

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Final - Tennessee vs Purdue

Saturday, March 30, 2024

Detroit, Michigan, USA

Little Caesars Arena

Purdue Boilermakers

Matt Painter

Zach Edey

Braden Smith

Fletcher Loyer

Lance Jones

Elite 8 Pregame Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We're pleased to be joined by the top seeded Purdue Boilermakers who will face 2nd seeded Tennessee.

From your left to your right, we're joined by head coach Matt Painter, Braden Smith, Lance Jones, Fletcher Loyer, and Zach Edey.

MATT PAINTER: Obviously really excited about being able to compete against Tennessee. Thought they obviously had played a really good game against Creighton. Any time both teams shoot the ball well from three and also shoot the ball well from the free-throw line, you're going to have just some slight differences on who wins the game.

I thought Tennessee's just overall toughness and physicality was a separator. That was something, after we played them in Hawaii, that really stood out to us. They do a great job of pressuring the basketball. They do a great job of taking away passes and just being physical across the board.

Obviously Coach Barnes is one of the best coaches in the country, but they have all the pieces. They have quickness. They have athleticism. They have good guard play. They have an All-American in Knecht, who is very, very dangerous. They have good size on their front line.

So we know this is going to be an absolute battle. With



that being said, we're looking forward to it.

Q. Coach, you've mentioned multiple times, when you have 13 turnovers or less, how successful this team is.

Tennessee has relentless defensive pressure, almost full court, and their opponents average 13.1 turnovers per game. What does this team need to do to protect the ball?

MATT PAINTER: They're one of the teams we had -- we're 6-4 when we have over -- anywhere from 14 to 17 turnovers. 17 turnovers is the most we've had this year in a game, from 14 to 17. They're one of the teams we have to win against. We're 6-4 when we're above it. It's not like we lose all those games. We still win 60 percent of those games.

For us, it's being able to get stops so we can push the basketball and kind of get the tempo. For them, it's scoring the basketball and setting the defense. It's the flip of it, right? So they do such a good job of setting their defense and then just getting into you.

But it's just handling pressure. It's nothing that we haven't seen all year, especially the schedule we've played. It's not like they haven't seen everything. They played a great schedule. We played a great schedule. We're both from great leagues. So you've seen a lot of things throughout the year.

It's just you hope your defense is better than their offense and your offense is better than their defense. When it comes down to their pressure and what they're able to do, you've also got to be able to pass and catch and but also have to be able to handle the basketball with confidence, but also execute. We run a lot of stuff. Whatever we're doing, simply do your job, make the right reads, make the right plays and passes, but be aggressive. As long as you're aggressive doing what we work on, things are going to work out for us.

Q. A few weeks ago Tom Izzo said don't judge your program on NCAA Tournament success, but you know the deal, that's what you get judged on ultimately. How big of a feather in the cap would this be if you're

ASAP sports . . . when all is said, we're done.®

able to get over that hump tomorrow?

MATT PAINTER: Oh, it would be huge. It's been our goal to win a National Championship. We feel like we're halfway there. We've worked really hard for it. As you're referencing too, we've had some disappointing losses in the NCAA Tournament. You want to rectify that. You want to use that as motivation. I think we've done that and just keep playing good basketball.

Not to take away these guys up here, not all of them have been here the whole time, but Zach has. We've been undefeated nonconference for three straight years and have one of the best schedules in the country. We've won our league for three straight years and in back-to-back years. For the people that compete, the players and coaches, those things do matter.

The number one thing is how you play in the tournament. We've played well so far, but hopefully this is just a start for us.

Q. Zach, a lot of people talk about the fouls that you draw, but what's it like when guys are just getting tired of having to guard you and fatigue and everything sets in, and how do you exploit that in those moments?

ZACH EDEY: Obviously teams, they want -- they can't just let me get to spots and let me get my shots. So it's in every team's game plan to play physical with me. When you play physical, at least fouls, it's just kind of part of the game, it's part of their game plan. There's nothing I can really do to change it.

Q. Matt, you said the other day that you wanted to build your program without losing your soul. I wonder if you could expand on that. What does that mean? Does it mean the same thing now in the age of NIL and the portal?

