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An Interview With:

COACH McCAFFERY

Q. What would you like to see Melsahn accomplish the rest of his season, and what does he need to work on in the off-season to get ready for another season?

COACH McCAFFERY: I think a variety of things. What's most impressive about him is he approaches the game as an aggressive player, so he's an attack guy, and that's what I want him to be.

Now the issue there for him is as he plays more point guard, you can't always go. You have to know when to go, when not to go. And I think that's been a unique challenge for him this year, understanding that when he's at the two, just go ahead and attack, and when you're at the one, maybe, maybe not; what's a good play, what's not a good play.

I think that he's proven that he can score. I think for him, strength is going to be an issue, because with his length, and his athletic ability, the only thing that's holding him back from potentially becoming a premiere player is his strength.

And he's young. We knew that. He's the same age as a lot of high school seniors right now. So, when he really starts to fill out, with those long arms and he's a legitimate 6-6, he's going to be somebody that's really hard to guard.

Q. Can you see him --

COACH McCAFFERY: Two or three, wing. I wouldn't be opposed to giving him the ball, but I think it takes away from who he is. He can do it. He doesn't mind doing it. I think he likes having the ball. He likes directing and he's not afraid to go out and break up a playoff. But you're looking at a guy who has the potential to be a 15- to 18-point a

game scorer in this league, I think, and eventually and probably not going to be that as a point guard.

Q. How did Melsahn handle not playing as much in the second half?

COACH McCAFFERY: You know, I probably should have played him more. I just felt like Brommer was playing so well; and we were struggling offensively. Cole's typically a really good offensive rebounder in those situations and they were playing more of a matchup in the straight zone. I thought the experience might be better suited for the situation we were in.

In that respect, I probably should have gone back to him and seen if he could figure it out and let him get that experience. But the game was in the balance there. It was a two-possession game, five minutes to go, and I just went with my experience.

In terms of how he handled it, he handles it the way he handles everything. He really doesn't get too emotional one way or the other, up or down; if he has a great game or a poor one or plays more or less than he should, it doesn't matter to him. Doesn't seem like it.

So what I try to do in those situations is just communicate with him and let him know what my thinking was.

Q. What kind of challenges does Michigan present -- inaudible.

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, he's not the only one that can make shots for them. That is the thing that sticks out, they have a variety of players. Hardaway can catch fire at any point in time. I think Morris is playing as well as anybody right now in the league.

So they have a young team, but they have got a terrific coach. I think they have a good blend of talent, and they obviously are really playing hard. I thought last night, they played well, but I thought they really played hard. I mean, they really

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got after it.

I think that's the thing that's most impressive, because when Michigan State is at home and they make that kind of run at you that they made back; you know, a lot of teams just don't hold on there. And they held on and had a great win.

Q. Interesting night when you consider Michigan and Michigan State, Indiana beating Illinois, what does that say about the Conference when the teams that were at the bottom --

COACH McCAFFERY: I don't think it's surprising. I think that's what this league is and what it had been. I didn't see the Indiana/Illinois game. I didn't watch that game. I think it's a little surprising when you see Illinois get 49 points. With how they have been scoring, that just stuck out to me as what -- I'm obviously going to watch the game at some point before we play both of those teams, but right now, I'm just focusing on Michigan.

Q. Michigan has an assistant that was here last year. Did that give them an advantage at all?

COACH McCAFFERY: I don't think so. John knows our team pretty well, and we are doing a lot of things differently. I don't think so.

Q. When you are analyzing and getting ready for the next game, is there one thing that jumps out at you, is it offensive, is it empty possessions, defense?

COACH McCAFFERY: It varies by game. If you look at that game, okay, you want to point to a lot of different reasons why we lost.

When the game was in the balance, we couldn't score. I mean, to me, could we have guarded them a little bit better at times? You know, we switch and then separate from Battle and he makes a big three, the one that put them up 45-39 but he was also 27 feet from the back. He made a heck of a shot. You have to give the kid credit there.

