

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Queens (N.C.) vs Purdue

Friday, March 20, 2026

St. Louis, Missouri, USA

Enterprise Center

Purdue Boilermakers

Matt Painter

Braden Smith

Trey Kaufman-Renn

Media Conference

Purdue 104, Queens 71

MODERATOR: Right now we're going to ask Matt to make a statement on the game and then we'll go to questions for all three of the Boilermakers on the dais.

MATT PAINTER: Congratulations to Queens for a fabulous season. I don't think people realize the transition you have to make going from Division II to Division I, being able to get in the Tournament as quick as they have. It really speaks to their staff, their players. It's really hard to do. Give them credit.

Obviously today was our day and we shot the ball really well and our guys were very efficient. I thought we did a good job of rebounding, outside of getting a little sloppy there at the end.

But congratulations also to Braden to break that record to have the most assists in the history of college basketball. It's an unbelievable feat. When Zach Edey started to put up numbers, to have the most points and rebounds ever at Purdue, now to coach somebody that has the most assists ever in the history of Division I basketball is an unbelievable accomplishment. Especially from the great Bobby Hurley, who we were in the same grade and he was just the quintessential point guard and winner at Duke University when he played and has had a fabulous coaching career.

But for him to have that honor for 33 years just speaks to how great Bobby Hurley was. And you look at the other guys that are right behind him with Chris Corchiani and Ed Cota. It's a big-time achievement. Happy for him and



excited about advancing in this tournament and having some fun.

Q. Matt, you're wearing the "March Madness" button. What's that mean to you?

MATT PAINTER: I think it's hard to be successful in March Madness. It's what you work for. What people don't understand is that when you go and you start your workouts and your practices in June, it's for March and April. Everybody feels great in June. Not everybody feels great in March. You have practiced. You have competed. It's hard. Everybody is banged up. Everybody is injured. And now can you lay it on the line and be able to get a victory or get two victories or get three victories, whatever it might be, we want to have a long run in the tournament, but everybody wants to have a long run.

So you have to cherish it. So cherishing this win but also getting ready for our next opponent. It's a special time. It's a special time for these guys. I always say it to our younger guys because they don't quite get it. Like, this is it for our seniors. This is it. It's over. I'm coming back next year. They're coming back next year. And they're not. So we gotta do everything in our power it have a special run here in March Madness.

Q. Trey, you were the first player to record Braden's first assist and then you were the one who scored on the record-breaking assist. What does that mean to you?

TREY KAUFMAN-RENN: I think it's just been really cool over the years, us kind of growing together. Me modeling my game around I'm going to have the best ball handler in college basketball history on my team. So how am I going to develop my game around that?

It's the same thing we had Zach on our team and that's the advice Coach gave me. You know he's going to play. He's such a great player. So you have to be able to fit with those guys. So when you have such special players, just being able to model your game around them.

As a player I'm thankful. Like you said he's not only the first and last but he's accounted for a lot of my scoring throughout my career. So it's been great.



Q. Braden, obviously you have a connection on the court with Trey but he's also known as philosophy major and I'm curious, accident if any conversations you've had with him over the years that have changed your perspective either on basketball or anything else over these four seasons.

BRADEN SMITH: Yeah we've had a lot. I think when it comes to the basketball court, just the way he thinks about certain stuff it kind of makes me like as a point guard because my job is to put people in positions to be successful, to help people out, try and get an understanding of where everybody is at and also hearing Trey's side and Trey's perspective of what he's seen and what he thinks. And obviously for me like I've grown a lot as a person and a player. Obviously when I was younger I was so competitive. No offense but I was kind of a dick. Just how I was. He could probably attest to that and I think I've gotten a lot better at trying to understand and listen.

Obviously we have our moments and we get on each other but we can hold each other to that standard because we both have an understanding of we want to win. We know what it takes to win. So to being able to hold each other to that standard and also listen to each other.

