

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

Sunday, March 31, 2024

Detroit, Michigan, USA

Little Caesars Arena

Purdue Boilermakers

Matt Painter

Zach Edey

Lance Jones

Fletcher Loyer

Braden Smith

Elite 8 Postgame Media Conference

Purdue - 72, Tennessee - 66

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by the Midwest regional champion Purdue Boilermakers. We are joined by head coach Matt Painter, Zach Edey, Lance Jones, Fletcher Loyer, and Braden Smith.

MATT PAINTER: Congratulations obviously to Tennessee for a fabulous season. Very difficult to go against. Obviously we played them earlier in the season, great coach, great defense, very athletic.

Dalton Knecht is very good, and I think he showed that today and made it very, very difficult on us.

Just want to give credit to our players and our staff for just sticking with it and competing and playing and putting ourselves in a good position.

Obviously our fans were fabulous in being able to come to Detroit after being in Indianapolis and really support us on Easter. To be able to get to a Final Four is a dream come true for me as a coach and for these guys as players. Just grateful to be in this position.

Q. Zach, you walked off with the net, and you saw Coach Keady. You gave him the net. What did that mean to you and also to him to have him along for the ride?



ZACH EDEY: You've always got to pay respect to those that came first. He built this. It doesn't go over our heads. He helped set this all up. To be able to pay him back and give him a little piece of net, it's the least I can do.

Q. Lance, there's kind of a narrative a little bit in college basketball, at least on the men's side, that there aren't many big stars, but the guy sitting next to you is a pretty big star. Talk about him going back and forth with Dalton and their impact on the game.

LANCE JONES: Yeah, Zach is -- his game speaks for itself. One thing I really like about Zach, he's humble. He doesn't brag about what he does and what he's capable of doing. He just goes out there, he works, he puts his head down. You know he's a great teammate.

Q. Lance, there have been a couple times, like the Ohio State game this year, when the team wasn't really shooting that well from three, and you kind of hit a big three tonight, hit some threes in that game as well. Is there kind of anything that goes into that with team confidence when the rest of the team doesn't really have any threes falling?

LANCE JONES: Just staying confident. Just be ready to shoot. Coach Paint tells us, just be ready to shoot the ball when it comes your way and you're wide open.

I put a lot of work in my shot, and I have a lot of confidence in that, and my teammates have a lot of confidence in me.

Q. Congratulations to you all. If Braden and Lance could answer this. Braden, from your perspective, when Knecht started getting going in the first half, just what you were seeing there. Then for Lance, did you anticipate being switched onto him prior to the game? And then why were you effective on him?

BRADEN SMITH: He's an unbelievable player, and he showed it tonight. When somebody shoots the ball like that, there's just not a whole lot you can do. We let him loose a couple times, so he was able to make those plays and make shots and kind of punish us from the three-point line.



Once Lance got on him, it's just what he does. It's an expectation for him to do that, and he did a great job.

LANCE JONES: (No microphone). So I wanted to make it my main priority to lock in defensively. When I lead defensively, it kind of trickles down and helps everybody else defensively.

He was cooking. So I wanted to do anything I could to shut his water off.

Q. Zach, with the way you guys play, All-American centers haven't won championships much in the last 10, 20 years. You of course are not -- rather, you're used to being different as a person, but just as a team, what do you think of the way you guys play being different, being here?

ZACH EDEY: I think it's just basketball. I think what wins basketball games in the regular season wins basketball games in the postseason. The rules stay the same. Our team stays the same. Everything's the same. It's just basketball.

What we do wins games a lot, and you kind of saw it on this stage.

Q. Coach Painter, first of all, congratulations on going to the Final Four. Off the court, for you, so many coaches taught you things, Coach Keady. You have a maximum of a little over a week with this group. What's one thing you learned from Coach Keady that you want them to take with them in their lives?

MATT PAINTER: Just understanding that you're a former player for 40 to 50 to 60 years and just keep that in perspective. It's really hard, after you've had success as a player, to not think that way when your career is over. A lot of times your career is over, if you're a professional, around 32, 33, 34 years old. There's a few exceptions to that rule.

But just keep that in place. I always say you've got to have two dreams. You've got to have one through basketball, and you've got to have one through education because you have this opportunity.

He really tried to talk to us about not just having a great basketball career, but taking an opportunity like that and having a great life. That's something I've always tried to pass on. Have fun with what you're doing. If you can do that and you enjoy what you do, then you're beating the system.