Defensively, yeah, we had a few breakdowns, but they are a team that is deliberate. They are a team that executes and they have a team that over the years, can score. But we still were in a position. We didn't execute against the matchup. We didn't execute our out-of-bounds play. We had a situation underneath the basket; we didn't execute there.

We didn't turn the ball over, but we didn't execute. We got a shot. It was okay. And I think the upsetting thing was the fact that we continued to quick-shoot the ball in situations where you can't do that. You have to have longer possessions, more screening, more attacking, try to put them in a position where they might foul us. They are only going to foul you one passed shot; you are not going to get to the free throw line.

When you are taking a lot of jumpshots in those situations, or in those situations, you're never going to get to the free throw line. You have to drive the ball a little. You have to go inside. Even if you go inside and out, you at least probe the defense and you've attacked in a way that put them in a situation where they have to actually guard you.

So that was what was disappointing to me, our decision-making for that four or five minute stretch there. But we were not getting horrendous shots, but they weren't great shots, either.

Q. Do you hold the guards more accountable?

COACH McCAFFERY: Absolutely. And typically the point guard, I had them both in there at different points in time. But at the same time, Jarryd, the fadeaway jumper off one pass, contesting. You know, I mean, that's not his game. That's not what we talked about doing. And that's what was disappointing.

But, it's not like Jarryd Cole went out there and said, 'I'm going to do exactly the opposite of what Coach McCaffery said. Sometimes what happens is in a situation like that, tight game, you're on the road, you think you're open and you just go ahead and let her go.

Now, if you remember, we had a transition situation, Bryce blew it down the floor, drew the defense and turned it and kicked it back to Zach McCabe for a three and made it. That's where it all started.

So now you have to figure out, all right, well, why was that a good possession off one pass, and why was this not a good possession off one pass. And they are two different things. You know, there was not anybody within 15 feet of one of our best three-point shooters, and Bryce had drawn the defense. He had penetrated. That happened right away.

So we didn't probe the defense at all, and probably four of those other five possessions.

Now, Bryce did drive baseline one time and kicked it to Zach in the corner and similar type of shot, he missed it, he had just made one. So I would say go ahead and shoot the next one.

But Marble's pull up, you know, contested Cole's turnaround; Bryce Cartwright drives it, didn't realize he didn't have anything and then puts it up anyway; those are the ones that really hurt us.

Q. What have you noticed about young players when you take them back to their home state for the first time? Do they maybe try to do too much or what's been your experience?

COACH McCAFFERY: You know, it's been all over the place. I've had some guys that seem to thrive in that environment. Others struggle and struggle big time sometimes. They want it so badly.

We all want it for them. What we try to do in that situation is not treat the game any differently. You know, here's the game plan, follow the game plan; this is what your role is. Just try to be successful in doing that, and don't get caught up in the moment.

But when all of the sudden a player goes to a game and there's 35 or 40 family members there, it's going to be a little bit different.

Q. You had a little publicity during the BYU/San Diego State game, a story on Jimmer Fredette, the Sports Illustrated; can you talk a little about recruiting him and did you have a shot at him?

COACH McCAFFERY: Oh, we had a real good shot, yeah. We offered him before he played a game in his junior year. We had him over for practice with his dad. His dad is a terrific guy. His dad helped the AAU program, for the Albany City Rocks that he played for. He played in the same backcourt with Talor Battle and Mark Lyons from Xavier. Those three guys played together on that team and Jimmer's dad was one of the assistants. Really good basketball guy. Great basketball family. His mom was really intuitive in that.

So we felt like for us, he's from Glens Falls, about 40 minutes away versus BYU which was across the country. We knew he was Mormon, and there's a Mormon Church a quarter of a mile, not even maybe, an eighth of a mile from campus. So for him it became, do I go across the country to the big Mormon institution, or do I stay closer to home.

