

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

Saturday, March 28, 2026

San Jose, California, USA

SAP Center

## Purdue Boilermakers

## Coach Matt Painter

## Trey Kaufman-Renn

## Braden Smith

## Fletcher Loyer

### Elite 8 Postgame Media Conference

Arizona 79, Purdue 64

THE MODERATOR: Coach, would you like to give an opening statement?

MATT PAINTER: Congrats to Arizona. I thought they played a great second half. Really proud of these three guys sitting right here and everything they've done for our program. Really set a standard of how to go about their business. It's going to be hard to emulate that. In today's game, having three guys come and stick it out and fight through adversity and keep making our program better.

They got the most wins in school history. They got the most tournament wins in school history. They got two Big Ten Championships. They got two Big Ten Tournament titles. You know, they showed up every day and worked.

That's what you want. A lot of people look at it like, it can't keep happening, but in today's landscape, but these guys proved that it can. All three of them will get their degrees from Purdue University, which means something. With the rules and how everything is, it's diminishing education. It's one of the dumbest things I've ever heard in my life, because all of this is taking opportunities in education and helped our lives and helped our families.

You can have it all. When you have the character that these guys have and the skill that these guys have, you can have it all. You can get a great education. You can treat people right. You can have a great basketball career. You can become a pro. I think these guys are great role



models for young people out there to understand the big picture of things.

There is balance. You don't have to look at one thing. You don't have to look at money or education or basketball. You got to look at the whole picture. And why not have it all? Because these guys have. And the standard they set for our program, it's going to be tough to match.

But that's what we're going to try to find. We're going to try to find guys like this that have character, that are wired to be successful.

Really hats off to their parents because they did the work. Braden Smith didn't come to our campus and we taught him how to pass. He knew how to pass. But he knew how to handle himself, go about his business. Trey Kaufman-Renn, same thing. Fletcher Loyer, same thing. You got to look at the people that raised them. You got to look at the people around them, and that's what success is all about. Now we get the fruits of those people's labor.

Just like we appreciate them, we appreciate their parents, their coaches in high school, and all the people that have helped them.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for student-athletes, please.

**Q. Braden, I know we don't want to make excuses, but when you went down, do you feel like your game was the same as it was previously in the first half?**

BRADEN SMITH: No, I thought shots weren't falling. I thought I took some good shots and maybe had a couple where I thought they were a little forced, but I mean, other than that, it's just me. I was fine. Just a little scared for a second, and then I was good. But, yeah, no, I don't think it was really anything other than that.

**Q. All three gentlemen, speak to what it means to be at a university and play four more years and what that means to build a program, build camaraderie, build friendships, build a team and to why that is so important rather than how many people have left after one, two, or three years.**



BRADEN SMITH: Yeah, I think for me it's what you want as a competitor and as an athlete is a group of dudes who enjoy being around each other, enjoy the game of basketball, and just want to win and also work really hard doing that.

So I think obviously you don't find that everywhere. I'm glad I was able to get the opportunity to even come to Purdue, because it was kind of a last-minute thing. I'm not even really supposed to be here, so for me just to be in a position and have an opportunity to play alongside people who enjoy the game just as much as I do and just want to win. I think it just makes it a no-brainer to not want to be a part of something like that.

TREY KAUFMAN-RENN: Yeah, to be honest, I really don't have anything to add to that. It's just I'm grateful for the opportunity.

FLETCHER LOYER: Yeah, I think it's just the lessons I've learned from obviously our freshman year where we win a Big Ten Tournament, win a Big Ten regular season, and get a 1 seed and fail and lose to a 16 seed. You got to experience failure.

You see these guys at their highest, and you get to see them as their lowest, and how a group of coaches and staff can overcome adversity and continue to trust guys that failed, continue to put confidence into two young kids, three young guys that don't know where they're at. They pushed us to continue getting better and showed us who we are.

Then you get a Final Four, national championship, and you're at your highest. Then you lose that, and what are you going to do? Are you going to quit? I think just seeing a group of guys, a staff, that just continues to push through adversity and not quit on one another is just a great lesson that I've learned in four years.

**Q. To hear Painter talk about what he just said that in this day and age you really can have it all -- grades, basketball, character, all that -- how does that feel to hear your coach talk about that, about what y'all have done for Purdue and put it on the map in a bunch of different ways?**

BRADEN SMITH: I think that's the reason we chose to come here, because he talked to me, at least on Zoom, and he kind of laid it out and told me, well, if you're good enough and you work hard, then you'll play. It's that type of thing.