Q. Five minutes left in the game, what do you say to

each other? Zach, being such a big figure in the game, people say it's a failure if you don't make it to the Final Four. How does it feel right now knowing that you've been able to get your squad there?

FLETCHER LOYER: With five minutes left and really the whole time, it's corny, but we're saying, stick together. We're saying keep communicating, keep being solid, keep doing what we've done in practice for too many months now.

It's what we've worked for. It's what all these guys have done. When shots aren't falling, what are you going to do? You're going to go defend. Credit to these two on my side, they did a great job with Knecht. He's just a great player.

There's probably a few of things we could clean up, but ultimately in the end we're just talking to each other, staying solid, and knocking down free throws.

ZACH EDEY: Yeah, we've been through it all as a team. It kind of happens when you come back. There's no scenario we haven't been in before. We're never going to panic, like anything. We're going to keep playing, keep executing, keep doing what we do. That's kind of the message.

Q. Lance, just kind of following up on one of the previous questions, how difficult is it to chase Knecht off all those multiple screens? Obviously he's very adept at scoring off screens. How do you stay confident in the game plan, especially when he starts hot like that and just kind of continuing to chase him around the court the way you did?

LANCE JONES: Just sticking with it, just trying to be physical, make his catches limited, push the ball out where he catches the ball. Just try to make it hard on him defensively.

He can rise over me and shoot over smaller guards. So, yeah, I just wanted to do whatever is necessary.

Q. Zach, with 38 seconds left, you blocked Dalton's shot. Not only did you block it, you kept it in play. Walk us through that play.

ZACH EDEY: Obviously I missed that free throw before. I was just trying to get back and trying to make my presence felt on the defensive end, kind of make up for it. He drove in, and I felt like that was a play I could make, and I made it.

Q. Zach, 39 1/2 minutes against an incredibly physical defense. How much did you empty the tank today?

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

ZACH EDEY: It's what we expected. Like I don't want to come off the floor. I don't care how my legs are feeling, how my body is feeling. I want to stay on that floor, and I want to keep impacting the game. That's what everybody on the team wants. Nobody wants to come off. I'm never going to complain about playing a lot of minutes.

Q. Braden and for Zach, what does it mean -- I mean, you gave the net to Coach Keady. What does it mean to get Coach Painter to the Final Four?

ZACH EDEY: It's amazing. I get to pay him back. Like there were so many coaches that looked over me, like you could -- name a program, I could name a coach that looked over me. Tennessee, Rick Barnes is a great coach, but he was at our practice, looked over me.

It's kind of been the story of my life. People have doubted me. People looked past me. Can't do that anymore.

Q. Zach, this question is for you. It's 2,200 miles, 3,600 kilometers from Toronto to Phoenix, but you're there now. When you think about where you were a year ago and where you are today and where you're headed next weekend, how has that journey been for you?

ZACH EDEY: It's been a long journey. Obviously I've been outside my country for the past five, six years, starting in 11th grade. To kind of end up where I am now, it's amazing, but we still have a lot of basketball left to play.

Q. Matt, what would you say is the biggest thing you've learned throughout this journey as the head coach of this program through all your ups and downs?

MATT PAINTER: Just be strong in your convictions in terms of how you think the game should be played. We base what we do offensively off our individual players and just try to play to those strengths and just be able to play off of those strengths.

And just being able to stay with it. Obviously we lost last year, and we just had to be better at what we do and do a better job at taking care of the basketball. I stress that all the time. We work on it. But every coach stresses that. Every coach talks about rebounding the ball and taking care of the basketball. You want to win that possession battle.

Yeah, stay in the process but also looking at it and seeing where we could make improvements, seeing where we could be better.

We had some guys that didn't shoot the ball as well the year before where I recruited, I had watched, I had seen in different environments really shoot the ball well. So I had believed in their ability and their work ethic.

A lot of times, I don't sit there and actually believe in a person as much as I believe in their work, and I delegate a lot of things so I can watch. So when we break down things, we meet as a staff, and talk about -- I delegate it because I don't want to be a part of it to where I'm not seeing the other end of the court, I'm not seeing people because I'm passing or doing stuff or involved with it. I want to watch.

But I also want to watch how they carry themselves. A lot of people don't like that cocky high school kid and it gets under that skin. That cocky high school kid is a college player. Deep down he believes in himself. You have to have that. And we have a lot of guys sitting up here that has those qualities.

