

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Miami vs Purdue

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Enterprise Center

Miami Hurricanes

Coach Jai Lucas

Media Conference



JAI LUCAS: Last night I was most excited and most pleased with just our -- we talk about this all year, but just our identity showing through. But controlling the glass, being able to get 16 offensive rebounds. I think it's plus 17 on the boards. And then down the stretch, just really being able to execute and take care of the ball. In March, you have to be able, at least to me, to control the paint, control the glass and then value possessions. We had seven turnovers in the first half, ended up with two in the second half and we were able to create some separation.

And the guys just living in the moment with it being a road game. I expect it to be close to a road game tomorrow. I've played Purdue before. I've seen how they travel. So I expect it to be maybe not as crazy, but pretty close. So we're just excited about the opportunity.

Q. Can you tell us, what did it feel like when you came out from the tunnel and heard the decibel of the boos in that building for a neutral, quote/unquote, game? What did that feel like? What went through your mind at that moment?

If you could talk about facing Braden Smith. What kind of challenges does he pose? What kind of match up do you think that is?

JAI LUCAS: Yeah. With the environment, we kind of picked up on it on the bus ride over. You could see all the Mizzou fans, the route we took and everything going on. I could hear them before I actually went out there as the game was getting closer and as it got under five minutes, you could really start to hear them. Walking out there, you could feel it. It felt like a road game, but it still felt like that big moment of being in the tournament, which is always exciting. So it was fun. It was fun.

Then Braden Smith, I mean, man, well, he's good. I'll just

start there. He puts a lot of pressure on you. Just his IQ, his poise, his ability to just command the team. He almost runs it himself. Matt Painter is a great coach, but when you have a point guard like that, that's like having a great coach on the court and you can just see it with how he commands the team.

So for us, we have to give him different looks. We gotta give him different coverages. He's seen everything, but we gotta keep him guessing. We have some stuff that we feel could kind of slow him down and make him think a little bit more than he usually does. So we'll try and do that.

Q. Coach, when you got these guys together and you're trying to change the narrative of a program and you have a lot of new people, what did you have to give them from the start to even remotely dream of having a moment, it would lead to a moment like this.

Second part of that, I realize a stat like this might not be on your radar screen right now. But no one has ever had a bigger turnaround. Does that mean something to you personally to have been a part of that?

JAI LUCAS: The first part was I wanted to make sure we had a clear identity of who we needed to be and how we were going to win and is why the team was built the way it was built. And I felt me and the staff did a great job of explaining that to the players, of giving as much clarity as possible. So one of the first meetings it was, all right, everybody, Malik is going to be our leading scorer. It's just the way we're going to play, how we're going to operate. Is everybody good with that? Everybody was like, yeah, we're good with that. So just trying to give them as many answers before we got started I felt helped us, because it kind of took that pressure off everybody. Like, this is what we're doing, this is why we are going to be good, this is how we're going to be good and this is how we're going to execute it. So just try to do that as simple as possible.

For the turnaround question, I haven't really, like, reflected on the season yet, and it just shows that we had the right people in the building, with the players, with the staff. And then also with the support from the university, from the administration and the fans. Like, our fans were great this year, especially coming down the stretch.

So for me, that's just the reflection of that. And making sure that everybody is on the same page and everybody understands what we're trying to do and execute, that's my part of it, and just making sure we're moving in the right direction.

But it started with getting the right players and the right staff.

Q. Coach, you talked a little bit about the game planning for Purdue. A little while back to NC State, you were talking about picking your poison, whether it's limiting the perimeter shooting with Paul McNeil or down low with Ven-Allen Lubin. Here's kind of a similar setup where are you going to decide to put an emphasis on limiting Braden Smith and Loyer or is it going to be more down low with Cluff and TKR?

JAI LUCAS: That's a great question because they have a lot of weapons. For me, these are the best games because you can kind of just throw everything at them and see what's kind of sticking. Like all games, we'll have multiple game plans that we can kind of adjust and adapt to depending on how the game is going. A lot of it starts with foul trouble and kind of things like that.

