

12/2/2013: 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 23rd-ranked Hawkeyes' game on Dec. 3 against Notre Dame at Carver-Hawkeye Arena.

Below is the complete transcript from the interview:

On the play of Zach McCabe last week during the Battle 4 Atlantis:

"The bottom line is I think he's one of our best players, there's no question. He's able to provide pretty much the same thing night-in and night-out. He can shoot the ball, he rebounds the ball. He's not a mistake guy. He makes his foul shots. He's a physical presence. He's an experienced player and he's playing at a really high level right now."

On how travel issues returning home from the Bahamas altered the team's schedule on Sunday:

"It may have changed it a little bit. I wasn't sure, to be honest with you, if we were going to do a meeting last night or not. You know, that was going to be dependent upon a lot of things and once we had the travel issues, we just fed the kids and put them to bed."

On his thought process taking an assistant job at Notre Dame after being Lehigh's head coach and what he took away from being there:

"Well, to me at the time, it's funny. It seems like it was such a short time ago when I was going through that and to me, it was really a no-brainer. I was young. I was 28 years old and I had interviewed for both the SMU job and the UMass job that year. Both search committees, both institutions were somewhat impressed with me, but you know, were very reluctant to pull the trigger with regard to my experience – both on a national level in terms of recruiting and coaching.

"So from that standpoint, it was an easy decision, plus to have the opportunity to coach at Notre Dame was something that I thought was obviously and dramatically going to impact my career. But you know, it was something that I wanted to do. It was an experience I wanted to try. I mean, the third game I coached was 37,000 people at the Indiana HoosierDome at the time we played Kentucky. So here we are in my first year preparing scouting reports to coach against Bobby Knight, Dean Smith, Mike Krzyzewski, Rick Pitino.

"You know, those kinds of games, we were playing regularly and there was no better way to prepare me to ultimately be where I am now than to be in those type of games where you had to, you know, game prep for teams of that caliber and then actually go through the game itself and, you know, sit in the room and watch tape with Digger Phelps and learn from him and how he breaks a game down and how he prepares a team and how he puts a program together.

"And then I was lucky enough to spend a substantial amount of time with John MacLeod, who had an NBA perspective and coached a lot differently than Coach Phelps did. You know, I would say that my ability to be successful at Greensboro and at Siena and ultimately at Iowa is the result of the experiences I learned while I was at Notre Dame."

On any recollection he has of being a Notre Dame assistant the last time Iowa played the Fighting Irish:

"Uh, I do. It was not my scout. You know, I had Temple. That was the Preseason NIT and I remember that game very well because the winner of that game got to go to New York for the Final Four of the Preseason NIT. So I remember watching Iowa. We were watching Iowa-Temple, Jeff Nix and I. Jeff had the Iowa scout and I had the Temple scout."

"It was a one-possession victory, as I recall, from Iowa's perspective. Iowa played really well against Temple and had a great game plan with Coach [Tom] Davis coaching and they brought in a good team with Acie Earl and Val Barnes and we beat them in South Bend."

On getting Aaron White more involved on the offensive end:

"You know, he's as involved as he wants to be. He has got the green light to shoot the ball whenever he wants to shoot the ball. We're running transition and motion. I mean, he can take 20 shots if he wants to, as far as I'm concerned."

On the play of Adam Woodbury thus far and what he wants to see from him moving forward:

"You know, obviously he had the foul trouble in the one game. But other than that, I thought he was really good. He was playing really well against Villanova and then Villanova went really small. So we had a decision to make – either to stay big or to go with Aaron White and Jarrod Uthoff and Melsahn [Basabe] and Zach, and we opted to do that. I didn't play Gabe [Olaseni] much or Adam much in the second half of that game."

"So you know, it's something as a coach, you go back and say, 'Well, maybe we should have played the two bigs a little bit more,' but they were really small and quick and we opted to go in the other direction, so other than that, I think he has played really well. I mean, obviously he's a tremendous post-defensive presence. He has done a great job of facilitating our offense. He scored well against Villanova and he'll have more games like that down the road."

On the dynamic of coaching against his wife Margaret's alma mater:

"You know what? I mean, she had a great experience at Notre Dame. She loves that institution. I mean, she's still really close obviously with Coach [Muffet] McGraw and the women's program there. But in terms of the game itself, you know, it won't have as much or as different of an impact as any other game. I mean obviously, she recognizes how good they are and it's a prominent opponent. But you know, she's a Hawkeye through and through."