So when you struggle and things happen -- we won the Big Ten by three games. We are the No. 1 seed. To take on that loss and be able to do that, you still got to look back and say, we did have some success there. We don't need to change everything. But we do need to make some subtle changes. Myles Colvin, Cam Heide and Lance Jones really helped us.

I also thought we had to be more skilled. By doing that, not everybody gets to play as much or even play at all, and that's difficult because they've meant a lot to our program and they've done a lot of really good things. That's the part I hate about coaching because I want it to work. I want everybody on our team to have his role. I want everybody to be a starter. I want everybody to play and do that.

So it's probably not a great quality to have as a coach. It's a good one to have as a person because it eats at me when like we've got guys that don't get in the game. It eats at me when they don't play. They probably don't feel that I feel that way, but I do.

I just believe in the personnel that we had, and I felt we were going to make some improvements, but I didn't feel like what we were doing was wrong.

Q. It's not always that you get an Edey and a Knecht out on the floor together and then they both play the way they played. I know you're coaching, but were you able to appreciate what was going on out there between them while you were coaching?

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, sure. Obviously we played

against Dalton Knecht earlier in the season. I don't think they realized quite what they had at that point, even though he was a really good player and played well in that game. He's a consensus First Team All-American. He's probably going to be in the end of the lottery.

Yeah, he's a good player. You can't allow him to get to his sweet spots. You've got to have discipline. You've got to be able to stay attached to him. At times you've got to force him into some twos and just make it difficult with him. That's what great players do. Where you kind of cut your losses a little bit and not trying to take away 100 percent. You're trying to take away 80 percent of what he's trying to get accomplished.

Yeah, we don't take Zach for granted. So like some of the nights -- he should have got 50 tonight, if he makes his free throws. I thought he would get 50. I know the season is not over, but I thought he'd get 50 in a game this year.

The thing about it is -- and I played with Glenn Robinson, so that's my reference point, right? In terms of greatness in a player. He's very unselfish. So if you just get to your spots and stay with what you're doing and they just come and get him, now we're playing H-O-R-S-E. If they don't, we want him to be aggressive and score.

It was a good battle between those two guys.

Q. Braden, so this is one of the biggest wins in program history, but you're not done yet, right? Can you kind of contextualize where you are and where you still have to go?

BRADEN SMITH: We just won an Elite game. We're about to play in the Final Four, and we've got two to go. That's our schedule coming up, and I think we're all ready for it.

Q. Also for Fletcher and Braden, we'll all talk about the 40 from Zach, but your guys' ability to get to the basket and attack seemed to have a major impact on the game. How much of that was trying to go against their pressure? If you could take us into that.

FLETCHER LOYER: All the baskets we got and all the looks we got, we knew they were going to come. We knew how they were going to get kicked out to us or on the break going and getting them. With Zach getting so much attention, so much pressure down low, it opens up lanes for us. Oftentimes the 5 sometimes neglects us.

Everything we've seen, it's credit to our coaches showing us the film, showing us where we're going to get our baskets, and having us prepare and be ready for it.

BRADEN SMITH: Yeah, Zach is just such a huge presence, and stay connected with him. For us to get downhill and reject the ball screen and get the point guards looking the opposite way for us to get downhill and make those plays. He just opens up the floor so much for us. They kind of got to pick their poison. Do they want to stay with us when we drive and we'll shoot the layup or stay with Z? Pick your poison there.

Q. Fletcher, I talked to you yesterday about what was different between the team this year to last year, and you talked a lot about developing your bodies, getting tougher, getting stronger. There were a couple moments where you collided with Zakai Zeigler out there and got knocked to the floor, things like that. Talk about how that toughness paid off today and being able to take that punch and give a little bit back.

FLETCHER LOYER: Yeah, that game was hard fought all season. All summer we fought hard. It shows how mentally tough everyone is, how mentally tough the staff is. It's not easy to do what we just did.

To play in a game of that caliber is impressive. I'm proud of these guys. Tennessee played great, and they played hard. We played a little bit harder, and that's what we've got to keep doing.

Q. Zach, if you can just pull out big picture, plus 21 on the glass, plus 16 in the paint, best defensive team or one of the best defensive teams you'll face this year. How proud are you of the job you were able to do in there to battle that defense and come out the way you did personally? Last for Fletcher, 44 years you're going to hang a banner that says "Final Four" at a minimum, maybe better, just kind of reflect maybe if you can and what it means to be part of this next wave of Purdue Boilermakers making the championship stage.

