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An Interview With:

## **COACH FRAN McCAFFERY**

COACH McCAFFERY: We'll just go ahead to your questions.

**Q. How do you balance progress with -- when you lose the emotions are raw but then the next couple days you look over everything. What kind of progress have you seen and how do you balance that with your expectation?**

COACH McCAFFERY: My expectations are pretty simple. We have to get better individually and then get better collectively. When you have some young players, you're trying to bring them along and develop confidence, get stronger, and stay healthy.

When you're preparing for ranked opponents, when you watch them on film and they have a lot of weapons, you then want to put a game plan in that makes sense, something we can handle. So I think we've done a pretty good job there. Better against Ohio State than Illinois in terms of the defensive game plan.

I think we've been able to be somewhat successful with different people doing some things offensively recently, which is going to be helpful to us. For a while the bulk of our offense was coming from the perimeter. Now Jarryd and Melsahn have really stepped up; we've obviously had McCabe playing both small forward and power forward; Brommer I think is playing well. So we can absorb somebody not having a particularly good game and still be out there putting some points on the board.

But we still have to get more consistent, and I think that's obvious at both ends. We're phenomenal in spurts and not so good in spurts, and some of that is inexperience and some of that has to be corrected.

**Q. Do you believe in breakout games, and if so, do you think Melsahn had a breakout game against Ohio State?**

COACH McCAFFERY: You know what, I don't really believe in breakout games. I think the key to being a good player at this level is to consistently have good games and not really define it as one breakout game.

I think it was important for him to have that game in light of how he played in the two previous games when he was sick. For his confidence I think that was tremendous. But I think the next step is how does he respond and how does he back it up on the road against a really good team.

**Q. Matt Gaten's shot seems to be really coming around. He was 5 for 8 the last game. Do you need him taking more than eight shots or is it a matter of what the defense gives you?**

COACH McCAFFERY: I think it's a function of both. We want him to shoot more, but he's obviously a marked man. To his credit he's not putting up bad shots. I think he'd probably turn down a couple that he could have let go, and I'm okay with him shooting those. But he's a very efficient player, and I respect him for that. He's going to see tight coverage pretty much every game for the rest of his career, so the more he can do off the dribble for his teammates, I think the better it'll be for us.

**Q. How important is it for you guys to identify another consistent outside threat?**

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, I think it's important, but I think McCabe has been that; I think Cartwright has been a scorer; Eric May has put up pretty good numbers from there. Marble has been scoring the ball well for us. He didn't have a particularly good game against Ohio State but I think Marble has been pretty good. We just need to get him back on track here.

**Q. Melsahn hit a jumper in the first half against Ohio State where he kind of hesitated, waited for someone to come on and they didn't, so he rose up and made it. Is that the part of his game, that kind of scratching the surface, that 15-, 16-foot jump shot, and did he do most of his scoring in high school close to the basket?**

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, he was strictly scoring in the lane, put-backs, little jump hook, catch-and-dunk, tip dunk, those kinds of things. But he can shoot the ball. And the next phase of it along with the point you made is he's got to rip and go. So if you're coming up on him and you respect the fact that he can make that shot, then he's got to be able to shot fake drive or rip and go and then score for himself or recognize the help and then make a play for someone else. That's when he will have arrived and become much more of a complete offensive player.

**Q. Would you say Eric May has made the progress you had hoped considering the missed the last game with a pulled groin?**

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, I think Eric has been fine. I think with him, we've discussed this before, in a lot of ways it's a confidence thing for him, to sort of go on the court not in an arrogant way but in a confident way that I'm one of the best players and I'm going to play that way. We need him to be a potent offensive player on a regular basis. Everybody we play knows the same thing; they're guarding him differently, they're putting athletic guys on him and pressuring up and things of that nature.

But what I want him to do is attack that space. Whenever there's space, whether it's in transition or at half court, to attack that space off the dribble and shoot his pull-up, hit it all the way to the rim or jump-stop and make a play.

Typically when he's put it on the deck, it's kind of been an all or nothing. He goes all the way to the basket, shoots the pull-up or not. He's not giving it up the way I think he eventually will. He's really worked on that. He's getting better at it.

And when you start to see his assist-turnover numbers get more to one to one as opposed to -- he's under right now. Obviously that will be the next step of his game to where he becomes an elite Big Ten player.

**Q. What will having him back in the lineup do for you guys as far as what Purdue presents?**

COACH McCAFFERY: Purdue has got some really good perimeter defenders and, of course, one of the premier perimeter players in the country. So you need all your weapons against a team like that, especially on the road. One of the reasons we held him out against Ohio State is so we'd have him for Purdue and for the games following, and you hope that it works out that way, that he doesn't have a setback, but he seems to be feeling better.