He had a phenomenal reputation locally. So anybody that didn't see this coming, you know,

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they saw it coming in Albany, and then that part of New York State.

So what we tried to do was we tried to out-work him, figuring, we're closer, and we'll try to out-work him. So we were at every game that he played. And to Dave's credit, he was there. He really worked. He got in and got after him. And then he's going to visit two places.

BYU is a pretty impressive place and when he went out there, he just fell in love with it and that's what we he decided to do. But yeah, we were very close, became close with his family. I think -- I don't know for sure, but I think his mom was kind of hoping he went to Siena. She really liked the situation there. But the kid could not have been any more professional. If ever you lose a kid that you worked really hard for and you don't get him, because as you know, in recruiting, you come in second, you really don't get any benefit from it. It's all that effort.

Now when I say we were at every game, we were at every game he played the entire month of July. But he could not have handled it with any more class. I'm so happy for him that he's doing so well. I'm not surprised.

I can remember this. I was sitting next to Tubby Smith, who was at Kentucky at the time, and he was looking at the big kid on that team who ended up going to St. John's. He came in to take a peak at him and was down in Orlando and he said, "Who is that guy? That's the best shooter I've seen all summer."

And of course, I'm playing a little dumb; "He's okay." You know. I thought Kentucky was going to get him. A lot of people liked him but nobody really got involved for whatever reason. He's going to be a pro, no question about it.

Q. Any update on Cully, his status and his health, as well?

COACH McCAFFERY: He seems to be doing pretty good. He's working out. He has not had any setbacks. That's the positive. But he has not really gotten out on the floor and really tried to turn it up yet.

Q. Can he run?

COACH McCAFFERY: He can run and he can get some shots up and he does pretty intense work out stuff. But you've got to be careful when you're talking about your center of gravity there, you've got to be careful. You don't want to

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overextend it and put any undo stress on that part of your anatomy.

Q. What makes Darius Morris so effective?

COACH McCAFFERY: He just keeps coming. I think to me, he's talented, he's got good size for that position. But it's his relentlessness that to me separates him. When you cut him off, goes that way and when you cut him off he goes that way and keeps coming at you.

Just when you think he's run out of real estate and there's nothing possible he can make out of the play, he ends up making a play somehow. Starting to shoot it better, too. He's averaging 15 and a half, hits a couple of 3s lately. His three-point percentage is starting to creep up. It was in the 20s and now it's over 30. If he gets that thing down, now you're talking about an NBA guy I think.

Q. Did you watch that game live, by chance?

COACH McCAFFERY: I did not. I sometimes do. I did last week, I forget, I think it was the Indiana game. It was Indiana/Wisconsin game I did. But I don't like to do that.

What I like to do when I'm watching film is I would like to be able to run it back, stop it, and really zero in on what's going on, and with time-outs and things, it seems like it takes forever. You can get through a tape, and you're really studying it a lot quicker than you can when you have all of that stuff going on.

Q. Do you recall where you were when you heard that final score, were you surprised that Michigan beat Michigan?

COACH McCAFFERY: No. Nothing surprises me. I mean, I've been in this long enough. You can tell me anybody beat anybody and I would not be surprised.

You know I think probably even more so in this league. I just don't get surprised.

Q. Are you still learning which buttons to push with these players, the psychology of coaching and motivating each one? It's like they are all freshmen for you.

COACH McCAFFERY: The tough thing with this group -- they are great kids. I don't have a problem child. I don't have issues with anybody. But we have not had the most consistent year and

each of our players have not had the most consistent year.

You look and you say, we go on the road and feel like we played fairly well at Minnesota and four guys score. Well, it's going to be hard to win when four guys score. Then everybody scores against Indiana and we score 91 then go on the road at Penn State and everyone played deliberate, it was a struggle; 51 points and Bryce is an all-league player in the first half, and the second half he couldn't do anything right. And Jarryd Cole, all of his baskets were in the first half. Basabe looks like first-team all-league player against Indiana, against Minnesota, against Ohio State, and then he was making one defensive mistake after another against Penn State. He just couldn't seem to get it going.