He was just honest and truthful from the beginning. So I think as a player, when you see that and you recognize that, that's what you want. Because you don't get that

everywhere. You hear a lot of stories. You see a lot of things pop up of people telling you things at other places, and you just don't get that here.

I think for me it was just, you know, no-brainer. And obviously you want to be a part of a program where their coach is honest and truthful. Obviously Fletch talked about it. He threw us in a fire a little bit and stuck with us.

TREY KAUFMAN-RENN: Yeah, I think, like he said, being able to get great education, being able to play winning basketball. You know, as a 19-, 20-, 21-, 22-, 23-year-old, that's all you can ask for.

Again, I'm excited to be part of it.

FLETCHER LOYER: Yeah, I think just the decision to come to Purdue obviously is going to turn out to be the best decision I've ever made to come play with these guys, to come play for Coach Painter and to attend Purdue University. It's a special place, and I'm glad I did it.

**Q. Braden, at the last 20 seconds or so you were dribbling the ball up, and obviously the game was decided. I saw you looking at Coach about, I'm guessing, whether you should dribble out the clock or make a pass. Were you surprised? Did you take any satisfaction in getting one more assist to add to your ledger?**

BRADEN SMITH: No, that's not my mindset. I was going to dribble it out, and Paint said go, go play. I'm just making a read like I did all night. Just left it at that.

**Q. Braden, can you sort of articulate what -- you guys have played such a good schedule. What distinguishes Arizona? What allowed them to create separation the way they did in the second half, particularly their guards? I'm curious your perspective on that.**

BRADEN SMITH: No, they're obviously very talented. They're the No. 3 defensive team in the country. They rebound at a high, high level. I think that's kind of where they got us. We would make a couple of plays, get a couple of blocks and then got it right back and were able to score. Obviously we didn't make as much shots as we did in the first half in the second half. Then obviously those add up.

I felt like we had a couple of turnovers here and there, and then obviously missed shots. Then we weren't able to get a couple of on stops.

No, obviously credit to Arizona. They're an unbelievable

team. Obviously we wanted to compete with them and make a little bit closer there at the end, but no, hats off to them, and congrats to them.

**Q. Fletcher, and then anyone else who wants to chime in, what was the most fulfilling part about going to battle with the guys next to you?**

FLETCHER LOYER: Yeah, obviously we won a lot of games, but I learned so much with these guys. I've seen Braden have bad games. I've seen him have bad weeks, have bad days, but I've seen Trey have bad weeks, bad days, but every single day they showed up with a smile on their face, ready to work hard, ready to push me to be my best and push the rest of the guys on our team to be their best.

I've learned so much from them, and happy I got to play with them.

**Q. (Off microphone)?**

TREY KAUFMAN-RENN: I think being able to play for four years and develop that relationship over time and us being able to learn and grow our games together. Again, it's something special at this moment of college basketball to have that.

Like I said, I wouldn't change anything for that experience.

**Q. Braden, I'll ask you specifically, and then if Fletcher and Trey, you could chime in. When you were in the locker room, I know obviously it's disappointing, career is ending. Do you think about the high times, the good times, the best times that you've had at Purdue and which two or three things right now stand out about your career?**

BRADEN SMITH: No, I mean, I think it's just being around these guys. I think that's just kind of where my mind went. I wasn't really focusing on it. The season is over. We lost. I was just trying to enjoy that moment with guys that I've battled with for four years and guys for one and two years.

I think for me I was just trying to enjoy that. I don't really think -- I mean, there are so many moments in our four years that have been so special, and I can't really put them all in order, but I think just for me it was to try to enjoy that with these guys one last time.

Obviously it's a sad moment, and we don't want it to end, but at the end of the day, you're with a group of dudes who enjoyed being around each other, like always hung out off the court. Just did things like that. I've never had an issue with anybody in my four years, and I think that's pretty rare

too. I never disliked anybody on the team. I've never not wanted to talk to people on the team. I enjoyed every single person.

I think for me it was just trying to enjoy that, especially with the younger guys, because I wasn't around them as long as I have with these guys, but you know, I think that was just where my mind was.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for your time. We'll go ahead now and open up the floor for Coach.

**Q. Matt, these three obviously have done so much for you, but there's always talk about what they've done for you as a coach, but what have they done for you as a person?**

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, obviously, you know, you've got to get obviously good players, but you got to get good people too. You got to get that balance. That balance is so important.

But, no, they've been great. You know, when your best guys put in time and they care and they sacrifice, it makes your job a lot easier. A lot easier. We're also from an evaluation standpoint those things matter to us.

