

11/25/2013: Fran McCaffery teleconference transcript (premium)

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Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery held a teleconference with the local media on Monday prior to the Hawkeyes' departure for Nassau, Bahamas to play in this year's Battle 4 Atlantis. Iowa – now ranked 23rd nationally in the AP poll – will play three games in three days, starting with an opening round contest against Xavier on Thanksgiving night (Nov. 28).

Below is the complete transcript from the interview:

On the importance of depth and whether it will be to his advantage this week at the Battle 4 Atlantis:

"Well you know, it's funny. I haven't studied every team. Obviously, I've been focusing on Xavier. They're deep, too. I've seen Kansas and they're deep. Those are a couple of teams that I know and I think Villanova's deep. You know, I think this is a field where you have more teams like us in terms of having 10 good players. I know Xavier does. I know pretty much everybody does. I know Wake Forest is a lot deeper this year. So you know, it's going to be an interesting three days for us."

On the ability to play Jarrod Uthoff off the bench for long stretches and what impact that has on his lineups:

"Well, the great thing about him is, you know, he plays more than one position. You know, when you put a guy in and he's playing well enough to remain in, that's all well and good. But you might have to take somebody else out because they're

either struggling or they're tired. So to have the flexibility to take him from the 3-spot to the 4-spot, or even the 5-spot if we had to, is something that I think enables him to stay out there and I think we knew that when we recruited him the first time, that he had that kind of versatility.

"When you have somebody who scores in so many different ways and can handle the ball and can face or have his back to the basket, you know, I just look at when he's on a roll like that and I just keep saying, 'How are you feeling? How are you doing?' You look and see, is he still running? Is he sucking wind or is he still moving pretty good and if he is, you should leave him in."

On if he has carved up any type of down time for his players while they're in the Bahamas this week:

"No. You know, we're not really interested in doing that. You know, we did that in August. We saw a lot of things. This is a business trip. You know, will they jump in the pool at some point? Yeah, I'm sure they will.

"But the way it's set up, you know, you have a function the night before the first game that we have to attend. We have a team meal. We have a practice when we get there, a team meal and meetings. You go to bed, you get up, we'll meet again. We'll have breakfast and meet. We'll go to shoot-around, then come back and have our function. Then you get up the next day and you have a pregame meal, then the game. Then the next day, pregame meal and game, pregame meal and game, then you come home.

"So where is there time to do anything? That's not why we're there anyway. You know, the fans who are going with us, I hope they have a great time."

On if Xavier guard Semaj Christon reminds him of former Michigan guard Trey Burke:

"Well, I think Trey's a different player. You know, Semaj, he really plays more of the 2, whereas Trey had the ball all the time. The thing about Christon, he can take the ball and run the team. But you know, Dee Davis has the ball a lot and he gets out and fills the lane, Christon does, and he finishes in transition. He's more dangerous there, I think."

On the role of team chemistry as someone like Uthoff plays more and more minutes:

"Well you know, it's like anything else. You look at it and say, 'Well, the kid deserves to be playing.' I mean, I think if you're logical and honest and objective, you know he's going to play. He deserves to play. He's going to play. As you've seen him settling down, clearly, he's comfortable now with his game and his role and with what we're doing."

"You know, as I told you before, I'm not surprised because you could see it coming. So I think everybody likes him and everybody appreciates him and how he has helped our team. We all have the same goal and that is to be a winning program that gets to the NCAA Tournament and advances and that's what we all want to do and he's going to help us do that. So it has been an easy transition for him and for the rest of the guys accepting him."

On if he views this week as a chance to give him a better read on what he has or if he already knows that:

"No, I think it will. You know, with all due respect to the five teams we just played, you know, we're stepping up in class with this group coming up. But you could look at that schedule in June and see that. You know, that's no disrespect to the five teams we just played, all of whom are going to be fine in the conferences they play in."

"It's just that we're playing teams that fully expect to be in the NCAA Tournament every year. We're playing a team in Kansas – if we end up playing them – that expects to be in the

national championship regularly. So all of us are trying to get to the tournament, to the Final Four, you know, and when it's all said and done, you hope to win it all.

"So that will clearly be a better test for us and the interesting thing is to do it three days in a row. It's one thing to play the teams we're going to play, you know, Tuesday, Friday, Sunday. Now, it's Thursday, Friday, Saturday. So that's going to be interesting."