I don't really have a specific story. But I think just overall like as a basketball player, and off the court, yeah he's got some moon landing and all that stuff that we talk about. But I just sit there and just listen.

Q. Braden, what does it mean to break the record and what was it like, I know you were in the middle of the game but to have the reaction the crowd did not only after you broke the record but during the timeout?

BRADEN SMITH: It was awesome. We always travel really well. We are obviously very thankful to have fans at almost every game home and away. It's a good feeling. But I think in that moment game was a little bit tight and I was just focused on trying to win and to get a lead.

For me I don't think it's really set in, because to me, again, it's my job. It's what I'm supposed to do. It's why I came here. As a point guard that's what you're supposed to do. You're supposed to get guys the ball to go score, and obviously I have a lot of great people around me who can do that. For me it's my job to put them in positions to go score.

TREY KAUFMAN-RENN: The crowd went crazy and I thought it was from my Euro step, but I guess it wasn't. (Laughs).

Q. I was going to ask you about you didn't really celebrate. The record happened, that's why. Instead, I'm not sure if you missed a shot after you got the record. Maybe you did. But you hit a bunch. Is there anything to that, just this long march is over and the march towards the record and you've held the shots?

BRADEN SMITH: Yeah. I think I've been very thankful and blessed to be put in a position where people trust me with the ball in my hands, and my teammates trust me, the coaching staff trusts me. And obviously I trust myself enough to go make shots.

For me my big emphasis is last week I didn't shoot it well all week. Like I think I made a total of 10 shots in four basketball games. And I think I'm my hardest critic. So I was very frustrated about that.

Just being able to come out and make shots, obviously whatever the game brings you, you gotta play, whether they're double teaming. It's my job to get the ball out of my hands and pass to Trey and make the right read and score that way, or if I need to score and obviously tonight it was a mixture of both.

Just having guys and a team around me that trusts me with the ball to go make shots and also make plays.

Q. Coach, I think Joe had said as you were walking up something like 45 NCAA Tournament games for Grant Leonard, that was his first. You hinted at yesterday kind of the grind he's had to go through to get to this level. Do you have any thoughts or memories about your first tournament game and as it responds to Grant what that's like to go through the 45th time as opposed to the first time?

MATT PAINTER: It was at Southern Illinois and we got beat in an 8-9 game really close game to Alabama, and they ended up beating the one seed in the next game, which was Stanford that year. So 23 years ago.

What was crazy for me, it really helps in this business if you played. Not that you're a better coach or anything, but to be able to get on that. When I said he's had a tough route, I'm coaching at my alma mater and you get a benefit. The guy that hired me at Southern Illinois was an assistant at Purdue, Bruce Weber, for 18 years. The guy I took his spot at Eastern Illinois was his brother. So Purdue has always helped me whether they've hired me or hadn't but I also played, so you have name recognition. It's just harder.

That's why I say he's had a tough route and I got a lot of respect for him and what he's been able to do.

What's crazy with my story is I bought my first house when I got the job at Southern Illinois after being an assistant for five years. It was a big deal to me. Had to borrow money and it was a big deal. Nine months later I'm on the phone the day after I get beat in that game, and with the Purdue AD and he was talking about Coach Cady and what he was going to do, maybe take the San Francisco job, maybe retire, but maybe stay one more year and they might hire an assistant. And I about dropped the phone when he had a big old cellphone at the time. It was huge. And it was like those old car phones, right? Do you remember those? We thought those were cool. They weren't. (Laughs).

And he went through those three scenarios and at the end he said, Yeah, if he wants to stay another year there's a great possibility that you could be the next head coach at Purdue. And I was like, hey, say that again. Like I couldn't believe it. Like I was 32, 33 years old. And it was just something for me.

But it just helps when you're in this business and you've played at a high level and you've got people like Gene Cady and Bruce Weber that's helping you, here is this guy, he is grinding it. I just have a lot of respect for what he's been able to do. I coached in that state at a couple different places, Barton College, which is a Division II school and it's amazing. Hats off to the players at Queens and their staff for the success they've had.

