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An Interview With:

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY

Q. Talk about the balance that we've seen in these Playoffs. It's not just Marble, we've seen McCabe hit a couple of big three-pointers, Woodbury seems to be playing his best so far this season. How big has that been for these playoff runs and how big is it going to be at Madison Square Garden?

FRAN McCAFFERY: It's going to be really big for us there, but it's been the case all year long. You never know which guys are going to be our leading three or four scorers. Typically you're looking at Marble and Aaron White. But Aaron White has one field goal, Basabe doesn't have any. We beat Virginia on the road. That's the kind of team we have. McCabe has been playing extremely well, Clemmons can score, he was spectacular in the second half, Mike was great in the first half. Marble has been on fire. That's terrific for us, but we know Woodbury is going to have games where he can be a double-double guy, and Olaseni not as much in that game, but he's been fabulous down the stretch.

All those guys are going to keep playing, and I think in a lot of ways it makes us harder to prepare for.

Q. Assist-to-field goal ratio on your team is very, very good. Is that something you thought maybe was possible or have they exceeded your expectations in that regard?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I thought it was possible because we have an unselfish team, we have forwards who can pass the ball. A lot of times you look at those numbers and it's a function of can your big guys pass. Woodbury is a good passer. The guys are unselfish. It's not just your

point guards, but we do essentially have three point guards, and they all have really good assist-turnover numbers. And there were times this year when we had all three of them on the floor in the starting lineup, and sometimes just by chance.

I think if you look at it collectively we're not making the kinds of mistakes we used to make. You look at assist-turnover numbers across the board, most of our guys are in the positive.

Q. You've had this NIT experience before. What's your thoughts about that?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, it's a tremendous experience in so many ways. Obviously purely from a basketball standpoint to be able to go to that venue and continue to practice and play for a championship, it's wonderful. You'll have an opportunity to do some things in New York as a team. It's a great way for a guy like Eric May to finish his career. There will be a lot of families there, they'll enjoy that type of experience. We'll have alumni there who maybe haven't had an opportunity to see us.

There are so many positives, but from my perspective, to continue to play in a kind of atmosphere that we played in the other night and continue to challenge our players to handle that and succeed in that type of environment is critical.

And this is the next step. Now we're going to Madison Square Garden, neutral site, playing a terrific team in Maryland, two other great teams are there, and I think to be still playing at this time of year is really very special.

Q. It was a deep run for you guys. Is this ultimately better for the program than maybe a one-and-done would have been in the tournament, the NCAA?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I look at it like this: Everybody wants to jump to that. I'm going to argue that there's very little difference between the

teams that you're playing. There just is. So if you make a long run in this tournament we could easily have made a long run in that tournament. It's really a question of who you match up against. Sometimes you get in your first round match and you're like that's the worst team we could have played or the best team. I've been there.

But I look at Virginia, they should have been in. They're better than teams that got in. There's no question in my mind. Same thing for Maryland, same thing for us. But it didn't matter. And the teams that got in had great résumés, too.

So we go into this tournament, you look at that field, and I don't look at it that way. To me, I think we had a team capable of making a run no matter which tournament we went to. The fact that we're getting an opportunity to play more with a young team I think is a very good thing.

Q. In what ways has the development of the program been helped by continuing to play now? What benefits do you see going on in practice right now and games right now that can be beneficial?

FRAN McCAFFERY: The funny thing about that is it's great to continue to practice, but our practices are -- we're backing way off. We'll get up and down a little bit and we'll lock into the other team. It's not like the practices this time of year are that beneficial, other than it's another opportunity to figure out can we put a game plan in, can they carry the game plan out to beat the next quality opponent on our schedule. All of those challenges will help us as we move forward. So additional opportunities for that, additional opportunities for our young guys to play in games. To see how Adam Woodbury played the other night, that was huge for him. Now he gets an opportunity to go against Alex Len, and he's a lottery pick.

From that standpoint, it's a great challenge for him. He's gone against other lottery picks this year. We'll see how it goes for him. He'll be ready for the challenge. And as you look down the road, the more opportunities we have like that, the better off we're going to be.

Q. What have been your Garden experiences from a personal standpoint?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, they've been fairly extensive. I played there, coached there as an assistant coach, coached -- I don't know that I've coached there as a head coach. But we've been in the finals. We lost in overtime of the

championship of the NIT at Utah in the semis, lost actually to Virginia in overtime.

It's one of those places, when you walk into the building, you feel this is sort of the mecca of college basketball in so many ways. And I'm thrilled that our guys are going to have that kind of experience.