MATT PAINTER: No, it really doesn't. That's actually a line I stole from reading one of Tony Dungy's books. I have a lot of respect for him. I heard him speak at a clinic in Gainesville. Just how he carried himself. I have a lot of respect -- I don't know him personally -- for how he was. It just seemed like he coached the game of football but also had his own values.

He wasn't someone that yells and screams all the time, and I'm someone that doesn't yell and scream all the time also. I still think you can have discipline that way. But you shouldn't be rewarded for doing what you're supposed to do. Like staying up here and saying, hey, we do things the right way. You hear those coaches say that. You're supposed to do things the right way. You shouldn't get an

award for that.

But there should be consequences for the people in our business that don't, and that gets pretty frustrating when we don't have a governing body that can handle situations like that. That's what's frustrating. Because you're supposed to be setting a great example for these guys right here, not to have a great basketball career, but to have a better life because of the opportunity of a scholarship.

You have to stand for something and be able to do things the right way, and if you get your ass kicked and you lose, so be it. But we glorify too many people who just win at all cost. I think it's important for these guys to understand that.

The guy I played for called it be a company man. Learn to be a company man. If you're going to leave here and go to an NBA organization or go play overseas or work for Eli Lilly, go do what's best for that organization or company. If you can do that and put your best foot forward, good things are going to happen.

Q. Braden, it was already spoken about, the pressure that Tennessee applies to guards, how do you mentally prepare for that given how many games you've played? Also, how many different defenses have you seen against the post feed that you try to get into Zach, and how have you kind of dealt with that over time?

BRADEN SMITH: Tennessee is a really good defensive team. They've got really good defensive guards. Just handling the ball and getting the ball in the right spots is going to be our biggest, kind of just goal. Then once we do that, I feel like, if they're out pressuring us and we throw it into Z, it's going to be hard for them to cover that as well.

Yeah, I think we've been through every situation in the two years we've played. We've seen everything and been through everything. I think we understand, if we see this, we do that. Or if they do that, we go do this. I think we understand that and kind of just move along with the game.

Q. There's a clip going around online about Myles putting the sticker on the bracket after you guys won kind of nonchalantly, nobody is celebrating. As a senior, does that signify the mindset, okay, we won, but we've got bigger goals ahead. The job is not finished?

ZACH EDEY: Yeah, for sure. This has been the tournament we've been hyperfocused on all year. Obviously we're not satisfied just making the Elite Eight.

We want to keep pushing. We know what we have on this roster. We know what we have on this team. And we know we can accomplish really big things. So we want to keep pushing and not get too caught up in one win.

Q. How much did you match up with Dalton Knecht in the last game, and what does he bring to the table that you have to counter?

LANCE JONES: I matched up with him a decent amount. He's an All-American, like Coach said earlier. He plays with good pace, gets to his spot. So I'm just going to try to limit his touches, try to make it hard for him, and just make it uncomfortable for him.

Q. For any of the players, the way Matt was talking about preparing you guys for life, being a company man, off-the-court stuff, you guys have probably played and won for coaches that were a lot different. Maybe not all nice guys, quote, unquote. So just how different is that, and how much do you appreciate that?

FLETCHER LOYER: It means the world to us. We put a lot of time into it and our coaching staff does as well. When you've got that level of trust with the guy that's in charge, it means a lot. It puts a lot of trust in us players to go trust one another when the guy at the top of everything puts it all into us as well.

Q. Lance, you and Dalton Knecht have been two of the biggest additions by way of the transfer portal this season. Can you just kind of touch on how important that's been for your career path and across the country?

LANCE JONES: It was a chance that I took. The grass isn't always greener on the other side, but the way that these guys and the coaches have accepted me with open arms has just made this experience so much easier for me.

I didn't know what I was going to expect coming into it, just because I'm a new kid on the block, but it feels like I've been here for all my five years, and I wouldn't trade it for anything. I enjoy being with these guys every day.

I told them walking in here, they keep me young.

Q. Braden, as you watch Zakai Zeigler play now, how different does he look compared to what you saw from him in Hawaii?

BRADEN SMITH: So I think he was just coming back from injury in Hawaii, so he was just getting a little bit of minutes restriction and stuff. I think he's a lot more confident player

now. He's playing like he did before the injury, and I just think he's a really good player. He's an All-American-level player.

So I think it's just going to be tough trying to stop him and just trying to keep him in front of us.

