

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

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SAP Center

**Purdue Boilermakers
Coach Matt Painter**

**Braden Smith
Fletcher Loyer**

Trey Kaufman-Renn

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference



Q. Fletcher and Braden, you guys came in with Cam Heide. This happens in March Madness all the time, you play guys you've played against before, but what's that like to play a recruit that you came in with?

BRADEN SMITH: I mean, yeah, obviously he was with us when we committed at Purdue, but this is my first time doing that. I don't know. Obviously he's chose a different path, and obviously we supported that and wanted what was best for him, and that's what he thought it was. It's just a basketball game.

FLETCHER LOYER: Yeah, a little interesting just because that's a guy that we lived with for two, three years. Spent a lot of time with him, put in a lot of work with him, but now it's the Sweet 16, so it's time to go and time to focus on that.

Q. Braden, I know so much was made about the assist record and I know you had told me before that you were wanting to get it over with. Now that that's been done, does it feel like almost a weight off your shoulders that you can forget about all the noise and focus strictly on the goal at hand of getting to the Final Four?

BRADEN SMITH: Yeah, a little bit. I think it's a mixture of both for sure. Like I said, I didn't come back for that. I came back to win. So to be in the position that we're in now and to continue to keep winning -- for us, I think obviously having that out of the way, it is nice, and just being able to focus on winning.

Q. Trey, Painter always describes you as a unique player. Has he ever given you any comps? Do you have any comps? What do you make of that word, "unique"?

TREY KAUFMAN-RENN: I don't really know. I just try to take a lot of things from different people's game and then do what it takes to win. I think that's kind of what I've tried to do. I've had a lot of different roles, I've done a lot of different things for the team throughout my years.

No, you know, I've always felt like that's kind of his job to place people in the right position. It's my job to exceed at that position. That's kind of how I've dealt with it and felt about it.

Q. Braden, I'd like to get what you make of Texas; they kind of limped into the tournament and lost five out of six, wasn't even sure they were going to be in. Now they've won three in a row. What do you think of their recent journey and what stands out about them?

BRADEN SMITH: It's impressive, obviously, when you're put in that position and the chances of you making that are low, and then they're here. It tells you a lot about them as a team and as a whole.

Obviously they're a very talented group. Obviously they've got a lot of guys in there that have played high-level basketball for a long time and continue to do so and are really good players, and we have that understanding.

For us, it's just focusing on that and having that understanding on that going in, okay, they're an 11 seed, rather than going in like, okay, these are a lot of older dudes who understand how to play basketball the right way and are a good team. So just really focusing on that.

Q. Trey, if you could be like anyone, who would you want it to be? If you could build your perfect basketball player, the height of Shaquille O'Neal with LeBron James' clutch gene, what would that be?

TREY KAUFMAN-RENN: Yeah, I actually used to play a game on the -- I think it was the GameCube with my uncles called NBA Hangtime, so I would have a player who was

7'6", he could shoot threes, he could just do everything.

But no, for me, I have no idea. Like I said, I just try to do what it takes to win, and each game is so different. We're playing a Texas team, which is very different than a Miami team. So, like, my role in each game is going to just be different.

I think I've just tried to -- I think what makes me unique is my ability to kind of change based on what is presented. If I'm playing against a bigger opponent, maybe I'm going to go do some more pick-and-rolls, for example. If it's a smaller opponent, maybe it's more post-ups.

I like to try to bend my game based on who we're playing.

Q. A bit of a fun question for you. I saw on Twitter last night on the Purdue men's basketball feed that you guys were playing Catan. What's been the backstory? Is that something you've been playing all season, and are there any characteristics from Catan that carry over to how you guys are as a team?

FLETCHER LOYER: Yeah, we actually did a Navy Seals thing where we slept in the locker room and trained all weekend, and we didn't have our phones, so we had to obviously find some time to do some other things. We brought a bunch of board games, and Catan was one that we played quite a bit, and Omer brought it this weekend.