Once the game starts, it's like anything else. The building itself, it's no different, and you've got to focus on the opponent. So I'm just thankful for the opportunity.

Q. What is the first time you ever saw a game in the Garden?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I never went to a game in the Garden until I played there. You know, growing up in Philadelphia we went to games in the Palestra, we didn't necessarily go to games in the Garden. We watched them. I watched those great Knick teams like a lot of people in this room. They were phenomenal. I remember the Willis Reed game and things of that nature. I remember that vividly. But I remember it was exciting for me to play there for the first time. We played in a Christmas tournament there.

Q. What about for a guy like Melsahn to play back in New York?

FRAN McCAFFERY: He might have been the happiest guy in the locker room. He's going home and he's going to have all kinds of people at the game, his family. You know, just to see that smile on his face was just a phenomenal feeling for me that he gets to go home.

Q. He took a bit of a chance coming from New York here with you. Does this become a nice reward for him?

FRAN McCAFFERY: No question about it. The thing about Melsahn, you look at him and say, well, yeah, it was a bit of a leap of faith in terms of I'm going to go out there with coach. This is a bright person here. He knows what the Big Ten is. He knows who's in the league. He wanted to make a decision that he would -- no disrespect to the metro -- Atlantic Athletic Conference, but let's play Ohio State, Michigan, Michigan State rather than Loyola, Canisius, St. Peter's. He made that decision. That's what he wanted. He wanted to challenge himself. He knew it was going to be harder. He would have been an all-league player there four straight years and potential Player of the

Year candidate there. When we signed him, that's what we thought. We thought we had a 1,000-point scorer, a 1,000-rebound guy and a four-time first-team all-conference guy and a potential Player of the Year. That's what we thought we had. Anything short of that I wouldn't have brought him here because it wouldn't have been fair to him. Just like if I needed a body; I didn't need bodies, I needed players, and he's a player, and he's not afraid, and I think he'll thrive in that environment.

Q. You mentioned for Maryland playing their seven-footer against Woodbury. Is that going to be the key?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, they are a lot more than that. I mean, he's tremendous, and anybody that prepares to play Maryland better be thinking about what you're going to do with Alex Len. But they have a lot of weapons. Dez Wells is playing as well as anybody in the country right now, Faust is tremendous. They've got weapons that go off the dribble, that -- they're going to play a little faster than some of the teams that we've played recently. This could be a game in the high 70s, in the 80s, with the way we both play. They've got a tremendous freshman class. Mitchell is very good, Cleare is very good, so they have size, they have speed, they have powerful wing guys. Jake Layman is playing as well as anybody right now. He started the season playing well, and then he took a little dip, and right now -- you saw what he did the other night. He was making big shots late. Aronhalt is a fifth year guy. I coached against him when he was at Albany and he did the fifth year thing where he graduated from Albany, and tremendous three-point shooter. Mark has put together a great team in a short period of time with a lot of pieces that work.

Q. What does it say that you get an opportunity to play against them now considering that they're going to be coming into the Big Ten in a few years?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, I don't really think about that. I mean, I think it's great for the league. It's a program that has been great, they'll continue to be great. They've got a great facility. I think it'll improve our fan base on the Big Ten Network to go back to that part of the country. I think a lot of thought went into it. I think it was brilliant.

Q. Your team has set a single season record for blocked shots. Just talk about the value of that in your whole defensive scheme.

FRAN McCAFFERY: It's not something I thought would happen. I didn't sit down and say, hey, we've got a great shot-blocking team. But if you said to me that was going to happen, I would have said to you that that means that Gabe Olaseni has developed in a way that he's been on the floor blocking shots, because for us to have that record he has to be right in the middle of it.

But, Basabe can block shots, I thought Woodbury would block some, Aaron White can block some. You obviously want to have some level of defensive ability to stop when you overextend. You've got to have something back in there. If you're going to press, somebody has to be able to go get one. Interestingly enough, Clemmons had a huge block the other night; Mike Gesell has had a few like that. So having some powerful, athletic guards helps, also.

Q. Is there an update on Mike?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Nothing has changed.

Q. What's allowed Devin to take his game to another level here at NIT time?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Nothing specific. He's a guy that kept working and believes in himself. We kept believing in him. I told him you're my guy, I'm going to stay with you, and he knew that. He just overcame a little blip there in the middle of the season where his shot was a little off and his confidence wavered a little bit. Usually that's not a problem for him. And right now you look at assists, turnovers, steals, who he's guarding, his ability to sustain effort for long periods of time and make shots, his three ball is coming around, as we thought it would this year. He's been phenomenal.