ZACH EDEY: The rebounds isn't just me obviously. I got however many I got, but I'm not out there boxing out five people. We've got a lot of guys that were doing the right things, a lot of guys that came with the right mindset, and we knew it was going to be a war. We weren't surprised by anything they do, any hard checks they throw. We knew it was going to happen.

So it's not just me, it's the whole team that contributes to that rebound difference.

FLETCHER LOYER: I think what this means to us and our school and all the people that support us, I can't even put it into words right now. In 20 years I'll probably be able to,

but right now it's what we've worked for. It's a lot of hours we put in. Looking up in the stands and seeing people cry, it means a lot.

Fans that have no family connection to us, they're just fans of our university and our team. I think the work we put in and how hard we go out there and play, it's special. So I'm so proud of these guys, and I'm looking forward to playing two more games.

Q. For any of you, you watch the Final Four each and every year, you watch that net get cut down. It's a full circle moment. Just how much exactly does that mean to be able to go up there and on that ladder and cut down the net?

ZACH EDEY: It's amazing. Obviously we've watched for the last three years teams kind of have this feeling and this experience, and now to be able to go through it ourselves, for me to have payback for Coach Paint for really believing in me, it's amazing.

Q. Matt, you did the interview with Robbie after the game, very emotional with Robbie there. What does this win mean to past players, former players, and including yourself being a player, to get to the Final Four?

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, he was watering out when I got up there. That was hard.

More than anything, you appreciate the guys that have played for you, and you appreciate that they had opportunities to go other places and they chose your school or they chose you, however you want to look at it.

But we weren't very good when that class chose us. Our facilities were just okay. That's being nice. And we've really done a great job in the last 15 years of upgrading what we have.

When someone signs at your school and they have a lot of options, like E'Twaun Moore, JaJuan Johnson and Robbie Hummel, and you got last place in the Big Ten and you're 35, 36 years old, and I hadn't done anything. So for our ability to get those guys and they believed in us, and we obviously got close, we got to Sweet 16, but we didn't get further. In their career, we won the league once and got second three times. He had two major injuries.

So his battle -- he should have played in the NBA for eight to 10 years, but because of his injuries and everything, he didn't. He was smart because now he's at the top of his game in what he does. I think everybody in this room would agree with that.

It just means a lot to a lot of people, but for someone like that, they deserve to -- you have guilt, there's no doubt about that. You have guilt because Gene Keady deserved to coach in a Final Four, and he deserved to play in one, and you're getting ready to go to one. I just appreciate what he did for us.

We had E'Twaun Moore and JaJuan Johnson, we had two guys that were here were All Conference. When you take a job and if you've got some people that are already there to get started, it really helps you, and that was David Teague and Carl Landry. Those two were All-Conference players. We had to sign a class behind them, and that was the class that got us going.

Appreciative of everything that Rob has done for our program.

Q. Matt, can you describe how difficult it is to create teams that are as tactically sound as yours, just limiting turnovers, the offense you run, the high level stuff you guys do, but then also a group that is diving on the floor, taking elbows, can match toughness with Tennessee, just that combination. How hard is that to craft?

MATT PAINTER: I thought when we struggled about 10 years ago, everybody talks about doing a better job recruiting, and I thought we had to do a better job evaluating because I would watch Belmont and I would watch Davidson and I'd watch guys at a mid-major level, and the best players at those places can play anywhere.

Now you're starting to see with the portal, right? Mark Sears didn't start at Ohio his freshman year. Now he was behind an NBA player in Jason Preston, and he still didn't start there. Now you look at him. There's great players everywhere. I want to get Mark Sears out of high school, right, because he had mid-major offers.

Steve Lutz was the head coach at Western Kentucky. Was the one that recruited Zach Edey. Micah Shrewsbury is the one that recruited Fletcher Loyer. I'm appreciative of those guys and what they did for our program and they helped us. I could go on about our current assistants and Brandon Brantley and Paul Lusk and Terry Johnson, and PJ Thompson is going to be an absolute star in this profession, Sasha Stefanovic. I have two GAs in Jared Walbrun and Tommy Luce that are former players.

So we've got a good group of guys. We've got younger guys that can relate to them. But we're very systematic, so you've got to -- we're systematic, and we evolve with our system, if that makes any sense. We evolve towards the

strength of our best players. I talked about it the other day. I think it's a big fallacy in recruiting because everybody wants to play shortstop and lead off, but you've got one shortstop, and if Cal Ripken is there, he's probably not going to get moved.