Sometimes you can get really, really talented teams, but you want to enjoy going into work. It's a little selfish, to be honest with you, as a coach, but I always say that. It's, like, hey, I want to enjoy this too. I just don't want to get the most talented guys and then don't care about their makeup. Their makeup is really important.

Also, the selfish part is the better their makeup is, as long as they're good enough, it's going to help you win because obviously you want to keep your job. I want to stay at Purdue. But they've been magnificent. Those guys have sacrificed a lot. They've put in a lot of time. Each year they always tried to do a little bit more. What can I do to help? What can I do?

The fact -- you've got to have a players-led team. You just do. If things are changing all the time, that's pretty hard to do. So we're very fortunate that these guys stayed loyal and stuck with it.

**Q. Coach, you guys had the seven-point lead at halftime, and they eventually end up making a 25-point turnaround. What did you see as when things were starting to change and the momentum shifted?**

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, their ability to get the ball. They'll wear you down. Their ability to get the ball in the paint. Whether that's getting an offensive rebound, whether that's

driving the basketball. So if you look how they play, they don't shoot and really make a lot of threes, but their ability to get by you, their ability -- they have such good positional size and quickness.

Like Awaka is very quick and strong to play the center. Koa Peat is very quick and strong with ball skills to play the four. Bradley and Burries are as good as anybody in the country in terms of their back court, in terms of being able to shoot the basketball, drive the basketball, play-make.

They get in transition and they kill you. They get on the glass and kill you. If you would have told me that they would have outrebounded us by one and we would have four more offensive rebounds, I would take that any day of the week against those days. Any day of the week.

We turned the ball over five more times than them. We beat Michigan a couple of weeks ago. We turned ball over twice in that game. We talked about that, the simple plays.

We had a handful of plays that weren't simple, and we had to do a better job there. So when you get that snowball, we miss our free-throws, they don't. We had some positive things to start the half.

We got a seam drive that Trey Kaufman always scores on, and he just stumbles. It's not his fault, right? He stumbles, and then he gets his third. And we get to the free-throw line, and we miss a couple. And then split a couple. At the end of the game, they shot 90% from the line. How are you going to get back with that? Just a combination of all those things.

But they have a great team. We put ourselves in a position to win the game obviously at halftime, and that's what hurts the most because sometimes when you get against those great teams, you don't even get in position. You got to get yourself in position.

In the first five to eight minutes of the Michigan game, we were dynamite. Excuse me. The start of the second half. We were good. Score was tied. We were really, really good, and we set that tone. On this game they set the tone.

**Q. To the point about Koa Peat, in the first half he really kept them in it. You guys stepped off him, tried to force him to shoot, but he can just take the ball to the rim like a guard. In the second half he got some put-backs. What's it like to play against him? Is it even more intense than it looks on film?**

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, he's a good player. Those two pull-ups he hit in the start of the second half were tough

shots. You would rather him have that than him getting all the way to the rim because, you know, he's just so physically strong, and he's long, and he's got good ball skills. You would rather him shoot pull-ups than get all the way to the rim.

I thought he was fantastic the whole game. Doesn't turn the basketball over. 20 points, takes 18 shots to get to 20 points, 7 rebounds. You know, he's a great player. He's a great player.

**Q. I was asking Braden specifically about that last 20 seconds, and you told him to keep playing.**

MATT PAINTER: Yeah.

**Q. More generally what Braden has meant to you, how good of a player he is, how good of a competitor he is.**

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, great player. At the end of the game, it's nothing you can look at it ironic, but he gets one more assist and Fletch gets one more three. For the guys, the all-time assist leader at Purdue history and the guy is the all-time three-point make leader in Purdue history.

He's been fabulous, man. He's been great. He didn't play. He broke his foot twice as a senior in high school, so he didn't play in the summer with us. Right as the fall started and we started to practice and compete and everything, just right away his teams win. He made a huge difference right away.

To be able to not worry about that position for four years, it's a tough position. If you have a great point and have you a great center, that's a great place to start, right? Because what is your usage? Your usage is very high for your point guard. Like Arizona, like look at Arizona. Jaden Bradley is a hell of a player. He's a big-time player. He has the ball in his hands. They're not winning it all if he's not at the top of it. They're just not.

I think they're going to have a chance, because he's a damn good player. Braden was that way for us for four years. Very, very consistent. Very competitive. Good guy.

Honored to coach him. Honored to coach him.

