

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal - Gonzaga vs Purdue

Friday, March 29, 2024

Detroit, Michigan, USA

Little Caesars Arena

Purdue Boilermakers

Matt Painter

Zach Edey

Braden Smith

Lance Jones

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

Purdue - 80, Gonzaga - 68

THE MODERATOR: Welcome back to the interview room at Little Caesars Arena. We're joined by the Purdue Boilermakers, 80-68 win to advance to the regional finals. From your left to right, we're joined by head coach Matt Painter, Braden Smith, Lance Jones, and Zach Edey.

MATT PAINTER: Very pleased obviously with our effort. Beating a great Gonzaga team, well coached. I thought our guys did a good job adjusting at halftime. I thought our defense was much better in the second half. I thought they got a little bit tired also.

Lance Jones did a really good job of getting up and getting some pressure. Braden did a good job guarding the basketball. Then in the second half we just wanted to stay one-on-one and not double and try to stay home on their shooters.

They made four threes in the first half, and Graham Ike had made two of them -- if I'm saying his name correctly -- and he made two of them the first time. He's made seven on the year, and he's made four against us. So you can go figure, right? It always seems to happen to you.

But I thought our guys did a really good job of focusing and guarding the basketball. Braden did a great job running the team, had 15 assists, which is a big time stat, especially in a Sweet 16 game.



Then as we went down the stretch, just giving Zach the right of first refusal. I think that was important for us to be able to establish him down there. If they doubled, he could pass. If not, he could be aggressive and go right am them.

Just pleased with our effort. I thought our guys were ready to play. Had some breakdowns in transition. Had some breakdowns from a communication standpoint. We weren't perfect tonight but obviously good enough to get the win.

Q. Braden, talk about the Purdue fans. You were getting them jazzed up a bunch of times. What's it like to see them follow you and be here and almost have a home court?

BRADEN SMITH: We have an unbelievable fan base. When you make plays and go on runs like that and get them involved, I think it makes our jobs a little bit easier.

Paint talks about it a lot, give them something to cheer for. When you do that, it makes everything so much easier.

Q. Zach, this might be normal for you, but like Ben Gregg literally just like slapped you full across the forehead at the end of the second half. I don't think it was on purpose. Can you just describe that play and how that felt?

ZACH EDEY: Yeah, it didn't feel good.

(Laughter).

Obviously he was trying to make a play for the ball. He just missed it and whack-a-moled by head a little bit.

Q. Coach Painter, to win an NCAA Tournament, you need six wins. You're halfway there. What have these three games taught you about your team?

MATT PAINTER: More than anything, with this win we're 26-0 this year when we have 13 or less turnovers. Just taking care of the basketball. When we give ourself a chance to score and we execute and get good shots, outside of making them, we also are a good offensive



rebounding team. Then if we do miss them and don't get it, it sets our defense.

So that just kind of enhances that for us. Throughout the year, when we take care of it, we outrebound our opponents by about 10 normally. We didn't quite get there tonight. But we're also playing someone who outrebounds their opponents by 7 1/2, I think. They're a very good rebounding team.

Just the balance. Just a possession war. These guys are resilient. They've played in a lot of close games. We've played one of the best schedules in the country. We've been undefeated in nonconference for the last three years. This is Zach's second time in the Sweet 16. So we've had some experience in the tournament. We've had disappointment, and I think any time you have that you appreciate things a little bit more, and your attention in detail is a little bit better.

Q. For Lance and Zach, if you could just talk about Braden's command of the offense tonight. He's had a great year, but tonight maybe took it to another level.

LANCE JONES: Braden is the head of the snake. I tell him all the time, we go as he goes. He runs the offense. I just try to be in the right position so he can find me. I just try to do my best to play off of him.

ZACH EDEY: I've been saying it all year, I don't think people appreciate how good he is truly. He sets me up, like I've never played with anyone who sets me up like that.

I know I wouldn't be putting up the numbers I would be without him. I don't think people give him enough credit all the time.

Q. Lance, how have you been able to go from playing at SIU, a place where you had a larger role, had the ball all the time, to accepting a role and playing at Purdue. For Braden and Zach, what has Lance brought to the team?

LANCE JONES: I knew, when I committed here, I knew what sacrifices I had to make. To be on a team that's in the Elite Eight currently, I would give up anything, whether that's scoring or doing whatever I used to do.

You know it's bigger than me. I go to war with these guys every day, and I'll give up anything to fight for them and do whatever is necessary to win.

Q. Zach, that 16-2 run middle of the quarter was like 13-7 there in the middle of the second quarter, you stretched it from 2 to 16. A lot of emotion on the

sidelines obviously, but can you just kind of take me through what clicked for you at that point? At that point they didn't get any momentum back. It was kind of one of those page turners.

ZACH EDEY: Are you talking about in the second half?

Q. Yeah.

ZACH EDEY: Everybody just started playing. Everybody started hitting shots. When we play like that, it opens up everything up for me. They were trying to double and take away some of my post touches in that first half.

Trey got big plays for us. They hit big shots, and we kind of went away from the double. They were knocking down threes, and it allowed me to play one-on-one a little bit. So really they just opened everything up for me.

Q. Zach, your first defensive foul came with just 3:24 left in the second half. How much confidence does it give you and your team defensively when you know other teams sometimes aren't even challenging you at the rim because of what a defender you are there?