Q. It's a tough match-up with the other team because of the way they distribute, right?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, that's what you want. You've got to be able to move the ball and you have to have multiple guys that can make a basket. If you're only going to one or two guys, they're going to shut you down. The scouting at this level is too sophisticated. You've got to have more guys and more weapons.

Q. Zach McCabe is a guy that's also struggled hitting his shots at times this year, but over his last four games he's 7 and 12 from behind the arc.

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, you figured he was going to come -- over the long haul, he was like, what, 41 last year, he's now a little over 33. And he was down in the 20s there for a little bit, which I think was unrealistic for him. But it's great to see him back doing what he's doing.

Q. How do you get a guy like that out of a slump where he's just ice cold?

FRAN McCAFFERY: You tell him to keep shooting and you work with him. You don't ever want to put in his head, hey, you want to move it on, that wasn't a great shot for you. We set him up. We go to him.

Q. What does it say about Anthony, the way he's really been struggling, but when you needed big time in that second half he came through?

FRAN McCAFFERY: He's one of those guys that his concentration wavers occasionally, and that's why of all the players on the team, I'm usually on him the hardest because he's got everything that you need in terms of ability. He can guard, he can shoot, he can drive, he can make plays, but you'll see him fiddling with the ball once in a while and you'll see him stand up on defense once in a while. I am on him harder than anybody else on this team, and he can take it. He's a tough kid. He's an intelligent person, so he gets it. I'm not on him because I like to be on him, I'm on him because he needs me to be on him, and he knows that. He knows I love him and I'm going to come back to him. I might rip him and pull him out, but I'm going to put him back in and give him another shot.

Normally a lot of times once kids go south, that's it. He has the ability to come back and make plays even when he had the -- what was it, a terrible turnover the other night, and he comes back and makes one of the greatest blocks in the game, which really was a huge momentum play in that game.

Q. You were introduced as Iowa coach three years ago today. Can you kind of reflect on where you've come in these three years and maybe what you expect in the future?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, we expected to build something special, and I felt like with the

history and the tradition that we had, the fan base that we had, the facilities that were in place and the facilities that were on their way, as long as we put together a staff that is necessary at this level that we would be able to recruit and attract quality student athletes and compete in the Big Ten successfully and then continue to get better.

Now, I'm not going to shortchange what we've done in this period of time, but I think a lot of people would argue that to get from here to where we want to be is going to be that much harder, just being respectful of the fact that the teams that are below us are doing everything they can to do exactly what we're doing, and the teams that are above us have no intention of going anywhere, nor have some of those teams gone anywhere for quite some time.

So that said, it's just continuing to work and recruit quality student athletes with character because the kids that we get, they're going to have to get better. They're going to have to improve, and I think what you're seeing is guys that work hard on their own and get better. I mean, I have no idea -- where is Aaron White going to be next year? I think he's going to be way ahead of where he is now. He's pretty good, but he's not nearly as strong as he needs to be. There's things in his game, if he gets to the next level in those things, now he's a pro.

You look at each guy that we have and the guys that we're bringing in, we're deeper, we're longer, we're more athletic, and I think we've addressed our shooting situation. Certainly we're shooting the ball now like we thought we would all year. We've also got two shooters coming in.

That's kind of team we're going to be.

Q. You inherited a 10-win season, now you're at 24. Is that ahead of your pace? Have you overachieved do you think a little bit?

FRAN McCAFFERY: You know, I don't think that I ever looked at, okay, I expect to go from this to this to this. Are we -- who did we bring in and what are they doing, and what pieces do I have that we can win with? And evaluate the league and study the league and what do we need in this league and how should we schedule outside of the league and what are we going to be doing in the summer.

And then obviously you want to improve. How do you define improvement? Well, pretty simple. Did you win more games than you won

last year? We look at it a little more broadly, I guess. Do we have the kinds of people -- you look at a guy like Eric May, and when he was recruited, it was like, is he a Big Ten player? I don't know. A lot of major schools were recruiting him, is he really good enough to play at Iowa? He's good enough to play at Iowa because he is a warrior. He's a champion. He is a worker. He became a student of the game. We do a lot with film, and he studied and studied and became a guy that could play more than one position. He could always shoot the ball, but now he's getting the ball to the rim. He's feeding the post. He's making plays off the dribble, and his assist-turnover numbers are spectacular. They were flipped two years ago. He became a better player.

