

1/16/2012: Fran McCaffery teleconference transcript (premium)

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Below is a written transcript of Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery's teleconference on Monday with the Big Ten media:

McCaffery's opening statement:

"Well, this past week was obviously an interesting week for us. We did not play well at Michigan State. We played probably as well as we have played all year against Michigan. So I think the important thing to take from that is we recognized at least some of what our deficiencies were and tried to effect change in a positive way, did so. Now I think the challenge for us moving forward is to continue to do that."

On what his reaction would've been if told three weeks ago he'd start Big Ten play at 3-3:

"Yeah, I don't know. That's an interesting question. I think the thing that might've been a little bit interesting is the fact that we won two games on the road. You know, we know how hard it is to win on the road, and we showed some toughness in both of those games. The other side of it is, we had a number of ranked teams in the first six games. That stands to reason that we would've beat at least one of them, which we did, so I think that's a good sign. But if you asked me, 'Would I take 3-3?' I'd still say, 'Let's play the games.'"

On what he intends to have the players do over the course of its upcoming 9-day layoff after Tuesday's game at Purdue:

"Well, it has been a pretty intense run here. I don't think it's necessarily a bad thing when we're not in session. I think the more games and the more activity we can involve them in, the better. They need a little bit of rest. There's no question about that. They need to get focused on the beginning of the academic semester. So I think it will come at a welcome time for them and then we'll just get back to work and sharpen some things."

"Sometimes when the games come quickly, you tend to focus on the next opponent. When you have nine days off, you can spend more time refocusing on some of the things that we're doing well and get better at some things we're not doing so well and try to improve in those areas."

On if he ever gets a feel based on practice whether he'll get a good effort or not from his team:

"You know what, I think you have a sense more so when you're going to play well than when you're not going to play so well. I think I would say that over the years, that has been more something I think I've been able to honestly assess, O.K., like 'I think we're going to play well today.' Even then, that doesn't always happen. Usually it does if I have that feeling. I really felt like we were going to play well against Michigan. I think it would stand to reason we played so poorly against the previous two teams, and sometimes you have to remind yourself just how good those two teams are."

"But I thought we showed great maturity in terms of refocusing in our preparation for the Michigan game. The next step is we're going into one of the most difficult venues in the country against a team that's playing well. So we have to refocus and reenergize and figure out a way to defend a team that we didn't defend so well the last time we played them."

On the challenges presented by Purdue guard Lewis Jackson:

"I think that the hard thing with him is he's so quick and so

crafty and so powerful, and he's also relentless. But I think Matt [Painter] does a good job in how he uses him. He gives him the space he needs and he has got enough shooters around him to stretch the defense and allow Lewis to make those kinds of decisions.

"But I think the thing about them that, certainly in our game, that made it hard was he has got other drivers as well. He has got a good mixture of shooters and drivers. Terone Johnson was getting to the rim. Anthony Johnson was getting to the rim, as was Lewis Jackson. Then [Ryne] Smith and [Robbie] Hummel and [John] Hart were hitting jumpers. [D.J.] Byrd probably had his best game of the season to that point. Since that game, he might be their leading scorer. He's up there.

"So they've got a number of different weapons and they've got guys different sizes that I think you're right in the assessment that it all starts with Lewis Jackson. He's the guy that makes everything go, and what I've been able to observe in him – I started watching him when we played in the tournament in [2009-10] when I was at Siena – he has elevated his game as an offensive player. He is an offensive weapon that any team that prepares for Purdue has to try to figure out what they're going to do with him. In ball screens, he's tremendous. In transition, he's tremendous, and you've got to focus on containing him and you can't let down for one second."

On if he sees any similarities between his team and Purdue:

"Well, you know, I think only in the sense of what you just said. I think that's true. I think they've been a little bit more consistent than we have obviously, and they've got a few more wins. They had a couple of games early that they had big leads and I think that might have changed some things. They had Xavier beat, I remember. If you can go there and play the way they did for 38 minutes, then you're a pretty good team.

"I think in some ways, with them, you have a team of players whose roles are changing a little bit. I mean, let's face it. When I coached against that team the previous two years, they had two guys that are playing in the pros. That changes things now when they leave, so you're going to see... when we played the first time, Byrd wasn't even playing. Now, he's one of the best players in our league. I think that's a credit to Matt's staff to bring them along and try to figure out, 'O.K., what are my rotations going to be? What am I going to get from Terone Johnson and Anthony Johnson tonight?'

"He knows what he's going to get from Jackson and Hummel and Smith, but he's starting to get great play from other people, and that's what makes them scary. I'm hopeful with us, the same thing will happen. We haven't had to deal with the departure of two NBA players. We've had to be able to sort of build on confidence level and roles defined for the players that we have. Fortunately for us, we've been able to have two freshmen that have come in and been solid contributors, but they're always going to be up-and-down."