Q. Coach, can you kind of encapsulate what Braden has meant to this program? I know you guys still hopefully have a lot of basketball to play.

MATT PAINTER: You have to understand in coaching a lot of people don't understand this. If you have multiple places to go with the basketball, like you're in a hell of a position. Like we got the best shooter from three that we've ever had at Purdue in Fletcher Lloyd. Like Trey Kaufman-Renn is very unique. Like the shots he was making against Michigan we see it every day. You take it for granted a little bit. You gotta catch yourself.

And then to be able to have somebody like him where you know somebody is a great player and when they struggle you stay with them. That's kind of a backwards way of looking at greatness. But we've always stayed with him because I've always felt even at his worst he was still our best. And it didn't happen a lot. But I think that sometimes players can take advantage of that a little bit and he's never done that. He's always stuck with it and played, like, I had six turnovers. I didn't play very well. And it's like we're coming right back to you. And I know as a player I've never had that feeling outside high school when someone believed in you.

But that's what you have to be able to do. You have to instill that in your guys. You wish you could do that with everybody. You can't do that with everybody.

But he also earned it. Trey Kaufman-Renn also earned it. Fletcher Loyer earned it. Everything they've gotten here, they've earned the hard way.

It's been fun because people will come up to me and say will say, man, you guys run some really good stuff. First of all I'm not calling any of it. P.J. Thompson does it all for us and he's fabulous and these guys will tell you, they will tell you that. He's very, very good at what he does. But guys like this make the plays work. When guys like this move on, you're like, hey what about all those plans you ran that were so great? They're not as great anymore. And any coach will tell you that. And players make things happen.

Q. Braden, can you talk about Omer a little bit and how he's learned from you and how he's progressed throughout the course of the season to become pretty reliable when, A, you need to come off for a break or being a close 2 to you?

BRADEN SMITH: That's my guy. And I think I've tried to like when I was young I had a couple guys that came to me that that were older like Ethan Morton, obviously Mason, they were older they were there for me and helped me. P.J., huge guy that helped me when I was young. He's been through the system and understands what's expected, how to do and approach stuff.

Obviously having people like that puts me in a better position. I wanted to be that for Omer. Obviously he's good. He's shown you that and you saw it when he was overseas playing. He's a great player.

For me it was just trying to build a connection with him and just trying to help him the best I can, and obviously just being able to come out and know that we still have somebody that can do what I do out there, it kind of just makes me a little bit relieved.

Obviously he's going to be a great player and he's young and obviously like to give him a lot of crap still. But, no, he's one of my guys.

Q. Braden, I'm just curious, obviously first couple years, Zach Edey was leading the way, and the last two you've been the leader of this team. I'm curious what have you learned through those two years of what it means to be a leader?

BRADEN SMITH: I mean, to be honest I don't think I'm

very good at it right now. Like I think I'm still working at it to be better every single day, and I have moments where I gotta be better and I have moments that I need to work on, and I think a lot of people will tell you the same thing. For me I think there's just a huge different difference my first two years. It was more lead by example because we had guys that were more talkative and did that. We had Mason, Fletch. I'm still a lead-by-example guy but I still gotta communicate as well.

And I feel like that's kind of my job, and I feel like for me as a point guard on the floor that's what you gotta do. You gotta be able to direct your guys and hold your guys accountable, but I also hold myself accountable. Like I want to be perfect in everything I do. It's not possible. But I try to. And I think a lot of people will tell you that are around me and know me, that's how I am. I get frustrated or upset if my jump shot doesn't feel good but still goes in, I'm still pissed about it. That's how I am.

Just being able to grow and obviously I've been a lot better my junior and senior year just being able to talk and learn from guys and understand guys in the way that they think and obviously know their strengths and weaknesses. I think I've made a lot of improvement but still gotta be better.

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