**Q. Does Purdue have the best one-two punch in the Big Ten do you think?**

COACH McCAFFERY: I'll tell you what, there's a lot of them, but you certainly would have to argue maybe in the country when you look at those two guys in terms of overall numbers. They've got good shooting numbers, good three-point shooting numbers, excellent rebounding numbers, pretty good assist-turnover numbers. Moore has got excellent numbers there; Johnson not bad for a post player. So they affect the game in so many different ways, and the rest of their players are talented. On any given day it's somebody else stepping up to have a big game. Of course the other night it was Smith with 20, but it could be any number of guys.

**Q. You played Purdue in the first round of the NCAA Tournament last year. What do you take from that coming into this week?**

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, just that I have a good feel for how they play. I watched a ton of tape on them, a lot of the same players, very physical, very good half court defensive team. They make it real hard for anybody to score, and so we're going to go on the road and play an aggressive quality man-to-man defensive team, and that's where you even think about, okay, how are we going to stop two guys that are averaging 20 and the rest of the team that -- I think what Matt has done is put some pieces together. He's got some drivers, he's got some wing guys, he's got some athletes, he's got some hammer guys, and that's why they're where they are.

So you can't discount the other players by any means. I mean, they've already proven that. But that makes them hard to prepare for when you have two guys averaging 20 with good percentages. That's a tall task, especially with Johnson the way he's playing in the post; one is inside, one is outside.

**Q. Is Johnson one of the most challenging defensive assignments -- he challenges your defense because he can score inside and take the ball and score outside?**

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, I mean, last year against us in the tournaments he was killing us with jump shots, and he's so long and he gets offensive rebounds, and if he doesn't get an offensive rebound his length sometimes keeps it alive for somebody else. Very efficient. Both of those guys are very efficient players and play with a lot of confidence, which they should.

**Q. How are they different from last year when you were preparing for them the last time?**

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, Moore is shooting it better. I mean, he's killing it. Last year we played him more as a driver because he was so good in that aspect of his game. It felt like we could zone with him out there. And now you look at the Northwestern game, they start the game 1-3-1, he goes five for five or five for his first six and sort of blows the game open early, was shooting over 40 percent from three-point range now, so now you've got a killer driver with size who's killing the threes, stretches the defense even more when you have Smith on the floor.

**Q. When you played them last year they were still trying to get over the loss of Hummel. It was fairly fresh. Now as you look at this team, have they established a new identity and they are who they are without him and totally different in that way?**

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, I guess. I watched the team last year. We of course watched tape with Hummel, but if he's not there, we prepared mostly for when he wasn't there. I think they did a pretty good job. I mean, a real good job of just sort of moving on. And he's not here. It's a different team, and others need to step up, and their roles change because he's as good a player as I've seen in a long time in terms of how complete his game is. You don't see very many guys his size that just do all of the things that he does.

And the other thing that he did was he was phenomenally successful and effective at the end of the game. So now when he's gone, others have had to do that, and that's what's I think been impressive about this team. Others have stepped up, so Moore and Johnson make plays. And last

year it was Kramer and now you've got Smith and Barlow. I think Jackson to me, I liked him last year, I really like him this year. I thought last year he was pretty good. Now I think he's really good. He's playing with a different level of confidence. So, maybe you look at a guy like him and say without Hummel he's really had to step his game up. He's terrific.

**Q. In a week or two second semester starts. How is everybody as far as eligibility goes?**

COACH McCAFFERY: So far, so good. I think we're all right.

**Q. Bryce has hit a couple of shots at the end of the first half, kind of buzzer-beater-type shots this season. Is there something about him that gives him confidence when the clock is winding down?**

COACH McCAFFERY: He's a playmaker, yeah. I think he's done it four times. He's a guy that can get his own shot. He understands time and score. He's not afraid. I've been really impressed with his development. Coming in I think we felt we had somebody who could play both spots, and he's now had, with Cully's injury, to be our point guard; not only that, play 35 minutes, whereas we were planning on playing him 25 or 28. Now he's playing 35 minutes.

What he's got to do now for us is he's got to affect the game more defensively. That's where he's not doing what we need him to do. I recognize that's asking him to do a lot. He's got to score; he's got to run our offense; he's got to make plays when we need him; and now, by the way, now you have to go down there and lock people up and make some plays defensively. Right now that's the next step in his challenge, to be what he can be and then for us to be what we can be.

