

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

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San Jose, California, USA

SAP Center

Texas Longhorns

Coach Sean Miller

Tramon Mark

Dailyn Swain

Matas Vokietaitis

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference



But yeah, it's nice to have a couple days in between. But everybody that's playing has those same days, as well.

Q. I was going to ask you if the team was fatigued after all the crisscrossing the country or if it's just sportswriters. Do you feel like all the pressure is on Purdue because you guys have done so much already and you play looser or freer?

SEAN MILLER: No, I don't. I think the one thing about this tournament that you learn is the best team doesn't always win in this tournament. It's the team who plays the very best on that particular day.

As we all know, whether it's an individual player rising to a height that he's not been at, and then other times where a team doesn't play nearly at the level that they've played at all year long, for whatever reason.

I think everyone is aware of that. It's so much about who's the better team tomorrow. Make no mistake about it, I think the way Purdue is playing here recently, winning the Big Ten Tournament, speaks volumes. Their tournament experience, Loyer and Braden Smith, you feel like you've watched those two guys for five or six years playing together.

They obviously have great experience together, and very admirable when you follow Purdue's program, how they've built it and who they are.

The fatigue, we have young guys. Everybody, now that we're in mid-March, if you look at some of the leagues, the way it works, there are some teams who have traveled way more than us through the months of January and February. I think that's all part of it, the way we travel, how we take care of our guys, and I think most importantly how they take care of themselves. I think that young people are more aware of the importance of that today, perhaps more than ever before.

Q. You obviously go way back with Coach Cal. How have you seen him change from the guy who recruited you back at Pitt to where he is now?

SEAN MILLER: Yeah, I mean, I've known Coach Cal, I feel like, my whole life because his family is so connected

SEAN MILLER: Obviously, we're thrilled to be here in San Jose and be a part of the Sweet 16. I think everybody knows a version of our story, in that where we began and where we ended are two different places.

I think all of us, me in particular, just incredibly proud of our group, the resiliency that we've shown, and even in the resiliency in the last week with what we had to do to be here.

Having said that, I know that we're playing against a great, great program, not just a great team, in Matt Painter, one of the best to ever do it. We clearly have to be at the very top of our game here tomorrow to have an opportunity to keep playing.

Q. How is Jordan doing with the ankle? Do you expect him to play tomorrow? Second question, after the hectic last couple days you guys had in Portland and then in Dayton, what can the extended rest do for you guys leading into tomorrow?

SEAN MILLER: Yeah, first Jordan, he's dealing with a lower leg situation. We're hopeful that he can -- we've given him a lot of rest since our last game, and I think he's really responding to it.

We still had a pretty quick turnaround, all things considered, because of the distance between San Jose and Austin and traveling from Dayton to Portland and Portland back to Austin.



to mine in Pittsburgh. But I think the thing that stands out about him more than who he is as a coach is just who he is as a person. He never forgets anybody, from where he comes from, anybody that's been a part of his journey. He treats them like they're kings.

He's obviously been very, very good to me. It's unique because the timing of his career and maybe where I'm at, the fact that we share the SEC and then we really have mirrored each other. He's like our travel partner on this trip. We've been in Portland together, and now here in San Jose.

Amazing person, and obviously everybody knows what a great coach he is.

Q. You mentioned Jordan's health, but what does it mean to him to be here, to be home, to be playing here and just to have the opportunity? I would guess he's going to have some friends and family in attendance this weekend.

SEAN MILLER: Yeah, it's really worked out, to some degree, like a storybook ending for him, when you think about just his journey, where he began his career, how this year has unfolded.

Jordan has really grown and emerged as our point guard. We depend on him in just virtually every category. I think his skill set of shooting, his ability to score at the point guard position, it's really been vital in our biggest victories this year, including the tournament. I just think his play in general sets the tone for our team.

The fact that he's here, back home, that's how you want it to end for every player.

Q. Since we're in San Jose, with Aaron Gordon having all the success he's had in the NBA, what do you remember about recruiting him, and another confluence having Arizona here, too?

SEAN MILLER: Yeah, I mean, when I think of San Jose, I think of Aaron and his family and what an important period of time that was in terms of building the program and what an amazing kid he is.

If you would have asked me then how I would have pictured his NBA career going, I would have pictured it then the same way that it has, like a 15- to 20-year NBA career, a champion, somebody that every organization in the NBA would love to have as part of their team.

