

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Wednesday, March 12, 2025

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

Iowa Hawkeyes

Fran McCaffery

Brock Harding

Payton Sandfort

Postgame Press Conference



Iowa - 77, Ohio State - 70

THE MODERATOR: We've been joined by Iowa. Coach, we'll ask you to make an opening statement, and then we'll go to questions for student-athletes.

FRAN McCAFFERY: Just really proud of the guys, played really hard. Probably as good a defense as we've played all year long. Couldn't be more proud.

Q. Brock Harding, I know you had that turnover at the end of the game, made it up with that 3. Kind of what was going through your mind after that turnover and to have that comeback like that?

BROCK HARDING: I was really hoping that Josh was going to hit the stepback middle, and he kicked it to me. I knew I had to make up for the turnover somehow, and it found me and it went in.

Q. Mostly directed to Payton. Brock, you were here last year as well, but the past two seasons also playing Ohio State in the first round and losing to them. I believe, Payton, that's the first time also getting the best of Ohio State. Talk to me about the emotions of that going into this game and keeping your season alive.

PAYTON SANDFORT: One of my favorite groups of seniors with Filip Rebraca, Connor McCaffery and Kris Murray. They kind of put a big dent in that season. We were having a great year. Last year we were right on the bubble, and they beat us.

It feels good to knock their season out and we get to keep playing this time. It feels really good and this was for those

guys.

Q. I thought you got a great effort in the paint tonight against an Ohio State team with some bigs in there. Talk a little bit about how your team's tenacity helped to narrow that margin.

FRAN McCAFFERY: It's interesting, I thought Ladji was spectacular, and Even was really good. We didn't play him as much in the second half. We had considered going with two bigs for that reason that you're talking about. We did put them in for a few minutes together, which we hadn't done in a while. Kind of one goes in and one goes out.

The thing we were concerned about is offensive rebounding. You can look at the stats, they had 13 offensive rebounds for the game. We didn't really get hurt too badly in the first half. The second half we did.

Seydou in particular I thought was terrific in the second half rebounding the ball, got five rebounds, and Ladji, like I said, was spectacular. He looked like he might have been tired, but I just felt like we had to leave him in there.

Q. Kind of a rough start for your team with the turnovers, not scoring any points for the first three or four minutes. What was key to that turnaround?

FRAN McCAFFERY: They were 1 for 10.

Q. On another subject, your bench solid tonight. Big time, a lot of scoring. Besides the scoring, there was a lot of plays and good cuts and back screens. You got a big help from your bench tonight. Talk about those guys and moving forward into the next game.

FRAN McCAFFERY: Well, as you know, and that's why you're asking the question, you can't survive a tournament, whether it's three, four, five games, unless you have a bench. It makes it almost impossible.

We had 34 bench points on Sunday when we beat Nebraska on the road. You're right, the bench was impactful in so many different ways. They made some baskets, but they rebounded, they defended, they showed



versatility, they executed our offense when we needed them to. Just couldn't be more proud of those guys.

Q. As Matt was kind of saying there, a slower start but turning things around in the first half. What's the message to the team at halftime as the tie game to keep that momentum and energy in the second half?

FRAN McCAFFERY: We pointed out, like any other halftime, the good things we did, the things we need to be better at, the things we think we can change that might be effective, the things that we think they might change to go against us. That's what halftime is. It's a lot of decision-making and suggestions and affirmation of what did go well.

This is an intelligent group. They're really good at absorbing that information.

Q. On a personal note, since you're here in Indy, what is it like to see Connor get into coaching. Has that led to any fun conversations over the years between you two?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I felt like he was going in that direction. We prepared him to have options, as most parents do. He was academic All Big Ten five times. He was a finance major, double major political science. I wanted him to have the option to do it if he wanted to do it. I would help him in any way I could.

Fortunate enough to get hired by the Pacers, and what a phenomenal opportunity that was for him to learn from Rick and Jim Boylan and Lloyd Pierce and just be around that staff and learn from Chad Buchanan. Just a really classy organization with great culture.

That's what we have here, so that's what he's used to. Then to go to Butler to work for Thad, and with that staff more great culture, just a great place.

I'm thrilled for him. He's loving it. He's learning a lot, and he's grinding like you have to, especially early in your career.

Q. Coach, you talked about Brock Harding's growth this season. What does it say for him to be able to turn that turnover into pretty much a game-winning 3?

FRAN McCAFFERY: You think about him, he came in, and he was Mr. Basketball in the state of Illinois. That's pretty impressive, and he was really good for us last year. But he was a freshman, learning, playing behind a senior.

So he comes back in the summer determined to earn a

starting position, and he did. Then as the season went on, we ended up sliding Drew into that starting position and taking him out. That's the definition of character. He just kept going. So impressive with how he competes and how he impacts the game when you put him in.

A lot of times he finds himself on the floor at the end of the game. He's tough. He's smart. He has that ability to come back after a turnover -- because he had a couple before that. When that shot left his hands, I think we all knew it was good.