But we've just got a great group of guys that like to spend time together, whether it's poker or Catan or other games, shooting pool, whatever it is. We've got guys that obviously like to spend time together and make jokes, and then when it's time to lock in for basketball, we're ready to go.

Q. For Trey and Braden, I'm wondering if you could ballpark estimate how many times you two have run pick-and-roll together in your college careers.

BRADEN SMITH: Probably over 1,000 for sure. I don't know, that's a good question. But a lot. I think it started sophomore year, summer?

TREY KAUFMAN-RENN: Yeah.

BRADEN SMITH: They would never put me and Zach on the same team like when we played pickup or in practice or anything, so it was normally Fletch and Z-Bo were the pair and then it was me and Trey and we would fill it from there. So I think it started there because Trey would play the 5 and guarded Zach and do that. Obviously, like Trey said, he's got to be unique and find different ways so when he's got a bigger guy, we've got to adjust. So that was kind of

our adjustment, and I think it started then.

But I don't know. That's honestly a really good question. I don't even know the number.

TREY KAUFMAN-RENN: Yeah, I mean, whatever. It feels like forever now. But yeah, just a lot of times over the years. It was always funny because early in my career the coaches always wanted me to roll hard to the basket. And then we played in summer, and I don't know, I was probably just tired, so I wouldn't roll as hard to the basket and we would get those short rolls and that's kind of where it started with the floaters and making reads out of that.

No, it just seems like yesterday and also feels like we've been doing it forever.

Q. For everyone, it was mentioned before that Texas was on a losing streak and now they look pretty hot, especially on the defensive end. Can you go through your specific roles in trying to break up whatever synergy a team has had, whether it's Texas or any other team that's coming off a hot streak, especially on the defensive end, how you go about breaking that up?

TREY KAUFMAN-RENN: Well, I think the important thing is just to recognize that they're a really good team. We had our streak for a little bit during the season where we were losing a couple games, and understanding that we're capable of becoming that team or we're capable of becoming, I think, the best team in the country.

Each team kind of has that. So the fact that they lost later in the season doesn't matter because this is the team that we're playing now.

With their team, they run a lot of different things, and they have a lot of unique players. I think for us, it's just about doing our job and communicating on defense.

FLETCHER LOYER: Yeah, I think not really focused on that at all because we've played a team like NC State in the Final Four that had to win five games in five days to even make the NCAA Tournament. Just focus on ourselves, making sure we're ready to go and recognizing the amount of talent and depth that they have, too, that they can beat anybody in the country.

Q. How have you seen the impact Oscar has made, especially late in the season? Seems like he's really picked up at the Big Ten Tournament and carried over?

BRADEN SMITH: It's been honestly really helpful just having him down there. Obviously just trying to limit him

from fouling is the biggest thing because we need him in the game.

I think he's done an unbelievable job just literally doing his job. We have meetings, team, player meetings at the beginning of the year just what each individual player wants to accomplish personal for the team, all that stuff, and his was just to be the best rebounder in the country.

He shows signs of that every single game. He really works hard towards that. Everybody has a role, and everybody has a certain task they've got to do, and that's one of his, is that and rebounding. For us to see that and him actually do that, which obviously we never doubted that, but for him to keep doing that for us, it gives us extra opportunities and puts us in positions to win.

Q. Braden, back when we were in St. Louis when we talked to Miami postgame, they mentioned they wanted to put a concerted effort to throw length at you and Shelton Henderson. What lessons did you take away from that game, and if you see it going forward, what adjustments are you going to make?

BRADEN SMITH: I think for me, every game there's length on me. I'm always the smallest on the floor. So for me, it doesn't change. It's not any different from playing Michigan in the final of the Big Ten where Yaxel is guarding me or Shelton is guarding me or whatever the case. It's always like that.

I thought they did an unbelievable job. I felt like I was kind of out of character and just not playing how I should, and obviously I was frustrated with myself because I've got to be better, especially in a game like that.