It's not just who he is as a basketball player. It's who he is as a hard worker, a teammate. He's an amazing, amazing

kid.

Q. You're no stranger to the second weekend of the tournament. I'm curious, do you draw over your past experiences into navigating and advancing into the next stage, or is it uniquely different because it's a different team almost every single time?

SEAN MILLER: It's definitely a different team every year. The circumstances are different. There are times when -- I would have been here in San Jose as a heavy favorite. I think we were a 2 seed and playing a team seeded very similar to us, and it didn't work out for us.

Those circumstances, expectations, the type of long season you've had, I think that sets the tone for this round.

In our case, we caught fire in about a 10-day period. We were grateful just to have the opportunity to be in the tournament, and then we kind of entered this second weekend as a dangerous team.

Each one is a little bit different. I will tell you, though, I think there is value in being in this round before. You're more settled in, more experienced.

Q. Obviously been a while since you left Arizona. Things struck me how different the landscape has changed, when you left, investigations going on at your place and now things have changed, NIL, et cetera. What's your impression of what has happened in the landscape of college basketball and how has it changed you?

SEAN MILLER: I mean, it's certainly changed a lot. I think that one thing you learn is, in everything that we do, you want it to just kind of always be how it once was, and that's just not the case. No question, how you build your roster, even the transfer part of things, I think there was a time when you had to be careful taking too many transfers because they had to sit out a year, and there weren't nearly as many who were willing to transfer, and now you can really, in one year, have five or six.

There's a lot of different rules, clearly, that have affected the game, but I think what it's affected the most is just how you go about building the team that you're going to have.

Q. It seems like every player on your team that plays is peaking at the right time, and a couple of them, if not peaking, they're making big contributions. How unusual is it for everybody to be playing their best at this time?

SEAN MILLER: Well, I think that's what the teams who

advance in March have in common. There might be a couple that can get away with not playing at their best, but to be able to advance in this tournament, regardless of how talented you are, everybody wants to be at their best, playing well, being healthy, and oftentimes that doesn't happen.

And when it doesn't, as I've said earlier, the best team doesn't always win in this tournament. It's clearly the team that's going to play the best on that particular day. That's really what we're after. I'm sure Purdue is, as well.

Q. Talk to us about Braden Smith. I'm sure you have a great appreciation for him as a point guard, but does he remind you of anyone, and how impressed are you with how productive he's been throughout his college career even though his size is often used against him?

SEAN MILLER: Yeah, I mean, he's just a terrific player. I mentioned it maybe a couple days ago, and I'll do it again. I think Bobby Hurley, when you consider that assist record that he had, I mean, I think it's lasted since 1992. So whoever that next player is that breaks that record, I mean, just think about how difficult that is to get that many assists.

He's the ultimate point guard who makes everybody around him better. He made Zach Edey better. He makes Loyer better. He makes players on his team better just because of his incredible understanding of the game, passing and scoring.

Q. You guys have the first game tomorrow. There will certainly be Arizona fans in the stands. Have you thought about just kind of the energy that they're going to bring, whether it's cheering for you or against you or things like that?

SEAN MILLER: I really haven't. I would hope they would cheer for us. We're the 11 seed. If I were them, I'd want us to win.

But my relationship with Arizona is nothing but great. I have three sons, they all attended the University of Arizona, and each of them had an amazing experience. Two of the three, their girlfriend, potentially maybe who they end up with as their wife, also went to Arizona. I was there for 13 years, have friendships that will last a lifetime. I was treated, our family was treated incredibly well.

My perspective of just watching Arizona, they couldn't have hired a better coach. I mean, what he has done is just -- it's like legendary. I know that the team that they have this year might be the best team at Arizona, one of the best ever.

That's where that stands. I mean, if we were to beat Purdue -- I'm at Texas. That would be amazing. We're playing in the Elite Eight. But the other part of it doesn't really exist for me. I think with that emotion, you can either burn the house down or make it warmer. I look at that place and that experience as nothing but just making my house warmer. I have nothing but positive thoughts, feelings and perspectives towards that experience.

Q. For any of you guys, Sean had said that he would be down to not rely on Cam Heide to help scout Purdue. Without giving away anything he's potentially told you guys, has he been helpful to you in preparing for this matchup tomorrow?

TRAMON MARK: Yeah, he's been big time. He knows what they do. He knows a lot of what they do, so he's been helping us, coaching us up on the things that they do and just being a big-time guy for us in our scouting and everything we do in our scouting, practice. He's been big.