And that's I think always the hardest thing when you're trying to make progress, it's okay. You want to try to figure out, okay, these guys are solid, these guys are going to give me this and this and these guys will figure it out and get them improving and then collectively we move forward.

But every time we move forward, somebody else takes a step back and then they take a step back and, well, that's what this year has been.

I think the thing for me is at what point do I maintain my composure and patience; and at what point do I blow a gasket and get in somebody's face; and at what point do I bench somebody and play somebody more minutes. I mean, that's kind of where I am right now.

We had a time-out at the end of that game. It was not pleasant for those guys. It was not pleasant at all. And it wasn't the one everybody saw on TV; it was the one before that.

I just felt like at that point, I was going to get in everybody's face because I didn't like what was going on, and to me, there are certain things that you can sort of expect, and there are certain things that you can tolerate.

If we have the ball out-of-bounds underneath the basket, and I call the play, we'd better be able to run that play. This is not the first day of practice. When we poorly executed that play, that's the kind of thing that will upset me more so than Bryce Cartwright overpenetrating and turning the ball over. And you say, well, at least he's trying to make a play, he's trying to improve the situation. Was it a good decision? Probably not. But it was an aggressive mistake.

So if we are making aggressive mistakes, then we are probably going to keep getting better. But if we are making mistakes because so-and-so didn't know where to line up, well, that's something that is going to be very upsetting to me.

We just have to get better at it. We just have to understand, execute down the stretch, just like on Sunday when we beat Indiana, luckily we were up 20. Just tried to run one simple out-of-bounds or press offense, and Jarryd Cole keeps taking the ball out-of-bounds, and he's not supposed to take the ball out-of-bounds, takes the ball over the line once and almost did it again. We have to be able to maintain possession of the ball.

So those are the kinds of things that have gotten me upset visibly. And they have to understand the seriousness with which you have to approach end of game situations. Rarely are we going to be up 20. We are just not. We are going to be in tight games. We have been in a bunch of tight games.

You know, can we run our late game transition offense? Can we make sure we get good shot opportunities, and if not, can we get a second or third shot. Do we understand completely that we are in the bonus for the double bonus, we don't want to start jacking 3s. We want to drive the ball to the basket to the free throw line so we can stop the clock and get into our press defense.

And then, what is that? It's going to change. It's not always going to be the same one. So we have to execute that. We didn't do a good job executing that the other night. We were running around, but we were not as effective as we should have been against a team that was tired, and you know, I thought we could turn it over. You only need two, you steal the game.

So those are the things that have been somewhat frustrating to me, and I think our guys are trying to improve in that area but we are not making the progress that I would like to see.

Q. Do you think the officials are having a quick trigger with you?

COACH McCAFFERY: I hope not. I think that you have to look at it from the other side; am I having a quick trigger with them. I think I have to be intelligent enough to look objectively at that situation. Am I jumping them too quick?

And I have stopped and taken a step back and thought to myself, okay, am I being unreasonable here. And I don't think I have been. I don't think I was in that situation. And you know, I

voiced my displeasure at the time. Subsequent evaluation of the game, you know, and I like to think that I handled it through the proper channels and that's what I'm going to do.

Q. Basabe's situation, what changed your thinking when you had time to reflect on it, that he can play through some of the trouble he's had?

COACH McCAFFERY: At the time, you're making a decision based on what gives us the best chance to win. Well, we didn't win.

So some of it is, I would like to have gotten a younger player more experience. But at the same time, I think when you have a younger player who is clearly one of our most talented players and I think a guy that has a chance to be special, you can go back and say, well, he's never going to excel in those situations unless he's in there, and that's what I'm talking about. Let's put him back in there, and, all right, maybe taking an experienced guy and put a young guy in that situation right then, but it might be the smartest thing for us long term.

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