Q. Kind of going back to that company man, for the players, you've got a maximum of a little over a week of the season left. If you think about the things that Coach Painter teaches you on and off the court, do any of you have a story that you'd like to share that's maybe a funny one?

BRADEN SMITH: He says a lot of funny stuff. He's got a lot of funny references. I think the thing that just sticks with us most is just to have fun while doing our hard work. I think it kind of -- I mean, it's kind of short and sweet, but it has a lot of meaning to it. I think, if you work hard every single day, you come in every single day, but you make it fun, you smile and you have fun, I think it makes it a lot better.

Q. Fletcher, there's a perception out there that you guys shoot a ton of free throws, Zach lives at the foul line, and that's kind of why Purdue wins. But when you look at the game, a lot of the games where you've shot the least free throws are some of your best offensive performances of the year, most efficient offensive performances. Is there something to be said for game flow and not stopping and starting constantly, the offensive rhythm you get in?

FLETCHER LOYER: Yeah, definitely. I think when we can get out and run in transition and get the ball moving and we get in our motion, and it's not all just getting to them on that block and the team swarming and fouling them, because when they do swarm like that, they do foul, it's obvious. If you don't think they do, just watch more basketball.

I think when we get out and we're running and making shots, it opens up so much more for Zach to get more one-on-one deep touches. With that, that's how we flow, and we get more efficient games without getting stopped at the line all the time.

Q. Fletcher and Braden, growing up with connections to the state of Indiana and understanding the history of this program, what does it mean for you all to now be a part of this postseason journey and sort of be in the midst of a potentially historic situation for the program?

BRADEN SMITH: It means a lot, especially in Indiana. It's a basketball state. So I mean, you just kind of grow up

with it, and it's just always been around, and it's been good here.

Just seeing everything that Purdue has done through the years and how good they have been and just being a part of this. Hopefully making it through more games and just experiencing that with these guys and Coach. I think there's a lot of people that deserve it. We work our butt off every year. I think winning this would mean the most.

FLETCHER LOYER: Right now it's everything to us. It's what our minds are on 24/7. To see kind of these last few years, kind of how it's played out and how much work these guys in recent years have put in, it stinks. You just want to get the program, the university, everybody over that hump.

It's what we want to do and what we're going to work hard ourselves to do on Sunday.

Q. Matt, just the way you guys have ran, you guys are kind of known as Big Man U now through the years. Where did that belief in running your program and your system that way come from, and how long have you held it?

MATT PAINTER: Just for me personally, Carl Landry was our best player when we got the job, and so he played 10 years in the NBA, and we circled around him. Then we had a 2 guard named David Teague.

So any time you have success in a program, you use your former players as part of recruiting going forward. When it comes to guard play in the NCAA Tournament five years ago, I thought Carsen Edwards and Ryan Cline were fabulous. I think it helped us. We showed clips of Dakota Mathias and Ryan Cline to Fletch and said, here's how we kind of look at you. Here's where you can -- and we ran a lot of stuff for him, right?

But we've just seen -- E'Twaun Moore was a great player for us, Jaden Ivey here with the Pistons was a lottery pick. So we've had some really good guards but the bigs seems like every year we've had a guy, obviously Zach being the best. From JaJuan Johnson to Caleb Swanigan to Isaac Haas to A.J. Hammons, Trevion Williams, I'm probably leaving somebody out there. We've had a lot of all-conference bigs.

So when we sit down to talk to somebody who's next, you've got a lot of people there -- I think the one thing you can show now analytically is there's a lot of great programs out there that do not utilize their big guys. My whole thing is I'm going to circle around our best players, whether you're big, small, in between, it doesn't matter. You've got

to do what's best for your program.

So I let things organically happen. I watch a lot. I break down things and let our coaches work. I just watch people. I'm a big believer in guys that believe in themselves. If you don't believe in you, if you don't put the work into it, it comes out. Everybody has doubt as a player. I don't care who you are. Everybody battles doubt. But who can get through that and who can get through that adversity and really, really believes in themselves -- but when you're putting a system together and have had guys, we've learned a lot through Isaac Haas, through A.J. Hammons to get to Zach. You learn how people foul them and how people double them and then just kind of build from that.

