

1/27/2014: 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:

"You know obviously, we had a really good win on Saturday and I was really impressed with our team, how we bounced back after losing to an outstanding Michigan team on the road. You know, I was hopeful that we would learn a lot from that game and obviously, we played extremely good defense against Northwestern, which is necessary with the way they're playing right now. So I think we took a big step there and you know, we've got a big one tomorrow night against Michigan State."

On how big of a hurdle Michigan State is in terms of where Iowa wants to be as a program:

"Well you know, one of those things that I think everybody has to realize in this league is, you know, if you're going to win a championship, – like I said, any team in this league – you've got to go through Michigan State. That's just the standard that Tom [Izzo] has set."

"You know, we all hope to get to the point where we could consistently be that good, so there's a respect factor there and the realization that, you know, to beat them is something special. You know, tomorrow night, we're going to have an unbelievable crowd in here and they've got a really good team. When it's all said and done, we're going to have to beat a

really good team and it should be a great game."

On whether he calls this a "program" game for Iowa:

"No. No, we wouldn't do that. No. It's not that. But again, there's a tremendous respect factor there. You know, it's a little different. You know, I think it's always a little bit different. But not like that."

On whether his team is getting closer to what Michigan State is in terms of mental toughness:

"I think so because, you know, there are a couple of ways to look at it. I mean obviously, we play with a level of toughness. But the key is to consistently do that. Every possession, every night to do that and I think everybody pretty much does it at times and so, you try to get more and more consistent with that intensity and effort and concentration and focus, you know, with everybody that's on the floor."

"You know, we play a lot of guys. So does Tom. So you're trying to get those guys to play together in a way that's physical and intense without fouling and being emotional when you need to be emotional. But you know, when it's all said and done, in an intense game, you've got to be able to control your emotions and effectively compete. That's the key and it's not always easy. But I clearly think we're getting better at it."

On whether the defensive play of Michigan State's Gary Harris sticks out as much as his offensive game:

"Well, he definitely plays both ends, you know, and I think that's impressive because a lot of scorers just don't do that. You know, they conserve energy because they know they've got to go get buckets at the other end. So you know, to me, he stands out as a guy who is a winning player, who puts winning above anything else and still talented enough to be the

leading scorer in a big game."

On how he would judge his team's defensive performance after Iowa's 76-50 win over Northwestern last weekend:

"Well you know, that may have been our best because you're talking about a team that was playing really well. I thought we did a good job on [Tre] Demps, who has been as impressive as anybody in our league. [Drew] Crawford, we all know what a great player he is. But you know, we didn't let anybody else get away from us. Like [JerShon] Cobb has been playing really well, [Alex] Olah has been playing really well and we did a terrific job on him.

"But collectively, you know, we got our defense where it needed to be. We played ball screens correctly. You know, we rebounded extremely well. I think it was 44-20 in that game. You know, they were dropping guys to take our break-away, but still, to double up somebody on the glass is clearly a commitment to defending and rebounding. Hopefully, that trend will continue."

On what the home-court advantage his team has after winning 20 straight games at Carver-Hawkeye Arena provides the program:

"Well, it has a tremendous impact on the energy level of everybody. You know, I said the day I was hired having coached here before that it was an incredibly impressive place when it was like that and to see it like that again is an incredible feeling.

"I'm just thrilled that our fans have identified with this team in a way that they want to come out and support us and provide that kind of home-court advantage that we often see when we go on the road in this league."

On if his team has to enter any game against Michigan State with a more challenging mindset in contrast to playing other opponents:

"You know what, I think when you look at a team that was preseason No. 1, last week it was No. 3, you know, they've been able to absorb injury in a way that has been very impressive to play extremely well whether at home or on the road. As I said before, it's a standard that they have set for themselves that you know, is kind of unwavering. So you know, for us, anything short of complete understanding of that, you know, you're going to be in a difficult position against this team."

"Fortunately, we've been through it. We've come close. You know, we only beat them one time since I've been here and that was the first time we played them. But we've been close and I think we've learned from those games. So, we'll see."