But you'll see, and we've always done this and you'll see tomorrow, like we play a bunch of different defenses, and we're going to come in and do what we do tomorrow. For us it's just trying to execute what we are and what we're good at and then just tweaking it, depending on how the game goes and how it starts. Of course, you gotta always think about the ball screen coverage. I think that's the biggest part of the game, how they like to put Kaufman-Renn in the pocket and how they like to let him kind of facilitate. And then the screening actions for Loyer is a big part of it, too. My thing is not letting them get comfortable. They're number one offense in the country analytically. So I gotta find a way to disrupt their rhythm somehow. We'll get it figured out. It may take 10 minutes. It may take a whole half. But eventually, we'll find something and we'll go from there.

Q. Malik, Tre and Dante all mentioned how much they enjoyed playing in a road environment like last night. You guys are 8-2 on the road, 3-3, neutral site. What is it about playing in a road environment that gets you guys going or have a different kind of juice or momentum going as you enter the game?

JAI LUCAS: It all kind of starts with the chip that we had, us against everybody mentality. And it started early on with kind of where we were picked in the league, towards the bottom, not having any Big Monday games and kind of just being, oh, it's Miami, you know. So we have had that

chip on our shoulder the whole year, and the road game really lets us buy into that and live in that moment. And I think the guys enjoy that, and it lets us play our best basketball. And we expect the same thing tomorrow with Purdue.

They have been one of the best programs since I've been coaching. They've almost been like a blue blood. The only thing they haven't done is won a National Championship. But they've been at the highest level for a long time, and that's just a testament to Coach Painter. So for us, it's another environment where we'll be the underdog, we'll be outnumbered. But that's when we play our best.

Q. With having Malik and Tre both coming from Big Ten programs and both of them having that chip because they both maybe felt, and Tre alluded to it here, that they were both maybe undervalued there in those programs. Do you think that, will that be a plus or can that be a minus tomorrow when they're playing against a Big Ten opponent? Will they maybe try too hard and it gets too much in their head? Do you talk to them about that? Because it's a little more personal for players who have played in that league and played against Purdue before.

JAI LUCAS: Yeah. That's a great question, and I would be naive to think that it's not going to be some type of emotion that comes with it, because there is familiarity and there is somewhat of a rival with Malik and Indiana and Purdue and what that feels like and Michigan and Purdue, with Purdue being at the top of the league every year.

So for me, it's try to get them to stay as level-headed as possible, but also letting them live in the moment a little bit and just go out and attack it. And that's our whole thing. Just go and get it. Go flow, go aggressively in doing it. But also doing it with poise and with patience. So that's the part where I gotta kind of reel them in at times. But last night was an emotional game. There was a lot of emotion within the game. Former teammates, former staff. Road game. So this game will have its own emotion in it, and what you just talked about will be a big part with it with them. But them being seniors, it'll take them a little bit, but I expect by the first media it will be under control.

Q. How much is it a benefit that they know Purdue so well, both of them?

JAI LUCAS: No. They do and they know their tendencies. One thing I will say about Purdue, I've played against them before, coached against them before. They have the tendencies that have carried over, like all great programs. Now, he does a great job of disguising it and having different offenses, but usually get to the same thing and the

same actions. So understanding the triggers and when people are here, this is coming. When they throw the ball here, this is what's happening. So they already have that and been talking about it in film and our prep.

So I guess that's the biggest part in the short turnaround is you have people who have competed against them, which always helps.

Q. This is the first Big Ten opponent you've faced all year. Is there a certain play style that comes differently in that conference that you're not used to seeing?

JAI LUCAS: There's a physicality in the Big Ten and the history of the league, but especially since I've been coaching, it's one of those leagues, and Purdue is no different, where they play two 5-men and they're big and physical. You look at Michigan. You look at Michigan State, Purdue, Nebraska, Wisconsin. They all play a very physical brand with two bigs that you don't see a lot anymore. And so that's the one thing about it.

And then on the perimeter, there's always great shooting. You know, it goes to the region of the conference and the Midwest with those states and those schools, just kind of how it's built through grass roots. It really shows in college.

But I think just the physicality, the bigger 4 and 5 men, less of a shooting 4, more of a banging physical 4 has always been kind of the calling card of the Big Ten.