When you get to the recruiting piece of it, now you have a lot of data to show them and say, you will get the basketball if this is who you are. I'm not going to throw the basketball to someone who can't get the job done. If you can get the job done, we're going to get you the basketball. It doesn't hold any differently for our program, no matter what position you're in. We're just going to circle around our best scorers, and that's basketball.

A lot of people don't talk that way in recruiting. They tell everybody this is how it's going to work for you, and then they get there and then things change real quick, right? They're going to go with the best, they're going to do what I say, but they're not always going to say it.

That's where kids need to do a better job of going through it and getting in with trustworthy people. Now you want to be able to walk in there and at Purdue you're just on earning game. If you earned it, you get it. If you don't earn it, nothing was promised to you. So now we still have a good relationship.

Q. Zach, are you the kind of guy who wants to think of a game like this as just another game, or are you someone who likes making it a big game in your mind because you think you'll play better? Why do you think you are whichever way it is?

ZACH EDEY: Well, it's not other games. You can't treat it like that obviously, but it's still just basketball. Rules are the same as every game we've played. Refs are the game. We've played this team before. It's still just basketball, but it's obviously a big game.

Q. Matt, do you get a chance this time of year to self scout and pick up on tendencies that you might be giving away to other teams? Does the tournament lend itself to that? Does it muck things up potentially? How do you approach that? The reason I bring that up is on one of the post-game shows last night, I think

Jay Wright said a lot of the post feeds to Zach come in from one side of the floor. I'm wondering if you give yourself the opportunity to look at yourself that way to try to figure things out.

MATT PAINTER: The hardest thing to do to handle a post guy is to be able to pass from the top, because they don't know whether to come from the left to the right. You're going to use the left block more with a right-handed player because he's more comfortable coming over his left shoulder. To basketball people, what he said, it's obvious. You want a lefty on the other block. You want there.

So if you have Zach Randolph, Wayman Tisdale, you're going to the other block because they're strong, they're there. And the other thing that really comes into play is Zach's grown into a really good passer. You want him to naturally be able to pass with his right hand. When he gets to the other block, he can still score and make plays. He posted up three or four times on the other block. Where they come on the double, that's where he opens up. So instead of passing across his body, he opens up, and then he looks at you.

Any time you open up, you see it, now you don't want to see two-thirds of the court or half of the court, you want to open up and see the whole court because you can always turn back around, put your back to the defender and get the post move. If not, you need to pass out, and we do a lot of reposting.

That's all he was referencing, plain and simple. He wasn't giving any lot of clues to everybody. Rick Barnes totally understands. They know what we're doing. They know what we're going to. It's kind of the -- you're trying to show a lot of different ways how to do one thing. It's like we do a lot of different ball screens for Braden, and Braden can get a layup, Braden can get a pull-up, but Braden is also going to pass and try to manipulate the defense on what you're going to do. But we also run a lot of ball screen things to make you handle all that and stop all that, but then we're getting the ball to Zach.

It's not just one screen and throw it in, but if you're going to allow us to do that or we have somebody in foul trouble, we get real simple on you. We don't try to overthink what's going on.

At the end of the game, we call it killing the dragon. If we see something and you can't stop it, we're going to go to it every single time. Cam made a great move and scored it. Then he was going to make the same move, and here I am yelling at him and I should probably leave it alone. It wasn't that bad of a move. He just traveled. But we had him on the hook. When you've got them on the hook and

you can get Ike out of the game, you can get Anton out of the game, those are big, big pieces for a team that only wants to play seven people.

If you can get some people there, now they're not -- you're getting in the bonus, you're shooting free throws, you're getting their backups in the game. Sometimes the backups are the same. There's just a lot of positives there, and you're shooting from five feet, right?

Q. Matt, I'm curious what you've seen from Zakai Zeigler as you prepare for this game. Obviously not on a minutes restriction this time around, your perception of the biggest difference for him early in the season until now?

MATT PAINTER: Yes. Obviously Braden mentioned he was coming off that injury and was on minutes restriction. He's athletic, he's quick, he can break you down off the dribble, he can put good pressure on the basketball. He's one of the best point guards in the country, but he's a two-way player. You have to be a two-way player for Coach Barnes, you have to guard. That's a non-negotiable.

So we've played them multiple times. We played them in the Bahamas. We played them in the NCAA Tournament. We played them in Hawaii. So we've had a lot of experience of going against them and how competitive they are.

