

1/23/2012: 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:

McCaffery's opening statement:

"Well, we haven't played since the last time we spoke, but we've had I think a good couple days of practice. We had an opportunity to go back and chalk some things up that we're doing, and now we're getting ready for Nebraska and Indiana. It will be a big week for us."

On how long it took him to learn of incoming recruits Mike Gesell and Adam Woodbury upon arriving at Iowa in 2010:

"Uh, not very long at all. Obviously, they were the prime targets for us, and interestingly enough, you know what ended up happening now unfortunately is when a coach takes over, it's open season on his recruits and his players. So you have to start with first securing your boundaries in terms of seeing what we have, so we at least know what we have and know what we need. Realistically, you get the people, how many guys are left that are going to be able to impact your program the following year. Certainly, the situation I walked into, we needed that."

"Fortunately I got Bryce Cartwright and Melsahn Basabe and they helped us in a big way. But I think the important thing for us was to zero in on that junior class and make sure, well actually those kids were finishing their sophomore year, and

really locked in on that class, because we felt that that class would really impact us in the future."

On the importance of beating out a national program and Big Ten rival for Woodbury and Gesell, respectively:

"Well, I think one of the things that really helped was what I kind of said a minute ago. We really locked into them. I went to every game they played over the summer of their junior year and over the summer going into their senior year. So in terms of being present and making sure they both knew they would be the highest priority, I think that was helpful.

"I think our style of play has helped in they were both interested in it. They want to go up and down a little bit, especially Mike. I think Adam is a running big man and he's an athletic big man. He's a runner. He can pass. He can play out on the perimeter. He's not locked into the block, so I think those things were good.

"And I think comfortability, we spent so much time recruiting them, I think they felt comfortable with us. They got to know us well and I think they saw improvement in what we were doing. They saw some other pieces. I think it's hard sometimes for young guys to, as much as they're confident in themselves, to say, 'I'm going to go in there and I'm going to be the guy,' and both of them have that. But it's nice to know that they can look and say, 'O.K., there are some other pieces there that we can fit in with and we can be the ones to put them over the top.'"

On whether his personal experience as a point guard helped him connect with Gesell while recruiting him:

"We talked about that quite a bit because interestingly enough, Stanford was involved. Johnny [Dawkins] talked about it. Virginia, Coach [Tony] Bennett talked about it. I'm sure [Nebraska coach Doc Sadler] talked about it. I think one of the things that really helped us with Mike was I locked into

that with him early because anybody that watched him in AAU, he actually played the 2-spot. Marcus Paige had the ball.

"So I told him, I said, 'Your future is at the point guard position. We're going to play you at point. I'm bringing you in to be a point guard where I can give you the ball, and that's how you're going to get to the NBA, as a scoring 1.' Not as a combo, not as a... because he shoots the ball so well, you can play him at the 2 if you wanted to. He can play the 2 for anybody. But I just think he's better with the ball.

"If you watch him for his high school team, he has got the ball all the time, and that's when I was able to lock in and say, 'This is the guy that can engineer a victory for us night in and night out,' in what is clearly the most competitive league in college basketball."

On whether he has been able to expand his offense this season because of the additional options he now has:

"I think only in the sense that we've taken what we have, we just go to different people. I don't know if it's the offense. I just think we've plugged those people into the offense and go to them, and spread it out that way. I mean last year, Cartwright had a really good second half of the season, [Matt] Gatens was solid, Basabe was scoring the ball. They were really our only three consistent scorers. We had individuals that would have good games once in a while like, you know like Jarryd Cole, and Eric May, and Zach McCabe, occasionally an Andrew Brommer. But really, we only had three consistent players that were scoring the ball.

"This year, it's much more than that, and quite frankly, you're not going to win in this league consistently without that. Because these teams scout you too well, they watch too much tape, they take away your strengths. I mean, fortunately for us, Aaron White has been spectacular. Zach McCabe has

taken his game to another level. Gatens has been spectacular. I mean, [Devyn] Marble last year, towards the end of the year, was a guy that I think you looked at and said, 'O.K., there's a guy that's going to be really good.' But he was inconsistent, just learning. Now he's probably one of our most consistent players and I think one of the better players in our league.

"So you know, the way teams prepare for us, they got to think about a lot of different things, and it also helps you when you're on the road and a team is really into you. You can go to different people at different times and get buckets and send the tide of a run, especially when you're on the road."

On what it says about the league when teams in the bottom half of the Big Ten routinely beat ranked teams atop the standings:

"Well, you know, I think this league gets as much respect as any when it comes to that. I mean, you look at last year, 7 of 11, that's a pretty good percentage that got in, and Northwestern and Minnesota last year were right there. If Minnesota doesn't have those injuries, they probably are in. Then you look at 8 of 11. This year, they're talking about 8 of 12 very likely.

"But what it says is that there are terrific coaches, there are terrific players, there are great fan bases, you have the Big Ten Network, and any night you don't have your 'A game,' you're going to get beat. If you don't have a game plan that's followed, you're going to get beat. And I think that's what makes the regular season so much fun. I think we sometimes, and especially these days, tend to jump to March so early, and every week, the standings in this league change. Every week, there's what I think are perceived to be upsets, but I'm not sure they are.

"I think when it's all said and done, the better teams will be at the top of the standings, and that's how it always works

out over an 18-game schedule. You're going to see the top teams in the top five positions, there's no question about that. But along the way, you're going to see some people knocked off and you're going to see some people moving up the standings that surprise, and maybe a couple of teams sneak into that top tier and get into the NCAA Tournament. Obviously, that's what we're trying to do."