

12/15/2011: 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 Dec. 17 against Drake at Carver-Hawkeye Arena.

Below is the complete transcript from the interview:

On what he anticipates being Bryce Cartwright's status against Drake this weekend:

"You know what, I'll know better today. He practiced yesterday, didn't seem to have too much difficulty. But the real test will be how does he feel today. I haven't seen him today. We practice at 6:30 [p.m.], so I know if he feels good, he can go ahead and practice today. I'm sure he'll be ready to go."

On whether Bryce Cartwright's return to the lineup sends Devyn Marble back to the bench, or would he still start over Eric May:

"You know what, that's a possibility. But I don't really look at that as being a big difference because all three of those guys are going to play a ton of minutes anyway. But that's a possibility."

On what he sees from Drake and the problems it will present:

"Well, they present a lot of problems in this sense – Obviously, [Ben] Simons is playing like... I would say Simons is

playing like a star. I mean, last year he was a good player. This year, he's the focal point of any team that prepares for Drake. But so is [Rayvonte] Rice. Those two guys average 17 points per game, basically. That's a tough team to prepare for I think, because you've got two really good point guards that can play together, or one could back up the other. They both can penetrate. They handle the ball.

"You know, you've got a couple of big guys. I mean, [Jordan] Clarke has been very helpful. He's a transfer. He was a very good player at Vermont, and now he's playing well here. [Kraidon] Woods, he's a fifth-year senior and he's a guy playing well. So they've got a lot of pieces and I think when you have two really good players that can really score, and then you put in some other valuable pieces, some of whom that have experience and have been around. They know the system. They run good stuff offensively. They're a team that can score points, and any team like that is tough to beat."

On whether Drake point guard Karl Madison is good at getting in the lane and passing inside:

"Well, he pushes it. He gets in the lane. He runs their stuff. I mean, he's rock solid. When you're starting to think that he's not going to score, then he scores. He's a very capable scorer. And again, he's playing about 24 minutes a game, playing really well for them. But [Kurt] Alexander also gives them another weapon, because he'll get on a roll. He can score in bunches. He did that against Iowa State. So you've got two quality players there that, like I said, they can play one behind the other or they can play together."

On where in Marble's game he has noticed the most growth:

"You know what, I think he has done about what I thought he would do. I mean, he was a very, very young freshman. We threw him right in there. He played a ton of point guard. He was skinny. But he's a fearless player who's talented and I think

has a chance to be really special before he's done here. What you're seeing is a guy who's older, he's more mature, he has paid attention. He has watched film. He reads the scouting report. He assimilates information. The more minutes he gets, the better he plays. The better he plays, the more confidence he gets.

"You know, I don't think he has even reached what he's going to be, by any means. I think the real test is can he kind of play the way he has been playing consistently, every night, and can he do it night in and night out in the Big Ten, because he has already done. But the key for him now is to do it regularly, and I think he will."

On what he hopes to accomplish against Drake beyond the final score:

"Nothing different than what we try to accomplish every game. We want to try and get better. I mean, defensively, we haven't been as good as we need to be, so we want to be better defensively. We want to execute a little bit better. We have been executing better, but it's not good enough. And ultimately, when you do those things, hopefully they're reflected in the final score with a win. But I also want to continue to develop our young players so that they can get better and better, and we can be a better team as a result of that. So we want to get each individual player to be better.

"I think we want to see Melsahn [Basabe] continue to develop the consistency that he played with last year. The last two ball games, he put up pretty good numbers, but we want to see that trend continue and we want to see him play even better. So I think from one game to the next, that's what we want to do every time."

On Cartwright's status and how the dynamic might change with him and Marble with both healthy:

"Well, I would expect Bryce to play and play well. He had a

good practice yesterday. We'll see how he feels today. When we practice at 6:30 tonight, will he be stronger or will he have deteriorated from yesterday in the fact that he really exerted himself yesterday? I think that will be the real test because obviously, he needs to put practices back-to-back to where his conditioning is where it needs to be so he can go play against a team the quality of Drake. I think we'll know more today and then more tomorrow, and then we'll figure out exactly where he figures into the starting lineup or coming off the bench."

On whether having Cartwright and Marble on the floor together might be his best lineup despite the risks it presents:

"Well you know, I will tell you this – when they were both healthy this year, they did play well together, and we ended last year with them both in the starting lineup. Eric May is a guy that will get a ton of minutes and be a very, very critical part of anything we do in terms of success. So we may choose to end up starting those two guys, or we may not. We may go back to bringing Bryce off the bench or go back to bringing Dev off the bench. I'm not 100 percent sure right now. I think what you'll see is you'll see it develop I think pretty easily over the next few games, and then we'll make a decision."