So guys just don't grasp -- they want roles, but I want players that just want to win. I want guys that can fit into those roles and understand that. Now, you've got to have your horses right. You can't have eight guys that are eight role players. You've got to have Carsen Edwards. You've got to have Caleb Swanigan. You've got to have Zach Edey. You've got to have Braden Smith being a maestro out there. When you piece those together, now you're systematic.

A lot of people don't give us credit. We really push the basketball. Now some great teams stop us from doing that and it doesn't look that way at times, but if you let us go or you turn it over or take bad shots, we really try to push. So it's that balance of it.

We've been able to get elite big guys. If you can get a good point guard and get someone that can run the team like we have, and you have elite big guys, you can put skill and competitive spirit together. Those two qualities together is magic, man. Guys that will lay it on the line, guys that will dive on the floor.

We started recruiting Mason Gillis, and he put -- it's hard to -- sometimes when they play center. Mason Gillis played center in high school. But I'd go and watch him warm up, and I was like, man, he can shoot, but his numbers don't show he can take a lot of threes. He's just doing what's best for his high school team. He's going to be a good college player.

When I saw Fletcher Loyer and how competitive he was, he's got heavy feet, but the ball goes in and he's competitive. Coming from someone who's got heavier feet.

But those guys win the day, man. They care. That's what Lance has been able to do for us. Lance has a good competitive spirit. He has a good way about him.

And I want to have fun. I don't want to get stuck in an airport with guys I don't want to be around. Like I get to choose. It's not a school district. I get to pick. Like I want to have fun. That's selfish, but I could care less.

So like I just did a bad job -- I think we all fall into the trap of looking at talent, instead of looking at talented people that are productive. The production is what we go on, right? You're like, hey, man, this guy can jump over the moon and do a whirly bird 360, but he gets two rebounds.

Who cares, then? How many breakaways are you going to get, right?

You've got to get guys, like if you look at UConn and look at those guys on their team, they are competitive, and they're nasty, and they can guard, and what they're all about, they're all about winning. He's done a great job instilling that, but I bet, if you went and talked to him, they would talk about they were that way before. He's just enhanced that stuff and been able to get it, and that's what you get.

You can learn from a lot of other people, but you'd damn sure better learn from our own mistakes, and that's what we've been able to do.

Q. Coach, congratulations. Two parts real quick. Zach Edey seems like he's got a little bit of a streak now. He's matured a lot. Talk about that. And five minutes left in the game, what did you tell them, Coach?

MATT PAINTER: Zach's got a competitive fight to him. He doesn't back down. When you have that elite physical size and you have that competitive spirit with it with some skill, it's pretty dangerous. He's pretty hard to handle.

We had some guys on fumes, I thought. I thought both teams had some guys on fumes, and we just had to dig deep, take care of the basketball, and just told him, hey, it's right here for us. This is what we worked towards. We put it in position. Trust the process. Take your shots when they're there.

Big fella is going to get the right of first refusal. We made sure they understand that. He doesn't have to shoot it, but he's got to touch it. Put them in that bind. Make them handle all that. He's going to pass if somebody's open. We have a rule. You want to double him, you want to mess with him, he's going to pass the ball, he's going to dig deeper. But if he stays one-on-one, his role is to score the ball.

Q. A big talking point in college basketball has been the 10-0 run or the kill shot. It's something your team has struggled with the past couple of years, but this year every game it seems like there's been one, there's a 13-0 run this year or this game. Can you talk about what's changed about the team that's led to that?

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, we've played more offensive guys. We have more skill that is out there. I thought a big part of the game was when they went up 32-21, if I have the numbers right, and then we went on a run right then. We were very vulnerable at that point. We had 25 minutes

to play. We had a long game. For us to be up after being down 11, I thought it was a great sign for us.

A lot of people feed off of makes, right? You get guys that go 5-for-6 from three, they'll defend better and rebound better when they're 5-for-6. But will they defend better and rebound better when they're 0-for-6? That's the sign of a championship team.

Today we're 3-for-15 from three, shoot 64 percent from the free-throw line and I didn't think it affected anything even though we had glaring mistakes from Dalton Knecht. When the ball got loose or rebounds happen, you've got to go to him. You've can't get separated from him.

He made some tough ones when he was supposed to but we gave him a handful of looks. And we were fortunate at the end. He had a couple of really good looks that didn't go down. We were very fortunate. Just staying with it.

Runs are a big part of the game, right? Obviously when they go against you, it can be the difference. But if you can get those good runs, if you can get two quality runs and you have a good team and you have good talent, you're normally going to win that game.