Q. After today's win, do you still feel comfortable going into the game with Illinois with the same style, or do you think some things will have to be adjusted in tomorrow's contest?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Every game is different. That's an incredibly talented team. They're really big. So going back to your question, we're going to have to really shore up that tomorrow, whether that means we have to play more bigs or just, I think, stay out of foul trouble if we can because they not only have those guys, but they've got drivers and shooters. It's really one of the more talented teams throughout the course of the year. They've been one of the most impressive teams that I've watched.

I know they had a little bout with the flu bug, and they took a step back. But they just kept coming, and we'll have them ready.

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THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Coach Jake Diebler and Micah Parrish.

Coach, we'll ask you to make an opening statement.

JAKE DIEBLER: First off, give Coach McCaffery and Iowa a ton of credit. I think they've been playing really well lately, and that carried over today.

We've guarded the 3-point line really well all season, and made some uncharacteristic mistakes there. Like some old veterans do, they made us pay, and I thought ultimately that was the difference.

I thought we had really good fight, played hard. We just had some defensive errors that they made us pay and ultimately was enough to be the difference.

Q. I'm sure you guys understood the implications of this game, not just for the Big Ten tournament, but for your NCAA Tournament hopes. Curious what the conversations were like pregame and how you felt like your energy was tonight.

MICAH PARRISH: I think we was ready. We wanted to win the game. We want to win every game. Not just being in the Big Ten tournament, but we wanted to win it for us.

We wasn't really looking too far in the future. We were just worrying at the present. Tonight we just didn't get it done.

Q. Micah, on that last possession in which Brock Harding hit essentially the game-winning shot, can you just walk me through what happened on that possession, whether it was some kind of breakdown, defensive lapse that he got that wide open?

MICAH PARRISH: I didn't get to see the play, but we just tried to help each other. We was too far to help, the whole game basically, and that's how they got most of their 3s. That's what I'm just guessing, somebody tried to help a teammate and he got the wide open 3.

Q. When you think about some of the maybe missed opportunities this game and this season, I think about the Northwestern game in late February, is there a common thread, do you feel like, in some of those games? Or just today you said it was maybe defensive lapses. Is there something you see overall that contributed to some of those poor performances in big moments?

JAKE DIEBLER: I don't necessarily feel like today was a poor performance. I know we didn't maybe shoot the ball as well and we had a couple defensive breakdowns, but I felt like our energy and our effort was good.

Again, they're playing with a lot of momentum. They shot the ball from three -- and certainly some of that was our fault, but they made us pay when we made those mistakes. That's what teams who have kind of that momentum, and we've seen that lately, as they adjusted to playing without Freeman, who was a great player certainly.

So this game was different than the first time we played them. As far as some of the other opportunities, I'm really proud of how this team has stuck together and kept fighting because a bounce here, a shot there, we're talking like we have lived in the margins this year a little too much. I think part of that is some of our youth and inexperience.

I think those are probably the moments that I reflect on. I think, aside from a couple halves in the nonconference against a tough schedule we played and certainly for a portion of that Northwestern game, we played really tough and hard all season long. It just at times toughness and playing hard isn't quite enough. You've got to execute. Attention to detail becomes critical.

I thought we got a lot better with that as the year went on, and our guys deserve a lot of credit for that. It's why we're



in this position headed into today and beyond. There will be a time to really reflect back, but I think overall I'm proud of just how this team has stuck together and overcome a lot. This team's overcome a lot.

I think most teams could have folded and wouldn't have an opportunity like how big and meaningful today's game was.

Q. Coach, you talked about Iowa playing without Owen Freeman this time around. What's different about them without Freeman in the lineup?

JAKE DIEBLER: I think before they were really trying to find him touches near the lane. It was a big part of their offense. Not that they weren't doing the other things, right, the motion screening, the ball screen actions, but a lot of what they were doing was predicated off him getting touches. He's a great player. He's proven that since the day he came into the league.

Now, they aren't doing that. Those possessions, which were a significant part of their offense, are no more. You're seeing Dix and Sandfort, both Sandforts, playing at a really high level with increased volume. They certainly had significant volume before.

I thought Harding deserves a ton of credit. I thought he managed a really good game for them, played with great poise, had some big time plays at the end of shot clock.

So I think the dynamic of their offense was a little bit different certainly, but the foundation of who they were was play with great pace and the motion screening and stuff. I think that's the biggest difference, those paint touches that they were getting are kind of mid-post touches.

Q. In the second half around the U8, you guys tried it, and they took the 63-61 lead. I think you guys had five cracks at tying it around or going back ahead, there were a couple of turnovers in that stretch, a couple of pull-ups. What did you see from your offensive execution in those moments, and did you feel like you got the possessions you wanted, or how did those play out?

JAKE DIEBLER: If I remember correctly, one was an offensive foul, which from my vantage point certainly don't necessarily agree with, but the game wasn't won or lost there certainly.

I think we had an opportunity on a back door cut, executed perfectly. We bobbled it right at the rim. That was another one. We got the ball to some pretty good positions, but turnovers certainly. I think that's been something we've been fighting to get better at really in some of these

stretches is some of these empty possessions with turnovers.

I thought offensively we did some really good things. I thought Bruce Thornton was phenomenal. Again, I think he's one of the best players in the league. I think he deserves to be treated as such in games and hasn't been for whatever reason this year.

But I'm proud of some of the segments we had, the segment, the fight-back, and in that moment we need more poise offensively.

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