the Year, and William Buford.

Matta said Sullinger's decision to return for his sophomore campaign came as no surprise, as Sullinger had told him from the get-go he was committed to playing at least two seasons at Ohio State before contemplating a shot at the NBA.

As for what Sullinger brings the Buckeyes this season, Matta

said his body fat was down and that he has been moving more fluidly on the court.

“If we can move him around a little bit more, they won’t be able to beat on him as much,” Matta said.

Wisconsin, who also made a Sweet 16 appearance last season along with Ohio State, was tabbed second and Michigan State was picked to finish third. The Badgers no longer have the services of Jon Leuer or Keaton Nankivil, but returning is senior point guard Jordan Taylor, who is the Big Ten’s returning leading scorer after averaging over 18 points per game last season.

Bo Ryan, who is entering his 12th season as Wisconsin’s head coach, said he doesn’t expect Taylor to post similar numbers to what he had a year ago, but is encouraging him to become a more consistent player with each day.

“He is our hardest worker,” Ryan said. “He’s the guy that makes everybody around him better.”

Meanwhile, The Spartans are coming off a disappointing season by their standards, winning 19 games and losing in the second round of the NCAA Tournament to UCLA. The key figure returning for Michigan State this season is forward Draymond Green, who head coach Tom Izzo described as “a mainstay,” whose leadership attributes resemble that of former Spartan greats Magic Johnson and Mateen Cleaves.

“He’s probably one of the more intelligent basketball players I’ve ever coached,” Izzo said. “He has a great understanding of the game, and he’s improved his shooting a lot.”

The preseason all-Big Ten team revealed Thursday featured Sullinger, Taylor, Green, Minnesota forward Trevor Mbakwe, and Purdue forward Robbie Hummel, who hasn’t played since February 2010 after tearing his right ACL on two separate occasions (then, and last October when Purdue started practices).

## **Big Ten intending to stand pat**

Commissioner Jim Delany reaffirmed his stance that the Big Ten doesn't have interest in expanding further. Delany was on hand at the Crowne Plaza O'Hare and when fielded questions about conference realignment, he acknowledged having interest in what others were doing but nothing beyond that.

"We're out of the discussion," Delany said. "As an interested observer, I'm sure there were people on the West Coast who watched what we were doing when we were active and they were not. We watch with interest in what others are doing.

"I think it's important in the business to watch and to monitor. But that has been the extent of our interaction."

One school in particular that was brought up during the discussion was that of Notre Dame, who is independent in football, but has all of its other sports resided in the Big East, which is currently in the center of realignment talks. Delany mentioned having conversations in the summer with Notre Dame athletics director Jack Swarbrick regarding hockey and on scheduling issues for sports such as football, but nothing about expansion.

"In the '90s, we had active discussions with Notre Dame, and that was that," Delany said. "We acknowledged it at the time, but we haven't since."

## **Update on the Hawkeyes**

Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery said Thursday that freshman forward Aaron White was back practicing after injuring his thumb, but that senior forward Andrew Brommer would still be out about three more weeks with a sprained MCL he suffered two weeks ago. He also confirmed recent speculation of sophomore guard Devyn Marble having missed most of the team's preseason practices after suffering a concussion during the team's first week.

"He looks fine, he says he feels fine, but there's a variety of tests he has to pass that aren't going as well," McCaffery said. "So we're not going to risk that."

As for the guys who have been able to participate, one player that has not only caught McCaffery's attention, but the attention of his teammates, is freshman center Gabe Olaseni. McCaffery said Olaseni has led the team in rebounding through two weeks a practice, and senior guard Bryce Cartwright seconded what was said by his coach.

"He's able to constantly run up and down the court, keeping defensive players honest," Cartwright said.

McCaffery also reiterated what he said at Iowa's Media Day on Oct. 13 about how he wants to keep sophomore forward Melsahn Basabe playing the 4-spot as much as possible. He believes keeping Basabe at that position would keep him away from foul trouble, which was an issue with the 6-7 forward last season.

### **Philadelphia connection**

McCaffery is now one of two Big Ten coaches with Philadelphia roots after Penn State hired Patrick Chambers to replace the outgoing Ed DeChellis, who accepted an offer to coach Navy.

Chambers, who was previously the head coach at Boston University, takes over a young Penn State squad that lost four starters off a team that reached the NCAA Tournament last season and consists of seven freshmen and five sophomores.

McCaffery described Chambers as a friend he was happy for when he landed the job and said he would be a "fierce competitor" recruiting players in the Eastern part of the country.

"We might go after a couple of guys in Philly periodically, but he'll do a great job there," McCaffery said. "There's no question in my mind."

To McCaffery's point, Chambers didn't make it a secret how

much value he plans to put in recruiting his region, which is heavily dominated by teams in the Big East.

"We're focused right now in the Northeast corridor," Chambers said. "We can't be afraid of going up against those guys."

## **Remembering the Fab Five**

When McCaffery was an assistant at Notre Dame, the Fighting Irish played a game during the 1991-92 season against Michigan that is historically significant.

That day, the Wolverines took to Notre Dame's court starting five true freshmen – Chris Webber, Jalen Rose, Juwan Howard, Jimmy King and Ray Jackson – that have been forever linked together as "The Fab Five." Michigan defeated Notre Dame, and would go on to lose the national championship game to Duke later that season.

"I think the thing that sticks out is the swagger that they had," McCaffery said. "They didn't act like freshmen."

This season marks the 20th anniversary of Michigan's "Fab Five" coming together and leading the Wolverines to the first of two consecutive seasons finishing as national runners-up. The statistics have since been stricken from the record books and the banners have since been removed from Crisler Arena. But the memories are still there.

ESPN released a documentary about the Fab Five back on Selection Sunday last March. That "swagger" McCaffery described is what stuck with current Michigan guard Tim Hardaway, Jr., as he watched the documentary. With the Wolverines reaching the NCAA Tournament last year and having higher expectations to perform well again this season, Hardaway senses a similar swagger developing in Ann Arbor and wants this current Michigan squad to have a similar on-the-court mindset the Fab Five had.

“It’s a great mentality to have as a basketball player,” Hardaway said. “Everybody’s coming out there with the same mentality you are, but it’s who wants it more and who’s going to do whatever they can to get it. Just having that, it’s very good.”

[10/27/2011 – Fran McCaffery press conference transcript](#)