But no, just being simple and making the right reads I think is what I've got to do because obviously every team is going to put, I'd assume, their best defender and length-wise and all that. For me, it's just to make the right reads, make the smart plays, and keep it simple.

Q. Braden, I don't know if you had a point guard mentor or somebody you emulated, and I don't know if it would have been Sean Miller, who was a pretty decent point guard at Pitt in his career --

BRADEN SMITH: Yeah, no, obviously I'm aware of him and how good he was. Obviously recently I've seen a couple of his clips when he played, obviously, since we got this matchup. But for me, I'm a big Steph Curry guy. So I'll watch Steph Curry. I watch the game a lot. I take it from a lot of different players, whether that's a Jalen Brunson, a Payton Pritchard, a Shai -- I love Shai. Cade Cunningham, whoever it is. I watch a lot of different basketball. There's

really not one specific person that I watch. I take everything from the game of basketball itself.

Q. Braden, Steph is obviously known as a shooter. Do you think he's underrated as a passer? What have you learned in watching him as a passer?

BRADEN SMITH: Yeah, no, I mean, obviously you've got to take what the game gives you, and I feel like he does that every single night, and whether that's him to score the ball or him to pass when they put two people on him. I feel like more for Steph, it's more about his journey and his story is what I've looked up to, and then obviously how he carries himself as a person on and off the floor.

Obviously I'm super competitive, and I kind of lose it sometimes temper-wise just because I want to win, and these guys would tell you the same thing. I just watch him all the time, and Shai, are the two people I really admire with that because they're just so composed. They never are too high or too low, and sometimes I am. Sometimes I am too high and sometimes I am too low and just trying to find that balance. I think that's what I take most from him. But he's just my favorite player of all time, so that's just one of the things I enjoy.

MATT PAINTER: Hello, everyone. Obviously, like everybody else, excited to be in the Sweet 16. We had a tough game last game against Miami, Florida, and I think anytime you can get -- nobody wants to be in those kind of games, but if you can survive it, I think it's good for you as you move forward.

Just excited for our seniors, our players to be in this position. We know Texas is going to be a tough match. Very good across the board. Very athletic, very long, tough. Sean's teams always defend, rebound, and they're obviously playing their best basketball.

A little similar to us at the end of the year where we had some losses, they've had some losses, but I think you can magnify a lot of different things. They've played better here in the tournament. We've played better. We've both defended better than we did in those stretches, and I think that's what it's all about is, like, how you're playing right now and how you've got to be able to just to push forward.

But excited about the challenge. We know this is going to be a very, very difficult game.

Q. You mentioned both you guys are very similar, and the way the season ended versus how it was now. I'm curious because it's not like the NBA where there's trades happening that can change the roster, it's still relatively the same team. What changes to change the

complete tide and get on a hot streak when you've been struggling for a bit?

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, our losses that we had outside of Iowa State at home, we were really good offensively, and that really magnified the point that we weren't very good on the defensive end.

We've just made strides there, and anytime you can take care of the basketball and set your defense and take good shots, it's going to help your defense.

We've been doing that, and we still struggled defensively. In the Big Ten Tournament, being able to beat Nebraska, UCLA, Michigan, and then obviously getting that win against Miami Florida after our victory against Queens, we've just been better defensively. It's not like it's been off the charts or anything, but if you look at it from a numbers standpoint, we haven't had as many breakdowns, we've been better on the basketball. We have to have a presence on the basketball, whether that's in the post, whether that's on the perimeter, and we've just been better.

We have a lot of experience. We have a lot of experience together. It was just unfortunate, but it could also end up being fortunate, if you look at the silver lining, if that made us be a better team and play better at this point, then so be it.

Q. There was a time when you were on everybody's list as the best coach not to make a Final Four. We've got a couple of guys here in Sean and Tommy who are on that short list. How big of a burden was that for you, the need to take that final step, and how much different did life get once you took that step?