On if having a veteran team makes it easier to take a "business trip" approach with this tournament:

"It does. But the other thing is, you know, the way we structured the itinerary, there just really isn't a lot of time and the other thing, too, is a lot of the players' families will be there. So when they get a little bit of time, you know, they might just go be with their family. Maybe they sit by the pool for a half-hour or grab a bite to eat with them at one of the various restaurants there.

"You know, I want our players to have fun. I want them to enjoy this experience. But you know, these tournaments and how they're set up and the ramifications of how we play – not only in terms of whether we win or lose those three games, but how have we come out of those three games and how have we gotten better? You know, that's the maturity that's necessary at this time of year."

On what he hopes to learn about his team this week that he maybe didn't already know after saying last week it still had more to prove:

"Well, I just want to make sure that we continue to get better. You know, I feel like we're playing very well. But again, you know, we've beaten teams that I think everybody expected us to beat. So now we're playing teams that people aren't sure if we're going to beat and you have to go out and play well against those teams and compete in a way that, you

know, clearly exemplifies our capability, you know, moving forward."

On if playing inside a hotel ballroom presents any different obstacles he and his team will need to adjust to:

"No. I think it will be pretty similar to last year when we played in Cancun. It was a very similar set-up. I think this actually is a little bit bigger than that one. The crowds are going to be bigger here than they were there. You know, we didn't really play in front of a ton of people until we played Wichita State last year.

"You know, this year I think there will be a lot more crowds. You know, a lot of teams are bringing a lot of people and I think it will be fun. It will be a much more intimate atmosphere than we typically play in front of because the facilities are so much bigger, but I do think it will be really intense and really loud."

On the types of challenges Xavier's Christon presents from a defensive standpoint:

"Well, he's a really impressive attack player. I mean, he is flying down the floor. He's attacking the rim. You know, he's good in space, he's good in ball screens, he has got an in-between game. But he has got an incredible burst. I think that's what makes him so hard to guard. You know, you're standing there looking at him and he's gone.

"So if he's in transition and you're on the side of him, you feel like he's going to get to the rim no matter what. But if you're between him and the basket, he still feels like he's going to get to the rim. You know, those kind of guys are a handful, especially when they have the green light like he does."

On how his team this year ranks in terms of unselfishness among players:

"You know, I've been pretty lucky over the years of teams that I've had. I've had very few issues. I can think of one team that I've had in all my career that I could say, 'You know, we had some selfishness,' some issues that required too many team meetings, too many staff meetings to address the same things and those teams never end up being very successful.

"This team, I think more to your point, is more talented than a lot of the teams that I've had, so for them to be this unselfish and to accept one another as they have, has really been impressive to me. I mean, it was a challenge for all of us. But you know, we all have the same goals and aspirations. We're kind of all-in and that's what you want."

Of if he'll consider starting Uthoff or thinks he's better in his current role coming off the bench:

"I will always consider moving anybody into the starting lineup, especially somebody playing as well as he is. But you know, I don't know that it would impact his total number of minutes that much. It might. And right now, I feel very comfortable with the starting lineup that we have."

On currently being ranked in both the AP and Coaches Polls for the first time since the 2005-06 season:

"Uh, you know, I'm just happy for the players. You know, I guess in some ways it creates more interest. More people talk about you and I think that's always good. But I don't really think about it very much. I mean, I'm just thinking about the next game because once you lose two or three games, then you're out. Then we're talking about you not being ranked and that you were ranked.

"But again, it's very simple. When you talk about rankings, I get why we talk about it as the process is going on. But when it's all said and done, I think the most important ranking – the only one that really matters – is at the end of the year."

On how difficult a match-up Xavier center Matt Stainbrook will be for his two centers:

"I think he's pretty good. I mean, I've really been impressed with him. He's in great shape. He's skilled, he's tough, he's way more athletic than he looks and I think he's a great fit for their team and how they play. It gives them another dimension, so another challenge for Adam Woodbury. I think [Darrien] Nelson-Henry from Penn is built similarly and I think he has a chance to be the Player of the Year in [the Ivy League], or certainly be in contention. So I think Stainbrook is a little better, quite honestly. I think he's a little better."

On how playing tougher teams during the rest of non-conference play helps him in figuring out rotations going forward:

"I think that's a good point because you know, this the the caliber of team we're going to see when we're in league play and it's going to be the caliber of team we see when we come home, when you look at certainly what Notre Dame, Iowa State, Drake, those teams are doing, you know. So it's exactly like you said."

"I mean, it's an opportunity for us to go down and play three quality opponents and compete at that level and figure out, 'We think we're good. Let's see how good we are and what we have to fix.'"