

3/5/2012: 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:

"We had an interesting week with a road win at Nebraska and a tough loss at home against a very, very good Northwestern team. It came down to the end and I thought our kids battled hard, but I think Northwestern has had a spectacular season and made the plays when they had to and that was unfortunate for us, good for them. But I feel like we're playing our best basketball of the season, without question. We're continuing to get better, we played well in February and I think going into this tournament, I feel pretty good about where we are."

On whether he thinks senior guard Matt Gatens would make a good coach someday or if he should do something else:

"You know what, I would recommend that he coach. I think he'll be spectacular at it for a number of reasons. You know, there are so many things that I don't think people really think about when they think about what's going to make a good coach. But in his case, obviously, he had a great career. As a player, you have a different feel of what it takes and I think his basketball intellect is off the charts."

"I think, without question, this is a business where you talk about guys putting hours in and guys putting in the hours on weekends and his work ethic is nothing like I've ever seen. So

you add into the fact that he has just got innate intelligence on top of his basketball I.Q., and those are the factors that you look at when you think of somebody that's going to be a great coach and he obviously has the ability to communicate, articulate and has a level of credibility.

"You know, he's ready now to jump in. My thought is he should keep playing. He's going to get some serious looks in the NBA and I think he's a player who already can play."

On if it would be a dream as a coach to coach five guys who never took plays off and had serious work ethic:

"It would, and that's obviously any coach's goal, is to get everybody to know and understand that that's how it has to be. The only way it's like that when the game starts is if it's like that in the offseason. There are some guys that constantly and consistently put the time in and when the game starts, they're ready. They function that way. Others, you know, they love the game, they're good at it, they work pretty hard and they put some time. But in the offseason, there's time for other things and be well-rounded and there's nothing wrong with that, but the reality is it's such a short window."

"Four years, it just goes by so fast. We say it all the time. But it almost has to be an obsession. 'These four years, I'm going to concentrate and work on getting better, being tougher, improving my body, working on my strengths, working on my weaknesses and being mentally ready every game and then when it's over, it's over.' Then they can explore some other things."

On the improved play defensively over recent games:

"You know what, it has been a point of emphasis from the first day of practice. But you go back to some of those early games where we were really struggling. You know, I think we got exposed against Creighton. They're a very good offensive team, but our offense was abysmal that day and that added into it."

Our defense was as bad as I've seen and we've had a few others. Our defense against Campbell, while they played really well, was not good. Our defense against Northern Iowa was horrendous. But clearly, at that point in time, those games were relatively close to one another.

"We were struggling at the defensive end of the floor and you think to yourself, 'If we don't get this corrected, can you imagine what it's going to be like when we go into Big Ten play? We're just going to get destroyed.' You thought, certainly at Wisconsin, that we were capable of doing it. But then we had improvement, then we had a few lapses, and then it started to get much more consistent. It starts with our guards.

"I mean, Matt's terrific. But you know, [Devyn] Marble has gotten better. He was always more of an offensive player. [Bryce] Cartwright got healthy and was more capable of putting pressure on the basketball. But I think [Zach] McCabe and [Melsahn] Basabe have gotten better. I mean, those two guys just typically get foul-prone. And then Aaron White, he's a guy that struggled with stamina and that sort of affects your defense more than it's going to affect your offense, and he was not playing good defense early in the season. He got himself to the point where he was going to play harder, be tougher and condition himself to where he could play every possession and he has made a huge difference.

"I think collectively, we recognized it, worked on it and like you said, we're playing our best defense right now."

On if it will take a group effort to defend Illinois center Meyers Leonard on Thursday:

"Well, not just him. I mean, they've got some other weapons. They've got [Brandon] Paul and [D.J.] Richardson and [Joseph] Bertrand. I mean, they've got some guys that are playing really well, so that's the thing. You can lock in on Meyers

Leonard and we can put a scheme around him that's going to really limit him, but you're going to give up some things with Paul and Richardson in particular that just can't happen. So I mean, that's what Illinois does to you. We've got to put it all together."

On if he voted for either Indiana center Cody Zeller or Michigan guard Trey Burke for Big Ten Freshman of the Year:

"I voted for Zeller and I think it was close. But I'm just going to say as terrific as I think Trey Burke is, I have seen very few freshmen in my entire career with the complete skill set of Cody Zeller. We didn't have a shot. I was at Siena when he was being recruited, so I hadn't really watched him until I really got into the league.

"I mean, this guy impacts the game in so many different ways. He can score, he can block shots, he can rebound, he can handle the ball, he can pass the ball. He never panics. He makes plays when they need them. He makes big buckets. He has got as good a feel for how to play the game as any freshman, and that's rare when you're seven feet tall. So I just thought that he was the guy.

"I think you could make a case for my guy, to be honest with you for Rookie of the Year, Aaron White. But to be honest and objective, Cody Zeller, he can very well be a first-team all-American."