On the importance of getting Basabe going defensively as well as offensively:

"Well, I've challenged him since the Iowa State game to be more of a factor in that area because he hasn't been. I think it's a hard thing, because we need him and he knows I've tended to take guys out after two fouls early, and I'm sure he doesn't want to foul and we don't want to foul. We're a team that doesn't foul. I think going into the Northern Iowa game, normally if you look at my teams, we make more free throws than the other team attempts, and before the Northern Iowa game, it was 134-137. I mean, we were right on par. So there's a fine line."

"I need him to be aggressive. I need him to challenge [Iowa State's] Royce White when he comes down the lane to dunk the ball. I need him to get a couple to three blocks a game, and get over and challenge, and mix it up and occasionally get over and take a charge, or get over and put your hands in the air and body up. So I think the thing for him is to figure out how to be effective in that area you described without getting in foul trouble."

On how Basabe has responded to that challenge during practices since the Iowa State game:

"He has been way better, and that's the thing about him. He has got tough skin, and I'm not an 'in your face' guy, but I will get in your face. You know, 'in your face' coaches are just constantly there, and I'm not that kind of coach. I consider myself a teacher. I want to be constructive and I want to be calm. But if I feel like I need to challenge you on the court, if I need to challenge you in the locker room, then I will. It's my responsibility to be honest with somebody that I think had the particular skill that he has not utilized. It's not to try and get somebody to do something that they can't do. That's not going to do either of us any good."

"I mean, I had watched Melsahn Basabe play in a million different situations going back to when we first started recruiting him. I mean, he is not an average shot blocker. He is a great shot blocker. He had seven blocks in the Iowa State game [in 2010], he had six against Ohio State. I mean, he's not going to lead the country with six-and-a-half blocks, but I need a game like that every once in a while. I need three and I need the thought of the other team when they're driving to the basket, 'Where's Melsahn? He might block my shot,' and he has backed off more than he should have, and he agrees. When you challenge him and you point something out to him and make sense with it, he'll buy in and he'll try to address it. He has tried to do that."

On the importance of having a week off after playing 10 games over a one-month stretch:

"It was pretty intense. We needed a little bit of time. We also needed time because they have to get ready for the most important week of the year academically. So I think in two areas, it was important. Also, as a result of that period that you described, we're a little banged up. Luckily it wasn't too bad. I mean, it hurt us with Bryce, and early on it was hurting us with [Andrew] Brommer. The other guys were able to play. Eric May had a back issue for the Iowa State game. Gabe [Olaseni] and [Devon] Archie were banged up for the Northern Iowa game. But we could get through that stuff. The only thing that's going to affect those kinds of injuries is some days off and some time in the training room."

On what he saw watching incoming recruits Mike Gesell and Adam Woodbury play head-to-head last weekend:

"Well, I was excited about both those guys the first time I saw them play. It was a classic game. There was a huge crowd. Very intense. Mike had 21 [points] and five 3s in the first half. That was pretty impressive. Adam had foul trouble, but still had 15 rebounds, so I was pretty impressed with both of them. They're winning players, they compete on every possession. They just fight and fight fight, and they understand how to win. That's, I think, the impact they're going to have into our program."

On whether a leader in the mold of former player Jarryd Cole has been identified yet:

"We don't have anybody like Jarryd Cole, but I think Matt Gatens has been pretty good. Remember, he was a captain last year as well. He's not as vocal as Jarryd, and I don't think he should be. But he is a phenomenally hard worker. He speaks when he needs to speak. I think that has been really good. I think Eric May has led, not with his verbal approach, but with

his work ethic as well, and I think Marble has been really good as our point guard. He just settles everybody down and he directs. He's much more comfortable in that role.

"The guy that has had just a rocky start has been Bryce and it's not because of anything... you know, it's sort of out of his control. I thought he started not shooting the ball well and I think that affected him a little bit, but then the concussion-symptoms and then the hamstring pull have really limited his ability to be as effective as he's capable of being. And he is not a verbal guy. He is not a Jarryd Cole in the locker room. He's not a Jarryd Cole on the floor. But he is capable of settling everybody down and being a quality point guard and leading that way. So I think we sort of have more people filling that role than what Jarryd was able to do."

On how Cartwright's start to the season may have an effect on the offensive struggles thus far:

"You know, what's interesting is the game that I thought he played the best was the Brown game. He played through that injury. He didn't say anything. I didn't see the play. If he had said something, we probably would've tried to win without him in the second half and shut him down. We might have been able to save him for those next two games, but nobody knew what happened. He just said, 'Yeah, I tweaked my leg.' Then we went back and looked at the play. It was the last play at the end of the first half.