But as Coach Barnes' point guard, he's got to run the show, but he's also got to set the tone from a defensive standpoint and get into the ball handler and put pressure on the ball.

So he's one of the best players in the country.

Q. Going back to your comments on the coaching profession, just wondering, first of all, your relationship with Rick Barnes, and also how you view his career from afar.

MATT PAINTER: Obviously he's hung in there a long time. I don't know if I'll be able to match that in terms of years, but like his teams always play hard, they always compete. He reminds me a lot of the guy I played for, to be frank with you. You know what you're getting, man, but you've got to be ready to fight. It's not two-hand touch. It's tackle football, man. You've got to be hooked up, and you've got to be ready to go.

If you do that, then you've got a chance to win. It doesn't mean you will win, but if you don't, then you have no chance to win.

No, I've got a lot of respect for him. He's a good guy. He's a good coach. I don't know him that well. We've had a couple conversations obviously when we played in Hawaii. No, I've got a lot of respect for him. He reminds me a lot of Coach Keady.

Q. You talked a lot or a little today about not making promises that you aren't sure you're going to be able to keep. So like against that back drop, I'm just kind of curious, like what do you think of NIL and the world we're in now where a lot of kind of promises get made?

MATT PAINTER: I think there's nothing wrong with making money off your name, image, and likeness, it's just not name, image, and likeness. In the spring, it's an auction.

But these guys generate a lot of money, and there's nothing wrong with getting paid for. If that's their market value, then so be it. They didn't do a good job of putting the proper guardrails on there. I don't think they're up against it, they're up against it. They simply don't win any court cases.

I think we've got to really look at the structure and everything. They obviously need some help, and they haven't gotten that help. We'll see how things go. I think Charles Baker is really trying to do that. I've been in those rooms, and I've sat there, and we talked about it. The thing that really happened was the timing of the portal, name, image and likeness, and COVID all at the same time. It was just such a slam. Now it was so hard for that.

But these guys generate a lot of money, and there's nothing wrong with them getting paid. But we've got to figure out a system how to do this, but calling it something that it's not. There's nothing wrong with somebody making money off of name, image, and likeness, but you're getting into spring here, and I can't recruit a kid and we've got great education and great people because I don't have a good number? That wasn't the intentions. But we threw it out in the pond without proper guardrails, and now here we swim.

I sign a lot of guys in the fall, and I stay out of the spring. The spring stinks. It's all these guys are talking about that, I'm not. So when our season's over, like maybe people leave, right? It's going to come and find me at some point. But we've had, going to the fourth year, we'll have two transfers in four years, and that's the fewest amount in high majors. So I'm not the person to really talk about that.

But that low to mid-majors, when you get good players, you've got to be able to get them, then you've got to be able to keep them. If you can't keep them, you can't grow

them. So how are they supposed to survive? You guys keep seeing good mid-major teams and low-major teams pop up and here and there.

But they're the ones that recruited them. They're the ones that thought they were a good player. Us high majors didn't think they were good enough, but now once they get there, you lose them. It doesn't seem fair, right?

Any time somebody's not happy, they should be able to transfer. So I served as the only coach on the one-time transfer subcommittee, and I always said I've got to change my résumé for the three-time, one-time transfer subcommittee. Because when they said that, that was it, right? They said, when you use your one-time transfer.

What I thought made sense to it was not allow somebody after their first-year transfer and use their one-time transfer after that first year. After your second and third year, then be able to use that one-time transfer. Now it's like they just keep moving. We've had a couple guys in our league that have already used it, and there's no extenuating circumstances, and they're just going to transfer.

Or there's a lot of coaches last spring who were told, hey, those guys aren't going to be eligible. So they didn't recruit those guys because they already used their one-time transfer, and then they end up being eligible. Now they feel like, hold on now. We called the NCAA. We talked to people in power. They said, no, they've already used it. Since they haven't graduated, they can't now be eligible. Then they end up getting eligible because they get a waiver or they threaten to sue or whatever they did. Each situation's different.

So just a lot of confusion. I think a lot of times when you hear coaches like myself talk, this doesn't affect me personally. It's affecting the masses, though. When you hear that, it sounds like sour grapes, but we just want an even playing field so we know how to operate.

