

National Invitation Tournament

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Iowa City, Iowa

Fran McCaffery

NIT - Iowa Hawkeyes



TCU - 94, Iowa - 92 (OT)

Q. Fran, would you say turnovers first half, missed free throws the second half, two things that --

FRAN McCAFFERY: Absolutely. I mean, you know, there's so many things to be proud of with this team all year long, but particularly in this game. You make 16 threes, you out-rebound the opponent, shoot 54 percent, you're supposed to win. But they got 21 points off those turnovers in the first half and we missed 11 free throws. That just completely changed the game.

Q. You guys came back multiple times, you were down 11 twice in the second half. Even down five points with 14 to go, still had a chance to win.

What does that say about your team?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I was really proud of the way we fought all year, but in this game, you're right. I mean, we corrected the turnover problem. We only had two in the second half, three in overtime. Unfortunately we went back to uncharacteristic turnovers in that overtime period, but sometimes it happens when you get behind. You try to be aggressive.

We got it to the front of the rim a couple times and didn't score, got frustrating. But I'm just really proud of how we kept fighting, how we kept moving the ball, sharing the ball.

Q. Your point guard had 34 assists in the three last games. Seems like he just keeps getting better, 13 today.

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I think what's happening is as he has gained experience, he's figuring out exactly how to make those kinds of plays. You know, in the beginning, he's coming off the bench, and then he's starting, but he just earned a starting spot, and he's trying to run the play we call.

I remember the Indiana game when he tried to run a play, and he turned it over because they took him out of it, and then later on he just went and made a great play, and so I think he's got that figured out now, okay, when to stick with the play, when to just go because of how they're playing him or they're playing the guy he's trying to throw the ball to, essentially what he did on the last play of the game.

I give him that kind of latitude to make those kinds of decisions, and you're seeing a guy who's just enjoying that freedom and the benefit of his experience I think at this point.

Q. Jamie said he felt like they played good defense, you guys just played good offense and made shots. How would you analyze how you guys played defense? Was it similar, you guys were just making shots?

FRAN McCAFFERY: No, I think our defense wasn't as connected as it needed to be. In the beginning they were driving the ball to the basket, and we didn't have a lot of rim protection. Most of Baer's blocked shots I think were in the second half if I'm not mistaken. So we've either got to take a charge or we've got to block a shot.

Again, we really were trying to force tempo, and we made a couple crazy turnovers in the beginning that led to baskets for them, and that was unfortunate. But you know, they were running a lot of screen roll. We were helping, but we weren't helping the helper. Again, that comes down to being connected, so you've got to help the helper, help the helper, help the helper, and that's what the rotations come from. When you have a team that shoots it that well from three and has a 6'11" center that can catch and finish and score off either shoulder, they've got you all spread out. It's going to require us to recognize where do I have to be, does Jordan need help on penetration, where is my shooter? We try to get into gaps and do some one-way close-outs, but we got caught staring at the ball a few times.

Q. Cook had trouble getting going, had some turnovers, but at the end of regulation he came through. Is that a sign of maturity?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, I'm always going to go back with him. He was really out of sorts in the beginning of the game. He was fumbling the ball, and it's reflected in his turnover numbers. But what's been impressive about him is when he's struggled like that, as long as I go back to him, he'll come back and he still ends up with 16 and 5. Shot 7 for 7, so he was really a very effective player in the game. I thought he got some big-time traffic rebounds late. I thought defensively he was better late. A lot of guys can't do that. Once they're sideways, that's it. You can't put them back in. But he knows I'm going to put him back in. I have

confidence in him, and little by little, he'll get it figured out.

Q. Your defense, I know it's not the way you wanted to end the season, but how far did you guys come with the young group on the floor?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, I think a long way. If you remember, and not many people in this room were in Florida. Our defense in Florida was as bad as I've ever been around. I felt terrible that my staff and I hadn't done a better job getting those guys to play better defense. You know, we were scoring the ball. Obviously didn't do it against Virginia but did it against Memphis and some other games. We couldn't stop anybody; couldn't stop them in transition, couldn't stop them in zone, couldn't stop them in man. I thought the Iowa State game was a turning point for us, and our defense became better. We were really locked into the game plan. I think they did a much better job as the season progressed in that area.

Came apart a couple times on the road in the Big Ten early. Sometimes you've got to learn from that. And from that point forward, we were a lot better. Today we didn't get much from our changing defenses. We didn't get many turnovers. They handled the ball well. They've got a lot of guards that can pass and catch, and they've got a lot of shot makers.