Q. Matt, you've talked about being grimy when you guys don't shoot well. Was this the essence of a performance like that today?

MATT PAINTER: Our ability to rebound, it ends up being the difference, right? We had 10 turnovers. They had seven. But outrebounded by 20. In my opinion, it ends up being the difference.

Yeah, you have to grind. I said it after the Gonzaga game, I go, we made shots, and we really separated ourself in that second half. But if we don't make shots, how does this game end up?

Obviously you don't want that to happen. You want to go 10-for-15 from three and shoot 80 percent from the line, but that's the game of basketball. The ball doesn't always go in. That's going to be a guarantee. That's why people always say defense and rebounding travel because you can be constant in those areas.

I thought that rebounding piece for us was the difference.

Q. Matt, Dalton Knecht, you talked about him a little bit, he took 31 shots. Was it part of your plan to make them one-dimensional? Because that's certainly what happened taking away the role players. He went off, but it was still a great defensive performance.

MATT PAINTER: Not really. We wanted to get up and jam the basketball to start. So that's why we had Lance on him, then at dead balls Lance would go on him there. I just didn't think our attention to detail was great. I thought it's smart on their part. Someone got a hot hand, go to him. Why not? If you had to pick someone off their team that you want to get shots for, he'd be the one.

Then when you look back on things, you're like this guy took the most shots, this guy took the most shots. They needed a little more balance, but at the end of the day, when something's not working, why not stay with it? I thought it made sense to stay with him and keep going.

I understand your point. We get that way with Zach. We want that balance. But we also know, if he's got the advantage -- you know, we had a couple drives in the game, where it's just like you're going nowhere. There's nothing wrong when people fly at you and stop your three, to now put the ball on the deck. We were able to drive and get some layups, but when it doesn't work for you, you wonder why Zach didn't get the ball. They have to feel the same way about him.

Q. When you got to the top of the ladder, what did you see, and what did you feel when you're up there? They didn't leave a lot of net for you, I notice that.

MATT PAINTER: I don't normally do it. I don't normally cut the net down when we win championships and stuff. It's kind of not my deal. But they said I had to do it.

Nothing, just you get a lot of s--- from people on the other side, whether it's rivals or other people in the league, and that's their job, right? They're your rivals, you go against them, and that's part of it.

One thing I appreciated, especially from last year, was the people that supported us from Purdue. That was to me, those are the people that are in your corner no matter what. I just appreciate the Purdue faithful that stayed confident that we could get the job done while I was still the head coach.

Q. Seemingly every night, Zach is breaking a record or getting on a short list with legends, but now you start seeing Braden do that. How nice is it to have him for the next game or two, as well as the next two seasons essentially?

MATT PAINTER: No question about it. He's evolved as one of the best point guards in the country, if not the best point guard in the country. Just his ability to pass and see things. He didn't get to it a lot tonight in terms of shooting his pullup, but those of you that follow us have seen him,

especially people that play drop coverage. He can really get to that pull-up, whether that's a three or whether getting to that 15-footer.

I think that's the most important thing for him is to stay consistent and keep looking for his shot, keep being aggressive because, when they take his shot away from him, now he can instinctually make passes, whether it's a post-up or a skip or what have you.

He's very knowledgeable, very instinctive, makes good decisions, but somebody you want the ball in his hands. That's what we've really found out is keeping the ball in his hands helps everybody, especially Zach. Now they've got to deal with him and stop him, and now they've got to deal with Zach coming into the post. If they overdo anything, then we go back and go in or we reverse it and go in. We just try to keep playing. He's been fabulous.

Q. Talked to Gene Keady just a little bit ago, and he said you're like a son. Is he like a dad, and what does it mean to you to have him on this day in person?

MATT PAINTER: It's great. He obviously deserves to have this moment, right? He worked so hard. Seeing him go into the Hall of Fame is one of the coolest things that I've seen in competitive sports for us here at Purdue.

He always comes at the end of the year and then travels with us and he's around. Kind of what he recalls from his coaching career and all the things and all the experiences that you had. They won three Big Ten Championships after I graduated. So like it's always something. You wanted to be a part of that. He's always included me, and I've always included him.

If it wasn't for him, I wouldn't be here. So when you're 18 years old and you get recruited by somebody, you don't think 15 years later you're going to be the head coach and take his place, right? So to me, it was really surreal when I coached one year in college and they were interested in me, but I know he had a big part of it. I know he had a huge part of it, and I'm very grateful for that and very grateful for all he's done for me and our players.

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