"But that game, I mean, he was engaged defensively, consistently. I thought he directed the offense well. He made some baskets. He still hasn't shot the ball as well as he's capable or as he did last year, but that isn't necessary for this team. He'll score, as long as he's feeling good about himself out there. So there's no question.

"It's one thing to have a hamstring pull and not feel like you

can turn it loose. But it's another thing to have gotten hit in the head twice, and have trouble concentrating and remembering things. That's a little bit more frightening, I think, and I definitely think that he was really struggling for about three weeks with that whole thing, and that's why we kept sitting him and putting him to the side."

On how Marble has handled the increase in responsibility from a mental/emotional standpoint:

"He shows absolutely no effect, at all. He's the same all the time. I mean, you can see him... I can't ever remember him being any different any day that I have ever seen him. He's easy-going, but he's a competitor. He cares about his teammates. He works hard. If you correct him, 'O.K., Coach. Got it.' If you blast him because he did a couple of things that were ill-advised, he takes it. 'O.K., Coach. Got it.' And he has really got a tremendous attitude for this game, and I think a tremendous approach.

"I think in the long haul, that mental approach will really be good for him. Because we talk about as we have struggled these past couple games, 'Don't get too low,' and if we had won all of them, you don't want to get too high, because you have to stay focused. You have to plug through the season. You have to work, and you have to respect your next opponent. That's the approach you have to have. That's where the mental toughness side comes in. Well, he already does that.

"That's the way he approaches every day, every practice, every game. He doesn't get ahead of himself. If he has a great game, it's no big deal. If he has a bad game, well we'll try to get better, but I'm not going to die with that game and lose my confidence. I mean, he's going to be just as confident the next game, and that's really a special quality to have, I think."

On whether he thinks players might not be as far along in his

system as he would have liked, thus leading to poor execution against Iowa State:

"Well, most of the breakdowns I think I was referring to in that game were more at the defensive end than the offensive end. Did we run our motion game well? No, we didn't run it that well. But we executed our sets pretty well, and we executed our three-quarter and full-court press pretty well. Our half-court man was horrendous.

"Now, that's not to take anything away from Iowa State, who executed their offense and had good players playing hard and making shots. But our defensive execution was not good. That's, I think, more what I was referring to than what was happening at the offensive end. We executed our out-of-bounds plays, on the side, underneath. We executed against pretty much whatever they ran against us.

"Our screening and our cutting into motion was not as good as it was partly because of the fact that they're powerful and athletic and they got up into us a little bit. Sometimes, it's harder to screen when teams are playing that way, so you just have to work that much harder. They were really the two areas that I thought we were the weakest."

On whether the start to this season has changed his mind about using the one extra scholarship he currently has:

"You know what, I don't think it has made us say, 'O.K., we're definitely going to go out and use it.' I mean, in my mind, it's great to have. You never know when you're going to get that phone call right around Christmas, 'Hey, I just got my release. I'm looking to leave.' That's usually from a person we know, and would it make sense. You get a phone call, there's a guy available. There's a ton of seniors that are still available. There's prep school kids. There's some junior-college athletes out there. Would one of those guys make sense for us?"

"We were going to explore that anyway. I would use it in May, I would use it in June, if I thought it would benefit our team. The likelihood, and I'll just be honest with you, is that we'll hold it and we'll carry it into next year and go with these five and what we have back. But I haven't said we're opening the door, we're shutting the door completely. No, it's there. We're still looking and we're still making calls and we're still fielding calls. If we find the right fit, we're going to pull the trigger on him."

On where Marble's steadiness and maturity comes from, even being as young as he is:

"He really is, but I just think it's a function of how he was raised. I think it's a function of his high-school coach, his AAU coach, the people that raised him. His influence from his dad. I think his mom is terrific. He has just played a lot of basketball. He grew up in a basketball household. He grew up in a basketball area in Detroit. He has played a lot, so he doesn't walk on the floor afraid of anything or anybody."

"You know, he is very confident in his own skin. So he is going to come out there and he is going to try and outplay you. If you outplay him, 'All right. You know what? You got me tonight. I'll take tomorrow, I'll try to get you, and I'll come back the next day and try to get you.' For some reason, that's not as easy as it sounds for some people. They get caught up in the trappings of the game, the crowd, the TV. The other night at Iowa State, I mean, that was a pretty intense crowd. He was unaffected by that crowd."

"You know, I think he understands, and this is what we try to do as coaches, is get guys to understand, 'You're going to be affected by the guy that's in front of you. That tough guy in the fifth row that's insulting you, he can't affect the game unless you listen to him. But the guy that's in front of you, he can affect you.' Marble just attacks the guy in front of him, and that's what I respect about him."