Q. Jai, you guys had an unbelievable season, but one of the issues all year long has been your free throws and it's kind of been a big plague for you. I know we're right next to the game. Is there anything you guys can do to try to fix that or make it better or is it just getting to the paint and getting to the line at a higher volume and having that even out?

JAI LUCAS: There you go. There you go. You know, when you build a team certain ways, you give up certain things. So my thing for this first year was I wanted to make sure we could compete and control the paint, control the glass, be able to rebound offensively, get kind of 40 percent of our misses back. When you do that, some of the shooting and some of the other stuff goes away. So you have to make up for it.

My thing is kind of like you explained for this year, how can we make 19 free throws? All right. It may take 35 attempts. It may take 32. Well, then that's what we gotta get. And by doing that it puts so much pressure on the other team with foul trouble, with not wanting to foul and the constant assault on the paint and on the rim. It just kind of evens out where you have a game where teams

shoot, make 14, 13 threes and you're still able to win by six and eight because you made 19 free throws, you had 16 second-chance points. So it's just kind of the formula with how our team is built. We work on free throws. We shoot them. They shoot, make 100 a day, 200 a day. We do it a lot, but it's just sometimes you're good at stuff, sometimes you're not. So we had to figure out for us, it's just about getting as many as possible.

Q. Jai, I've been meaning to ask you this for a while. You've talked all year about this formula, about make more than the other team attempts and 40 percent of the offensive rebounds, all these numbers and statistics. Where do your analytics come from? Where are these numbers and these formulas coming from?

JAI LUCAS: So I kind of take it from teams I felt were built like us and why they were good and why they were good offensively. So it was four times I kind of looked at, Arizona, Gonzaga, Tennessee, Florida. I had Michigan at first, but they were kind of an outlier because they made 10 threes per game. With Arizona, I said this all year, they're the number one team in the country and they only make six threes a game, but they also have the number three offense. So you're trying to figure out why are they so good. And you look at their numbers and what was true across all these teams was Arizona, now, they shoot a lot of free throws, but they are really good at free throw shooting. They're one of the best free throw shooters. They make 20 a game. You go to Gonzaga, 17 a game. Tennessee was like 18. Florida was 19. Okay. And then the offensive rebounding and everybody was at least 37 percent or higher.

With threes, it was like that mean average was like 7.2, right around where we were. And then the second-chance points was right around 14. So I kind of saw that and read into the numbers and felt for us this is a simple, similar formula that we could do for this year, why we could be good offensively. And we have been for the most part. We've had a few games where we struggled. But we've been a lot better offensively than I imagined. I thought we would be built more defensively, and we actually have been more of an offensive-based team this year, which has shocked me.

But just looking at teams that were built like us and why they were good and then kind of reading into the numbers and seeing where it was and that's kind of where I came up with it.

Q. It's working.

JAI LUCAS: Yeah. So far, so good.

Q. Coach, last night really felt like a tone setter for Dante. How have you seen him come into this new role ever since that mid season, late season adjustment?

JAI LUCAS: Yeah. Dante has grown throughout the season, and it could have been easy to start Dante at the beginning of the year just with the preseason and the summer he had. But Tru also had a great summer. I thought that was kind of where we needed to go and it was for part of the year. And then I felt we got stagnant throughout the year because our bench, we weren't using it as much and not getting a lot of production off the bench, especially once Marcus got out. So I felt we needed some pop off the bench. So flipping Tru and Dante, I felt, put everybody in a bucket that they could be comfortable with. And so Dante is a great connector. He's really good at playing with other good players. So putting him out there with that starting group, he's able to connect and do the little things that are winning things that really show up and it gave me the ability to bring Tru off the bench and put him more in the scoring role. So when Malik is off the court or Shelton is off the court or Tre is off the court, we are coming in the game with some punch off the bench.

So Dante has done a great job of just continuing to buy in to the winning plays and you've seen him develop throughout the year. Like his shooting showed up last night. He hit some big threes for us. But just his ability to defend, his ability to get in the paint and get fouled. He's starting to make some reads. So he's grown throughout this season, and for me I hope he stays around as long as possible. I want him to be one of the foundations of our program.

MODERATOR: Jai, thank you very much. Best of luck tomorrow.

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