ZACH EDEY: Yeah, I think, like you kind of see it with teams kind of going away from me. They were shooting a lot of those kind of floaters, getting a lot of those hot sauce actions off their post-ups. It just probably wasn't in their game plan. They wanted to attack me a different way and try to get me moving in space.

I feel like I made a lot of strides in that area, and I feel like I shut down a lot of that.

Q. This could really go for any of the players. All three games so far kind of fall in the same pattern of winning the second half by more than you do the first half. Do you guys feel you're a second-half team and why?

BRADEN SMITH: I think we just take a little bit longer to settle in just because it's March Madness. This is what it is. Once we come in and really lock in defensively in that second half and we push the ball and start knocking down shots, it's hard for teams to pick and choose what to give and take, you know what I'm saying? It's either we're going to hit shots, or we're going to give it to Zach.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, you can go back to the locker room. We'll continue here with Coach Painter.

Q. Things were getting a little chippy there down low. It looked like there was some good healthy jawing and all that stuff. I wonder how you've seen Zach kind of develop in those situations where it seems like, if he

gets running hot, maybe it's at your advantage, if anything.

MATT PAINTER: First of all, like if they're trying to trade fouls, some people do, by getting into an altercation, we had it happen in the Big Ten tournament, and he just needs to back out of it.

I think he did a good job tonight of doing that. Just keep your mouth shut and carry a big stick. That's what I always tell him. I don't know why you have to say anything. In society, when you run your mouth, your percentage of getting your ass kicked goes up. So we've all seen that.

The guy that keeps quiet is normally the victor, if it's even.

But he just -- his stamina is something for someone his size, and now they have these long timeouts. So it convinces me not to take him out. Those guys are like, hey, he needs a blow. He needs a blow. I'm like, no, the timeouts are longer, so we don't have to take him out. It's amazing someone of that size can play that long.

Yeah, they're going to try to get to him before he gets that position, and rightfully so, right? You don't want him to get the basketball five feet from the basket. So he had to dribble down a little bit more tonight than he normally does.

But just keeping his composure, he's been able to do that all year for the most part. But it's hard. It's hard with the attention that he gets to kind of understand his surroundings sometimes when they could be coming with a double ball side from the big, covering down. They can do a lot of different things. Sometimes they'll wait for him to dribble, then they come. He has to have a crouch dribble. If he doesn't, he has such a high dribble then, and now that's time.

So having that crouch dribble and being down in a stance for him, now when they come, picking it up and being a passer, normally they're okay and they're doubles. I'm talking about everybody we play. But they're not always good in their rotations.

I think that's where he gets you. He's so unselfish. But just keeping his composure from all the physicality is something that's pretty impressive.

Q. This is kind of a game where you had to wear Gonzaga down until you can finally go on a run. Is that something you kind of anticipated coming in? Do you anticipate that going forward?

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, you just don't know how the game's going to flow. You just want to stay on your rules.

You want just the functionality of the game. You want to take care of the basketball. You want to rebound the basketball. But you also want to take what they give you.

That's something really important for individual players and teams to understand don't have predetermined thoughts. You can have an understanding of what might happen or should happen. It doesn't mean it's always going to. Like they mix up their ball screen coverages. Sometimes they'll hedge. Sometimes they'll corral. Sometime they'll switch. They'll be in a drop.

So that was something for us where now you're not just talking about one coverage, you're talking about multiple coverages, and you've got to be prepared. You've got to be prepared for that.

No, it just kind of happened. You can't go on runs if you don't get stops. So it's the combination of runs. It's the combination of getting defensive stops. Then obviously scoring at the other end. You just try to score -- each team just tries to score in different ways.

You got to get in transition, and you've got to get on the glass. If you're only scoring in the half-court against quality teams, it just gets to be too tough. So just stealing points and obviously trying not to let your opponent steal those points also.

Q. Matt, talk about the 10 starters you have and what sacrifices those guys have made. We've got three guys up on the stage, but how important they've been all season to this team.

MATT PAINTER: We've had different rotations. The guys that have played more for us in the past that don't play as much now, like their sacrifices have been huge for us.

That's a hard pill to swallow.

But you get this late in the season, and you're setting rotations, and just kind of the blend. We're putting as much skill as we can out there. I think that's something that really helps us.

I thought Cam Heide really played well in that second half. Trey Kaufman didn't have a good first half. Then he starts off the second half, and he was really good. Then I stayed with Mason Gillis. We had that great stretch there, and he was a part of that, and I just stuck with him. He really gives us a lot of spacing.

But everybody helps us. Even some guys that didn't play much or play at all, just having a great attitude and sticking with it and understanding the team's above everything else.



Q. Braden said it's either hit shots or we're going to give it to Zach. You have a million sets and a million plays, but is it that simple as far as the offensive philosophy?

MATT PAINTER: Right. One of the things for us that we kind of found out, like you always take inventory at the end of the year, and obviously last year we had a very, very tough loss. But just playing through Zach after ball screens was something we were really successful at last year, even more successful at this year.

So putting the ball in his hands as a decision-maker and then playing off of that and getting him set up. We'll run some basic stuff and just throw it in, but it's better to move the defense and put guys in different spots because, if you can have that balance of him running your team and making decisions and passing and getting to the free-throw line, getting Zach's post-ups, and also getting quality threes, that's the recipe for success.

But we have a lot of trust in Braden. Braden is a very good player. He's got very good instincts. He came to campus that way. He's gotten stronger, more experienced. You see tonight he's two rebounds away from a triple-double.

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