Yeah, I'd like to be able to walk into a gym and say, okay, I'll take Sullinger. Right now I can't do that. So we're going to have to get guys that can beat Sullinger, and that's not easy to do. They won our league this year.

You never say, wow, this is great, we have 24 wins, I'm thrilled. We're happy that we have 24 wins. That's great, but we're not at any point in time going to stop continuing to work every day on all aspects of the program because we're not just building a basketball team. We're building a program, and how are we perceived on a national level, how are we perceived in the state, how do prospects that are considering where to go to school and they have plenty of options. How do they look at us?

There again, the exposure that we've gotten in these games has been very helpful, I think.

Q. What does the winner of the NIT really get in terms of tangible things and intangible things?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I think what you're going to get is two more opportunities -- if obviously we win we'll have two more opportunities to play on national television when hardly anybody else is playing, and every prospect in the country is going to watch those games. Sure, they're going to watch Saturday and Monday, but they're going to watch Tuesday and Thursday. There's nothing else on. They're going to watch those games, and what are they saying about the coaching staff? What are they saying about those players? What are the players saying about their coaches? What kind of interest does that program have?

People had a chance to watch this building with 15,400 twice. Everybody that watches says, "I

want to play there. I want to go there and play." That is an unbelievable atmosphere, and that's what you want.

So ultimately I think the tangible benefits are we'll continue to get better.

Q. Is it easier to coach with high expectations, which it sounds like you're going to have that?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I think it's better. I don't know if it's easier. To me it's the same. If you have low expectations or high expectations, it's always the same. You don't change your approach. You never relax, you can never relax in recruiting. You can never stop coaching your guys, and you can never cut corners. By that I mean you don't take guys with bad character because they come back and get you.

I'll go to battle with Eric May every day of the week because I know what I'm going to get. Sometimes you say, this guy -- I think he's better than his problems. Well, they're very rarely better than their problems.

Q. The other night you talked about how your team played well on the road, just didn't get wins, which I think some people associate winning and losing as the only barometer on the road. But the other night you were at that juncture of the game where you were up, but several games it just slipped away for whatever reason. What do you think your team did in that last five minutes other than make 14 of 14 from the free-throw line?

FRAN McCAFFERY: We executed what we wanted to do on offense, and even though we had a little bit of trouble getting it in sometimes, we didn't turn it over except for the one time. Zach inbounced the ball and it got poked out. We handled the ball against pressure. We ran, whether it was motion to a set or right to a set, we looked at our options, we got a good shot, we got second shots a couple times. We had the right people shooting the ball, and there was no panic. I think you're right, nobody really looks at well, we played pretty well on the road because you look at your road record. But you were there a couple years ago when we would go on the road. Yeah, it's just one loss, but when you walk off the floor and you lose in double overtime, it's different than when you walk off the floor and you lost by 25. You know you have improved, okay. Now the job

at hand is a little different. We played well enough to win, we didn't win. Okay, what do we have to do to win? If you lost by 25, now we've got to address a whole other array of issues that are going to be very time-consuming.

Q. Is your brother going to cover the game?

FRAN McCAFFERY: No, he'll be wearing Hawkeye gear watching the game and hopefully behaving himself.

Q. You didn't really get to the free-throw line until the end of the game against Virginia. Are you going to make an effort to get to the line earlier in the game against Maryland?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, we were trying to get there earlier in the game, too. They played a pack line defense. They don't let you get to the rim. You're going to get open jumpers is what you're going to get. You've got to make them, you've got to have the right guys shoot them, move the ball, know what a good shot is and know when they're flying.

Q. Just going back to Devyn, he's been running the point in these Playoffs. How much -- it seems that's really giving you guys' offense -- it's really changed your offense in a sense. It gives Mike a rest, too, but just talk about Devin running the point, how that changes your team.

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, it's been great for us in a lot of ways because he just has a real sense of when to go and when not to go. Whether it's in transition or whether he's just going to take his guy or whether we're going to run some clock on that particular possession. He has a great feel for time and score. He knows if they put a small one on him who wants to come up and get him, he's going to take the guy. He's not going to fiddle around with the ball. He's not a mistake guy, he's not a turnover guy, he gives it up easy. To me that's what's been impressive. A lot of times when you take a guy who we know can score, you give them the ball, they want to shoot the ball more. Oh, I've got it more so I'll just shoot it. I don't know what else to do with it, I'll shoot it. Well, he's not that guy; he thinks the game. He's getting more assists and typically getting to the free-throw line more.

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