**Q. Do you start designing plays for him as shot clocks are wearing down?**

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, we've already done that.

**Q. On your radio show you made it sound pretty much doubtful that Cully would be back. How long do you go before you make that official and move on?**

COACH McCAFFERY: I guess what I would do in that situation is defer to the doctors.

That's not a decision I'm going to make. I mean, it doesn't appear he's going to be back any time in the next seven or eight weeks. I think if you do the math, how many games will be left? What is it, eight, nine weeks? You know, what's fair to him? He's only played five, so he can get the medical red shirt. We're probably headed to that being a formality at some point until somebody just makes it final. But I would say right now it doesn't look like he'll be playing.

**Q. Has it affected your recruiting plans at all?**

COACH McCAFFERY: Yeah, probably.

**Q. In what way?**

COACH McCAFFERY: Well, we might have to go get another guard.

**Q. How are things going with recruiting?**

COACH McCAFFERY: I think they're going good. The thing with recruiting is they can always be going good or they can always be going bad until you get somebody that you really like and then they have to be good. Sometimes you get somebody that you like and then they're not any good anyway. That's the thing about recruiting. How many times have you heard, this is a top-ten recruiting class, whatever, and sometimes the guys nobody ever heard of end up being great.

I would say in terms of answering the specific question how is recruiting going, we've been very well received. There's interest. There's interest on behalf of good players, but by the same token they're always going to be interested in other places, as well, and we've just got to reel them in.

**Q. Does it help now that you've got some games at Iowa as opposed to before the season when you were trying to recruit?**

COACH McCAFFERY: I think at some level everybody kind of wants to see you there. You can talk about what you did somewhere else, and that only takes you so far, I think. So the fact that we've come here, we've done okay, we need to do better, but at least they can say, okay, we see how they play, we see his coaching philosophy, his coaching style. They watch the players to see if they enjoy playing in that type of system, are they having fun, are they enjoying what we're doing, are they buying in, all those things I think would impact a prospect's decision on whether or not he would want to come here.

And I think from that standpoint it's been very positive. Clearly the players are playing to their maximum potential and enjoying the style of play and competing.

I think our crowds have responded well to our players, and I think that's been good. I mean, we've needed that. We need that energy level when we're playing the teams that we're playing.

So I think all that together would make someone say, hey, that would be a really good place to go.

**Q. This stretch of games, five of six are against ranked teams, are you seeing the guys learning from this, what it takes, what they need to work on to get to that top 25 level?**

COACH McCAFFERY: I think we're improving. You break a film down and point out in a two-possession loss, okay, what if we did this here, what if we did that there. We would do that if we had a two-possession win. But I feel like, okay, from the Illinois game to the Ohio State game we were better. We're not where we need to be. We made too many mistakes. That's just a fact.

We're improving in that area. We had more turnovers than assists in that game. Not a ton, but if you want to beat the second ranked team in the country you've got to have more assists than turnovers. You've got to out-rebound them. You've got to limit their key guys. We did a good job on Sullinger in the first half, not in the second half. I've taken some responsibility for that. We probably should have doubled him earlier, maybe doubled him differently. But they've been killing the three so much, we were living with that and we did a good job in the first half, we thought we could do just as good a job in the second half.

So we go back and we just rework it.

**Q. Have you seen enough of the high school ball out here to kind of give your opinion of it? It seems nationally Iowa high school basketball doesn't have a great reputation, but you've been here for a while now; are you surprised just by what you've seen?**

COACH McCAFFERY: I've been impressed. I've been impressed by the coaching. I think we've got really good players. I think on sheer numbers in terms of population, how many of them are going to be high, high major players. There's going to be some. We've always had

some. We've had some great ones. But it's not like there's going to be 50 in any given year. There's going to be some, and we've got to get some of those kids to come here.

**Q. Will Melsahn's success help you recruit the East Coast, New York areas and areas you've been at?**

COACH McCAFFERY: I think it will, and I think when prospects come to campus from the east and get a chance to spend some time with him and he can relate his experience and how it's going, both academically, athletically and socially, I think that will help.

**Q. Is your first priority in state and then go beyond, or do you look at it that way when you're talking about recruiting?**

COACH McCAFFERY: I look at what our needs are and who can fulfill those needs. If we could fulfill them all within state, that would be great. If we need to go outside the state to fill them all, that's what we'll do. But I can tell you there's players in state that can play. You look at a guy like Zach McCabe, I can't even tell you how hard he was recruited. But I can tell you what, he can play anywhere. And I'm glad we have him. And there's others like him.

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