On the play of Mike Gesell since transitioning back to point guard:

"He has been spectacular. You know, I think more importantly... I mean, he's always going to have a great assist-turnover ratio because he's not going to turn the ball over and he's going to find people and he's unselfish. But you know, ironically, I think he has had more chances to shoot the ball at the point than he did when he was at the 2-spot."

"You know, it has clearly helped both of them. It has helped Devyn Marble tremendously. It has really got him going where he's a bonafide scorer and is somebody that the other team is going to have to scheme against. I mean, he's driving the ball, he's getting to the free-throw line, he's making his 3s. Mike's pushing the ball. He's getting our break going, he's running our offense, executing our sets and you know, he's doing everything that I knew he would do when we recruited him."

On how aware he was of the possibility of playing Notre Dame in the Big Ten/ACC Challenge and his reaction to finding out this match-up:

"Well you know, it's funny because I was a little bit surprised at first because, I mean, I don't know that myself or anybody else was thinking about Notre Dame as an ACC

member. They had just joined and when you're kind of thinking of the ACC and who you're going to get, you normally think of the traditional ACC teams. But then you look at Notre Dame and I said, 'It will be a great game for our fan base. It'll have great interest for our fans.' I knew it would sell out and it has."

On how difficult Notre Dame is to defend and the challenge of facing guard Jerian Grant:

"Well, it's always harder to guard a player of that caliber when he has got so many other weapons around him. You know, this team shoots the ball from 3-point range as well as anybody we'll see and they typify a team that you'll have to beat because they won't beat themselves because they have such good ball-handlers. They do not turn the ball over. You know, they take care of the ball, they move the ball and they shoot open shots and they typically make them. So, you know, it's really going to test our defense."

On the gut feeling he has about his team coming out of the Battle 4 Atlantis:

"Well, I liked the fact that we competed. You know, I don't know, I'm sure you can imagine, but not until you go through it do you realize what an incredible grind that 3-day stretch was. You know, you have very little time to prepare for your next game, you have very little time for sleep."

"The kids, they're in an environment where a lot of families are there, they're all having fun, everybody's running around and I was so impressed with how locked in we were mentally and just really paid attention to the next task at hand. We were locked into Xavier, we were locked into UTEP and we were locked into Villanova, and I was really impressed with our focus, our concentration and our competitive instincts."

"That was really impressive. You obviously always look back and say, 'Boy, I wish we could've done this or that better.'"

But that's basketball. Ultimately, I was very pleased with the professionalism with which we approached that tournament."

On if travel issues returning home affect what he and his team are doing Monday in preparation for Notre Dame:

"No. No, today will be what we normally would do. We'll have meetings and practice and then probably more meetings. We just used yesterday to kind of wind down a little bit from a long trip and today, we'll be locked in."

On what Gesell has done to elevate his play:

"Well you know, I think he has gotten in unbelievable shape. I think he has gotten a little stronger and you can tell he's in top physical condition. But I think the only thing that he needed was a little bit more experience. I mean, you could see it coming. He was one of the top 50 players coming out of high school. He just needed to go through the season he went through last year and you're seeing the result now."

On if he senses the possibility of a fatigue factor settling in Tuesday against Notre Dame:

"I really don't think so. I just don't. I mean, these kids are in great shape. You know, it's something that we are prepared for. We have experienced guys. You know, we went overseas, came back. We had been to Cancun last year. I mean, these guys have been through these kinds of trips. The Big Ten is a grind. Our guys know what's at stake. You know, we're at home. I'm going to play a lot of guys, so I'll make sure guys are rested and we'll be ready to go."

On if the season has been a flashback of his life between playing Penn and now Notre Dame:

"Uh, you know, it has been an interesting year from that perspective. But what happens in this profession is just, you know, when you're coaching at an institution, that's where

your focus is.

"You know, I recognize the fact that there will be two guys on that bench that I recruited and coached. Mike [Brey] is somebody that I have an unbelievable respect for. You know, I really consider him a very good friend and I have a lot of memories there. But that won't impact our preparation in any way and we're excited for the opportunity."

On the health of his team:

"Everybody's good."