Q. What's your final memory going to be of Peter Jok?

FRAN McCAFFERY: The thing about Pete that I love, and a lot has been said and written that he's here because I stuck with him. What I said to him just now, I said, Pete, you stuck with yourself. He had a tough journey. It was well over 12 months. When he came back, he was not himself. He did not look good. I was at the game and saw him get a shot blocked by a six-foot guy, and he was as down as he could be, wondered if you could ever put it together, and he just kept working. I had seen him before and knew he could play, and we stuck with him, but he stuck with himself, kept working, and ends up leading the state in scoring, Mr. Basketball, and the rest is history, comes here and has a fabulous career. So I'm really proud of him, and again, when you get to know somebody like you do in recruiting, his character is tremendous, and I said to him, I said, a lot of the players in this room are here because you hosted them on their visit. They all wanted to play with Pete. They all respected Pete. They all listened to what he had to say, and as a coaching staff, you really appreciate that.

Leadership manifests itself in a lot of different ways. It's in practice, it's in the locker room, it's on the road, it's in tight games, but it's in the off-season, and it's in recruiting. What do we do off the floor? What do we do to stay connected as a group in the off-season?

And he's always been a guy that's in the gym all the time, so they just follow his lead, and our guys are in the gym all the time. That's why we have the practice facility. That's made a tremendous difference in our ability to build this program.

Q. What did you think of the crowd?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Oh, the crowd was fabulous. It was electric. It was -- I mean, they were all in every possession. I think that's what you appreciate as a player and as a coach. You know, they didn't just cheer when we made a run. They cheered the whole game, every time we did something well, when we got behind, and that's what you need. You need that energy level then, and that's what I'm so thankful for, for this crowd these last two games and all season.

Q. When you look big picture, you had to replace 392 starts coming into this year, you had five, maybe six freshmen coming in. It's going to be a journey. It's going to be a climb --

FRAN McCAFFERY: That's exactly what it was. You're absolutely right. That's exactly what it was. There's incredible highs and some lows, and you think a guy turned the corner and then he starts making some freshman mistakes again. The key is to stay positive with them. Challenge them, hold them accountable, which I did early, a couple timeouts I got after them pretty good, but then come back and put your arms around them and trust them, give them another shot, and you know they're going to keep getting better, and I think we've seen tremendous growth from a very young team because we've got a lot of guys that were freshmen, we've got a lot of guys that were sophomores and didn't play a lot because of those 392 starts that you're referring to. Look at Baer and Ahmad Wagner in particular, Brady Ellingson. Those guys all had tremendous years, and they're just going to keep getting better.

Q. What do you tell the younger guys after this game wraps up?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I'm proud of them, I love them, and we've got to go back to work. You know, we're not going to take any time. We're going to get back in the gym. We've got an opportunity I think to have a really good team, but the only way that's going to happen is if we keep fighting and keep working, and it starts immediately. Off-season conditioning, summer workouts, we get extra practices and we're going to take our team overseas. That will be an opportunity for us to grow together, to assimilate our new players into that group, and play some games overseas, and I think as a result, we'll benefit greatly.

Q. Was a big part of this year unexpected for you, or did they kind of play about how you thought?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I don't know that I ever -- I think a lot of people say, hey, what was your expectation for wins and losses. I don't ever have an expectation for that. What I have an expectation for is we're going to play a certain way and individuals are going to play a certain way, and it's my job to get them to play to their potential, and how you do that is you coach each player individually. You don't scream and yell at all of them. You don't say one thing and assume -- everybody is different. They have different personalities, different games, different strengths and weaknesses, so you try to get the best out of each one, so collectively the group becomes better.

And then self-evaluate, that if I'm not doing a good enough job, my staff is not doing a good enough job, what do we have to do to help them. A lot of coaches throw everything on them. We're all in this together, and it's my responsibility to take care of that.

And so I would say this: I really appreciated how they responded to me and my staff all year long. They kept grinding and kept trying to get better, so I think ultimately that would be my expectation, that regardless of whether we're 5-5, 8-5, three-game losing streak, we're going to keep grinding and we're going to keep concentrating on the game plan, stay true to the game plan, and be a great teammate that helps the guy next to him. And that's what we'll keep trying to do.

Q. What did you think of Dom Uhl's contribution?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Dom was great tonight, and he wasn't so great when I first put him in. I didn't leave him in very long, in his defense, but I thought defensively, offensively, he was terrific. I'm really proud of him.