**Q. Arizona had 15 three-point attempts today. They lead the NCAAs in games played with less than 16 three-point attempts. From your perspective, what is so effective about approaching the game in that way?**

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, well, it's you're playing to your strengths. When you look at there are guys that we return really good shooters, like Burries is a really good shooter, if

you look at his volume and percentage, Dell'Orso falls into there. You have to go to Dell'Orso's 40 minutes because he doesn't play as much as those other guys. He averaged 20 at Campbell two years ago. He's been consistent.

Those were the two guys that we didn't want to leave, and they make all five of their threes, right? Easier said than done.

Really hard when you are trying to stop the ball in transition, and they find Brayden Burries for a three. That's hard. You're trying to load up. Here comes one of the Mack trucks coming down the lane. Jaden Bradley has the ball, who is faster than hell.

It's easier said than done. Sometimes people want to talk in theory about what's going on and say, hey, but they're playing to their strengths. He can change on a dime when his team changes because, you know, maybe his next team is a better three-point shooting team, but it doesn't matter. There's nothing in the manual that says you got to play a certain way.

So in recruiting people talk about it all the time. You want to come here, you want to play this way, you want to do this. All coaches are going to play to the strengths of their team.

When you can sub Awaka and bring him in, like, he's not a sub. You know what I mean? He's a stud, man. We played him when he was at Tennessee. He's a good player.

I thought Krivas, he didn't score a lot. I thought he was really good. He just causes problems, right? They just have that elite size. When you have that elite size and then you have quickness, that's that positional quickness that I was talking about, because Kharchenkov, he can drive that basketball. Koa Peat can drive that basketball. That's their three and their four.

Now you get the two electric guards together, now you're in that paint and helping. Now you can get flip-up lobs and dunk-ins right there. Now you're one of the best rebounding teams in the country.

When you offensive rebound, you get fouled. You get -- period. When you got quick guards that can beat you, you get fouled. Go look at their free-throws. Like, this is the fewest amount of free-throws they've shot in a game in the NCAA Tournament so far.

They've just lived in the paint, just lived in there. That was our concern. That was our concern. Keep the ball in front

of us, try to stay out of rotation, stay home, but if we don't go and double the post some or whatever, they're going to foul us out. They just are.

We handled Michigan the same way, because they have that elite size. Hats off to them. Sometimes people don't understand those great teams, they just cause different problems.

**Q. A question for you, Coach. Just speak to the battle, the fight, the game that Oscar Cluff had. It seemed like he was battling and holding his own with 14 points and 10 rebounds and doing all he could to keep Koa Peat and Krivas off the boards and doing the best he could to maintain down low.**

MATT PAINTER: He was great for us. He gave us what we needed. Second in the nation in rebounding last year at South Dakota State. Great attitude. Tough dude. He fit in. He fit. We brought those three seniors. They came back. C.J. Cox is a really good -- had a really good sophomore year.

But O.C. was fabulous for us. Man, he'll compete. He'll foul you about 15 times in a game, too. He's going to lay it on the line. He's going to hit. If they're allowing him to play -- I don't know how they pick out fouls in those games, like how they let something go and let just the consistency, because if they called everything, everybody would foul out.

He loves games like that. He loves the physicality of the game. He loves the play. He's been great for us. Good dude to be around.

**Q. As you walked off the floor at the end of the first half, you talked to Daniel Jacobsen. Seemed to be smiling. Was it more of an encouraging thing, what you were trying to build his confidence a little bit, or kind of walk me through what were you trying to relay to him?**

MATT PAINTER: I thought it was real quick. Sometimes during a game I didn't do a good job of prepping him to play along Oscar, because we haven't done that a lot. I just thought, right, as -- sometimes you see guys. Yaxel Lendeborg was this way. Keaton Wagler was this way. You haven't been face-to-face with them, you just watch them on film, and then you get there and you're like, man, you're a lot bigger, taller, longer.

I've been around big people before. They jumped out to me that way. Just, man, Krivas just looked -- Koa Peat looked so much bigger than our other guys, and hear how durable he is and how athletic he is with the basketball. I

felt like we had to have the two bigs in there, and he got that block.

When we do stuff and run things, they have to coexist. That's what I was talking to him about. I thought he did a really good job of helping us there in a pinch. I just was, like, trying to encourage him to -- when you don't know, don't fake it.

That's not his fault he doesn't know, because he wasn't in the position that he was playing, so we run out-of-bounds play or run a side out-of-bounds play or run a set, now it's pretty difficult, because he's not in front of us, right, in the first set and falls down at the other end.

I was just trying to -- it's been hard for him. Him not playing as much this year, as much as down the stretch, we just felt we had to get TK as the five. We just felt like when we get in that stretch and he gets it rolling, that's really hard on those other teams. So he's going to have a great, great career.

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