Q. For any of you guys, it was a very loaded week last week, playing three games in that time frame. What were these past couple of days like? Were you trying to keep it rolling, keep the same flow, or did you take some time to rest, reset and then get ready for this?

DAILYN SWAIN: When we went back home, we had a day off, but like you said, just trying to keep that momentum rolling, keep building chemistry, keep getting closer. Obviously we bonded a lot winning those three games in that short time period. I think we're just trying to build off that momentum and keep it going.

Q. Tramon, with your journey through college basketball, you've been a part of this landscape change where the transfer portal was opened up and things like that. How have you seen the transfer portal change the relationship between coaches, players and the programs they're a part of?

TRAMON MARK: You know, with the NIL landscape and what it's done for college basketball and other sports, it's been crazy. It's hard to navigate sometimes. It's hard to know how people feel about you because of where you're going because they probably think you're going somewhere for money or stuff like that.

In all honesty, you've just got to do what feels right in your heart and trust the people you trust, trust in your family, make decisions as you go. But it's a hard thing to navigate for sure.

Q. Dailyn, six assists, one turnover for you the past two games. That's the best stretch for you all season.

When it comes to turnovers, that's the best stretch for you since November. What's changed for you in that regard? Is it just teammates making shots, or are you just more locked in? Why have you been so productive as a play maker?

DAILYN SWAIN: I would say just being more locked in on that side of the ball. I know the stakes are higher. So I think turnovers is was one of the biggest parts of my game that I needed to work on and cleaning it up in March, there's no better time to clean it up.

My teammates always hit shots. I think I'm just doing a better job finding them whenever I'm getting downhill. I know defenses are collapsing on me around this time of year. They do a really good job scouting and they know I like to get downhill, so kicking it out and then depending on those guys to hit shots.

Q. Matas, obviously Purdue, very pick-and-roll heavy team with their two-man game with Braden Smith and whatever big they bring up. So that's going to put you in a spot where you're defending a lot of those situations. What's your approach heading into how you're going to manage those pick-and-rolls that Purdue is going to throw at you guys?

MATAS VOKIETAITIS: So we're just going to play the same defense roles the same way we always are in pick-and-roll. He's a very good passer so we will just try to limit his ability to pass to big guys and just play like always we do.

Q. Matas, what's your confidence level at right now considering what you've been able to do in the NCAA Tournament and the way you've been able to produce? Also, has your family been able to watch some of these games, and what's the time difference over there in Lithuania? Are they able to watch these games whenever you're playing?

MATAS VOKIETAITIS: So right now it's nine hours difference, so right now it's midnight almost. Talking about confidence, I mean, my confidence is always high. I'm ready to play, and we're ready to win tomorrow.

Q. Matas, you said last week in Portland that your goal is to be the best big man in the country, which Coach repeated and made sure we all heard. Is that something you two talked about this year going into the season, that you had the talent to do that?

MATAS VOKIETAITIS: I mean, I think everything starts from working hard, believing, and yeah, I always think I'm the best player on the court. I'm always coming with that

vision to the game. And when you're working hard, you're believing in what you're doing, and everything comes what you want.

Q. Do you have a favorite big man that you model your game after, someone in the NBA right now maybe, or is there someone who did something in college that you always really admired?

MATAS VOKIETAITIS: So obviously, the best player for me all time is Arvydas Sabonis, father of Domantas Sabonis. Right now who's playing in the NBA, I would say that would be Nikola Jokic or Alperen Sengun.

Q. For Dailyn and Tramon, playing against Braden Smith, he has one of the best eyes in the game. That's kind of what led him to this assist record. How do you go about defending a guy that's being able to make passes that maybe some people on the court can't see and he's able to thread the needle in ways that totally pick apart defenses?

TRAMON MARK: Yeah, he's a great passer, so you've just got to make it tough on him throughout the whole game, through a 40-minute game, make sure some of these passes are easy darts to his teammates for easy shots. Maybe you can get a hand on it, deflect it, something like that, but all of that requires effort. That's what we're going to do.

DAILYN SWAIN: I would say the same thing as Tramon, he's a really good passer, taking away those windows, putting longer guys on him, trying to get deflections.

Q. Matas, were you aware Sabonis played in Portland with the Blazers? Were you aware of that when you were playing there?

MATAS VOKIETAITIS: Yeah, I know he played here at Portland Trail Blazers. Special place because he played there, so maybe he gave some magic to play like that. I don't know.

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