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, I didn't look at it as a burden personally. I looked at it as a burden towards Purdue. I didn't like it. If you're in the position as a head coach at a high major school and it bothers you when people say stuff, you're going to be in a tailspin for a while. But I didn't like them saying it about my school. That affects you.

But it wasn't like we weren't doing everything in our power to try to win games. We had some really tough losses where we fought like hell to be in great positions in the NCAA Tournament, and we've lost games.

We've also been able to win some of those games. I think when you get to that point, everybody is just trying to help their team, but more than anything for us, we're just trying to help our seniors.

We have three seniors that have been together in their careers and they've tied for the all-time winningest players

in school history. If they get one more win in the NCAA Tournament, it's the most wins ever by a group in the NCAA Tournament by a group.

Those are the type of things that you want. We're not in position to go to the Final Four right now. We have to beat Texas to be in that position --

Q. (Indiscernible.)

MATT PAINTER: Not really. I'm not worried about my validation. I'm just worried about coaching guys and helping them and winning for Purdue.

Q. I was just teasing Braden if he emulated Sean Miller as a point guard, and he said, yeah, I watched some recent clips of him. Is that the extensiveness of y'all's scouting, that you're looking back at the coach's playing career?

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, he could be lying to you. He's a good dude, but you could have shocked him. I heard it back there. I wasn't sure.

Yeah, when they asked him when he was passing those guys, when they asked him to talk about Chris Corchiani from NC State and Ed Cota from North Carolina, he knew Bobby Hurley, but he didn't know Ed Cota and Chris Corchiani. And I was like, those dudes were really good. But that was in my wheelhouse, not his. You just don't know -- if guys don't go and just have great NBA careers, these guys weren't alive. So they don't know.

So it was interesting, the thing that I thought was really cool about it was when you have an assist record like he's had, like he has, excuse me, you can't do it on your own. Someone has got to score the ball.

So if you think like Rodney Monroe at NC State with Corchiani, if you think of all the greats at North Carolina and at Duke that those two guys played with, it just kind of shows you that it's pretty cool for us because he doesn't get -- Braden doesn't get the award without Zach Edey, Trey Kaufman-Renn, Fletcher Loyer, and all those guys. So that's what makes the thing pretty cool. It brings out the greatness of other people that he's passed.

Q. Do you do like the last ten games, the last three tournament games, or every game?

MATT PAINTER: We throw it all out there. You try to go on the season. You talk a little bit about their career especially with the portal because that gets a little dicey because you'll see somebody averaging seven points who averaged 22 the year before at a mid major school, and



you're like, hey, man, he scored 37 against these people, and you're like, well, he hasn't scored in double figures in three weeks. You're like, well, it only takes one game to get beat.

We talk away neutral, we talk last five. We don't go as much at them with it but from a coaching standpoint and an analytics standpoint, especially someone's ability to shoot, you want to know -- even though their overall numbers might not be great, you want to know how well they shot -- how well have they shot free throws is important too, last five minutes, things of that nature.

Q. Matt, when we were all asking Braden different questions and he was talking a little bit about his favorite players, Steph and Shai, and said he really admires their composure and sometimes he is not composed, he lets his temper get the best of him, what has that evolution been like over the course of his career, and how have you seen him grow in that, and how much does that play a role in him being such a good competitor?

MATT PAINTER: Right, yeah, he's very competitive. I think you saw that a couple games ago when he ripped his jersey off and had to play -- just over missing open shots. That's all it was over.

But you would think in game 135 or whatever it is that you would get there. I don't think he's ever going to be that. But that's what makes him good.

Sometimes there's nothing wrong with playing through your passion, but when you're emotional, man, you have to learn to move to the next play. He still has struggles with that. He still will be mad he turned it over and then he'll have a breakdown defensively or vice versa where you've just got to move to the next play and keep playing, especially -- he has to be accountable. He has the ball in his hands at all times.

Q. I asked Braden and Trey about how many thousand times they've played pick-and-roll together. What's it been like for you watching them and really all three of the guys just learn to play together so well for as long as they have?