What you don't want is 99 percent of these kids aren't pros. But so many people getting scholarships, whether you get it through athletics or something else, really springboards you into a better situation in your life and career. That's what I always tell these guys. You're going to be a former athlete, former basketball player for 50 years. Think about that. Use this opportunity to now have a better life, not just a better basketball career, without stealing your basketball dream.

So if you can have that balance and that understanding and that perspective, then you're beating the system because now you're a good basketball player. Now you know you can use the brand of Purdue, but if you jumped

around with three, four schools in five years, you've been loyal to nobody. And now maybe you played better at a certain place or you got more touches or you got more shots, well, what about -- I'm not in this position without Gene Keady and Bruce Weber, sorry. My out-of-bounds plays aren't that good.

But those guys looked after me. Those guys helped me. But I was a bad basketball player, and I stayed, and we stayed loyal. Now when I need someone to help me, they pick up the phone, and they help me, and I've gotten in this position because I've had a lot of help from Purdue people, not just in this job, but in other jobs. Some of these guys and what they get into, man, we all know who's connected you to your job. Nobody just gets things on your own all the time. We have people who help you.

I always talk to our guys about, think about the success you've had, now write down every person on a piece of paper that's helped you. I bet you need another piece of paper. We all need that help. That's all I'm trying to do is trying to make sure that these guys -- and I've been on the phone with student-athletes that are on these committees and try to talk to them and say, you want the freedom to do whatever the hell you want, and I just want what's best for you.

Think if you just did whatever the hell you want and your parents let you do what you want, where would you be? You've got to have some people that sit around and say, no, we're not doing that. This is what's best for you. If some of the stuff we're talking about is what's best for them, so be it. We've gotten away from it. We're dodging lawsuits, and I think there's student-athletes out there who are getting punished for it, even though they get to move and do what they want.

Q. It's no secret that Braden and Zach are two of the most effective players in the country. Does it feel any more effective for these two just because they play the 1 and the 5 in?

MATT PAINTER: That's a great question. It's a really good question because, if you talked in theory about basketball, I think that's where you would start. But some of the greatest basketball players, if not the greatest basketball player ever, is not a point guard really and is not a 5. So there's value at every position, and I don't want to take away from that.

But you would probably start with those two positions, especially from a point guard standpoint in today's game. You need that floor general. Obviously Zach has been able to dominate when he gets it, but they take a lot of things away from Zach, and then he gets on the glass too.

So he earns his. Sometimes it's different how he earns it, but he's always working and trying to get there.

No, both of those guys are pillars in our system and what we do, but I think they'd be pillars at a lot of places.

Q. As a Cubs fan, you know something about delayed gratification. It's only been 44 years, not 100 and whatever it was with the Cubs, but do you sense, being around Purdue people, the level of desperation they feel to finally get over the hump?

MATT PAINTER: I feel it. I was a Purdue basketball player and a Purdue fan, then I was a Purdue assistant coach, now I'm the Purdue head coach. Everyone feels it. No different than rooting for the Cubs. You just want it. That's your passion. I'm a little bit different towards the Cubs than probably people are towards me because I understand there's tough decisions to be made, and it's hard, and it's competition, and there's a lot of people out there.

Yeah, I think we feel it just like them because we pull for Purdue. We pull for other sports at Purdue. We want to see Purdue well.

Yeah, it's been a long time since we've been to a Final Four, and we'd like to be able to accomplish that. But we know Tennessee's in the way and they have a great team, and we're going to have to play well.

Q. How much does it help you to have a guard like Braden who crashes the boards and he gets the board and is immediately going?

MATT PAINTER: It's great. He's not a great box-out guy, but he's great at going to get it. Any time you deal with someone like Zach who's going to get around ten defensive rebounds a game -- maybe he's not quite there in his average, but he's going to get a lot, right? To have another player that is quick to the basketball, that can get those long rebounds and push it.

Because I always talk about tough perimeter shots should be like turnovers. Normally they -- when someone takes a really tough shot and someone thinks they can surprise their teammates, sometimes the way the ball gets off the rim because it's a bad shot or a bad three or a low shot clock play, let's treat them like turnovers. Everybody seems to sprint when you see that turnover. So then you get that advantageous break, right? You get a primary break, whether that's four-on-two, four-on-three, three-on-two, but you've got to try to do that from rebounding too.

So if you've got the ball already in the hands of the person you want to push it, so when he gets the rebound, we push it. When everybody else gets the rebound, they look for him. He's done a great job of that in transition this year.

Q. What was your perception of Purdue basketball growing up? What's been the secret sauce of 44 years of just two coaches for your program?

MATT PAINTER: It's interesting because I grew up an Indiana fan. Most of my family went to Indiana. So I grew up an Indiana basketball fan. Then I rooted against Purdue. Then when they started recruiting me, I was emotional more than anything. I was like, I don't like Purdue. I don't want to go to Purdue.

My dad has two degrees from Indiana, and he just said -- it was my first lesson in recruiting, and I've always used it in recruiting. He just said Purdue has good education, and he just says, and Purdue always wins more than they should, and they have a great head coach, and he's got discipline. He just said, and you're going to play for someone who has discipline.

He was a big Coach Knight fan, so that was along the lines right there. It's what I said earlier in here, you're not going to do what you want to do. You're going to do what's best for you. That always resonated with me in terms of any decision I've ever made. So you've got to do some things you don't want to do, but it's still better for you to do that and don't always think about yourself, think of others around you and stuff like that.

Yeah, that's -- I wonder why their gym was so damn dark when I was a kid. Do you remember that? Anybody here, Indiana people? Their gym was dark, and they flipped the lights on my freshman year. So that was the last year. So when they had games, the court was lit, and the stands were dark.

So when you grew up -- I don't want to sound old here, but cable hit in 1980, '81. That meant 12 channels. That was cable then. Besides that, you had your three main channels and channel 4, which was kind of fuzzy. You had to get your rabbit ears with the tinfoil and get that all lined up. But Raycom covered Big Ten basketball. That's all you knew before ABC on the weekend.

So you knew the Big Ten, but you knew the elite schools in the country because they're on the game of the week, but anybody in between, you didn't have a feel for until the NCAA Tournament came. The coverage was just so different.

So that was Big Ten country. When you started to get

recruited, when other people would jump in, they didn't have the same affinity as a Big Ten school would have for you. Like I wanted to play in Big Ten, and then it came down to Minnesota, Michigan State, and Purdue for me. I really chose Purdue because of Coach Keady. When he left our home, I was like man. Everybody was like -- back then you didn't stay in the summers all the time or at all. So like everybody else gave me choices. You could do this in the summer, you could do this. Coach Keady didn't give me any choices. He said, you will go to summer school, or if you don't, you'll get a job. You need to learn to get up and wake up early in the morning and get to work.

I was like the hell with that. You're 17, 18 years old. You're like I want to shoot jumpers and eat pizza and have a helluva time. So I walked out of there, and I told my dad, man, I don't know about that. He said, that's the only person who told you the truth. You need him way more than he needs you. That was a good choice even though I stunk as a player.

Q. Matt, you've talked about how unbearable you are after losses, how hard it is as a coach to take those. I wonder, the 2019 Elite Eight, you don't let it consume you, but I imagine that one was harder to get over than most, right?

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, it would have been much harder if you'd made a mistake. I just felt like, when we were up three and they came down with 14 seconds to go, if it could get to a manageable -- if you foul too early there, it gets to be too much time and a lot more things can happen.

Everybody says you're up three, you have to foul. You have to foul when the time's right. If it's too much -- now they can play the foul game to you, and I've done that before, I've fouled pretty early. Then you've got to play the foul game again if they go again and they foul quick.

But we got our foul around 5 1/2, 5 seconds. It wasn't perfect, but in the scenario it was perfect. Then to be able to get that tap-back and for them to make that play.

The other thing people don't realize is that we're up under a minute in overtime, and they make a shot, and then we come down and we don't make a shot. Now we have to foul, and we never recover from that.

But there wasn't anything that any of our guys did wrong or coaching wrong. Sometimes when you go back and you make a mistake late in the game like that and you're like -- you're going to really beat yourself up when you make a mistake. And you do make mistakes obviously. That wasn't one of the situations.

But a lot of times, our mistakes, you guys don't even realize at times.

Yeah, that was tough, but I was still happy for Tony Bennett. It stunk that we couldn't do it, but I was happy, if it was going to be anybody, I was glad it was him and the way he's operated and the way he's done things, he's been great for college basketball.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