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, well, Braden and Trey, they have -- especially with the short roll, they have a really good feel. Our assistant, P.J. Thompson, has done a really good job offensively of setting things up, depending on how people are guarding it, to get the ball in there. I always call it the decision that leads to the decision. So if you have a great decision-maker passing it and a great decision-maker catching it, now he's got to be able to make that play.

It's very unique because he doesn't shoot jump shots, he shoots that push shot that he has. But if you come too strong on that, he'll make that pass for that three right there.

All those guys have really evolved. Fletch has really worked from a physical standpoint to help his cause, putting in a lot of time, and to have the all-time leading assist leader with someone unique like Trey Kaufman and the guy who's hit the most threes in school history and then just watch them grow together has been pretty cool.

Q. When did Oscar Cluff first get on your radar, and what sort of impact has he made on you late in the year?

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, it was a different recruitment. His college coach and his junior college coach ran his recruitment, so that was a little bit different. So they called us in February. His college coach called us in February to one of my assistants and said he was definitely going to leave and he wanted a place that -- you know, from a low post standpoint, but he wanted to go somewhere where they needed him. So we played TK as a undersized 5 the year before, and we didn't have the rim protection and the overall rebound position even though we did get to the Sweet 16.

So it was just a perfect fit for us. But he's been great. He's been great. He works hard. He does a lot of dirty work for us, can rebound the ball, can pass the ball. That's something I didn't know how good of a passer he was.

But very unselfish player.

Q. Matt, you and Sean have been doing this for a long time, but how have you seen him reinvent himself from his time at Xavier, Arizona, back to it, and now at Texas compared to you at predominantly one spot?

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, this is the third place that we've played him. We played him when he was at Xavier, man, a long time ago, 15, 17 years ago. I think we played them twice and they beat us, if that's right.

We played him in the Bahamas, if I've got that right, in one of the best seventh-place games in the history of basketball. They were good, but they were No. 2 in the country, and they lost all three games in the Bahamas. So we lost our first two.

We beat them pretty good in that magical seventh-place game. Then we won 19 straight after that, and they won a bunch. They won like 15 out of 16. Sometimes those

things, even though you don't like going through them, they can really help you.

But no, he's a great coach. You know what you're going to get from one of his teams. You know you're going to earn your victory if you can get there because they're going to play hard, they're going to play together, they're going to play tough.

And I think sometimes doing it on the quick turnaround like he's had to do it is a little bit more difficult, right, because now you're taking on a new job once again. So he did it at Xavier, now he did it again at Texas. Now you're trying to feel your team out.

When you get to the end of the season, you want to be playing your best basketball, but you also want to be in a good position. It's a hard thing to do, but he's done a masterful job here, to be where they are and to be able to be playing.

But they have a good team, and now they're collectively playing well together. They're defending, they're fighting, they're scrapping, but they can make individual plays, and he's always done a good job of getting his best guys to play to their strengths.

Q. Braden has obviously seen a ton of length this year on him. Just from the way he operates when we were in St. Louis, Jay mentioned that having a guy like Shelton Henderson on him was kind of a conscious choice. What kind of lessons did you learn as a coach when you see a guy like Shelton Henderson guard Braden Smith and what you may ultimately see if an athlete of that type of caliber is on Braden the rest of the way?

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, we've played a tough schedule in Braden's four years. It doesn't mean he's not in a position where he could struggle with something like he did the other day, he had eight turnovers. But he's seen it. There was nothing Miami did that he hasn't seen before. That's what I always talk about. It's like relearning something or watching a movie again, and you just don't quite remember how it ended. You have to relearn things in the game of basketball.

You know they're going to put great quickness, great athleticism, great length on him. The key is kind of watching them and how they do things, but then also realize that they could change, too, so like the change isn't the biggest thing in the world, it's the adjustment to that change. Braden does a great job making those adjustments and understanding that with it.

But no matter who they put on him, they're going to put size, athleticism, length on him, which most people try to do.

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