

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship - Final Four: NC State vs Purdue

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State Farm Stadium

Purdue Boilermakers Coach Matt Painter Fletcher Loyer

Semifinals Pregame Media Conference



THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Purdue head coach Matt Painter. We'll ask Coach to give us some thoughts on the day so far, then take questions.

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, we're obviously just working towards getting ready for our game tomorrow. It was a joy to practice yesterday here. Always attended events, always around, always went to games at the Final Four. To be able to be actually one of the teams out there practicing and doing things, today is going to be a cool day with all the fans here. To be able to go out there, really just have fun.

You're going through the same routine that you would if there's no fans out there. I always thought it was cool because there's some fans that can't afford to go to the game or can't get a ticket to the game, and this is their game.

I know there will be a lot of Purdue people in the stands that are going to the game, but still they get the opportunity of being here a day early. We're excited about it.

THE MODERATOR: If you have a question for Coach Painter...

Q. Zach Edey was here to get his second straight AP Player of the Year award. We don't see a lot of times happen what just happened. You and your team was here to support Zach. It seems like you guys are loose enough to be doing that, come here and see this sort of thing. Why do you think that was important?

MATT PAINTER: I think obviously he's our pillar, the guy we work around in what we do. But it's not something from an attention-seeking that I think he likes. He's gotten more

comfortable answering questions and getting that kind of attention. At the end of the day, he just wants it to be a team game. He wants the attention to go to everybody.

He does a great job of facilitating that, being humble. That's refreshing. Who doesn't want to play with a great player but also a great player that's unselfish and humble like he is?

He's learned to take some things in stride and understand it's his value but it's also the value of our team.

Q. After NC State's game against Duke, DJ Burns said he wasn't worried about being physical under the post with Kyle Filipowski because he knew Kyle would be worried about taking fouls. When you have two big men going against each other, how do you navigate that fine line between being aggressive and not getting into foul trouble?

MATT PAINTER: That's a really good question 'cause that's a big piece of the game for size because they deal with fouls a little bit differently, especially somebody like DJ Burns who seeks out that contact, and rightfully so. He does a great job of getting that feel for that contact, then he knows which way to go or which way to maneuver.

Both of those guys are great because they can score over either shoulder, hurt you in a lot of different ways, but they're both really unselfish.

If you want to take away their scoring ability, they're great passers and they can get the ball out of their hands.

I think that's a little different matchup with Kyle Filipowski, who is a fabulous player. I look at him as really like a four man. You can even kind of say he's that hybrid four, that 3-4 type guy. You see guys like him play at five a lot because coaches are trying to get their best players on the floor. If they think their guards are better, they stretch it out and put him at the five and do different things.

With Zach, obviously he is a five. He's closer to a six than he is a four. So I think that matchup is going to be a great matchup. More than anything, it's trying to be physical

without fouling. It's something we talk about a lot. Sometimes we're good at it, sometimes we're not.

I think everybody kind of struggles with that. But at the end of the day it's making people earn their points and stay in the game. That's something that he wants to do, DJ Burns wants to do, and Zach. Also that other team is trying to attack you. You kind of got to manage that as a coach, especially if you get that one foul. Obviously if you get that second foul in the first half.

Q. The names that were rattled off for winning this award, separate the NBA part here, just college basketball, when you hear Ralph Sampson, Jerry Lucas, Kareem, Bill Walton, Pete Maravich, I'm including Robertson here, it's an unbelievable list. A Hall-of-Fame list. Where do you put Zach Edey in the college basketball historical perspective after what he has just accomplished the last two years?

MATT PAINTER: I think just that consistency of being able to be a national Player of the Year for two years in back-to-back year is very impressive. With that being said, like if you go back to Jerry Lucas, his Ohio State games, Lew Alcindor at UCLA, Ralph Sampson at Virginia, you're talking about a lot of success. Those guys just didn't have gaudy numbers, their teams won a lot of games.

When you look at Zach, he's in that same boat when it comes to individual success and team success. It's a little surreal, too. Like, when we've talked about it, when he'll pass certain guys, the scoring in the Big Ten or the rebounding in the Big Ten, he's going by Cazzie Russell, Walt Bellamy. And you know he doesn't know who the hell Cazzie Russell and Walt Bellamy are, and these guys are just legends and great players, but it's 40 years ago, 50 years ago. So much time has went by.

Jerry Lucas could arguably be the best Big Ten player ever from a career standpoint. If you look at how many rebounds he averaged, how many points he averaged. They were in Final Fours. I think they won a national championship if I'm not mistaken. It was 10 years before I was born.

He had unbelievable numbers across the board. So when you see some of those comparisons, go look at David Robinson's numbers, Shaquille O'Neal's numbers. He's right there with both of those guys. He didn't have as many blocks as those guys did, but the rebounds and points are eerie in terms of how similar they are.

Q. The difference also with him is he was not hyped coming out of high school, didn't have all those accolades. What does that say about Zach, that he

had to go on this learning curve to get to this elite status?

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, that group of guys, he's the outlier, there's no question about that, because from Lew Alcindor to Jerry Lucas, Elvin Hayes has been in a lot of these discussions, Ralph Sampson, all of those guys coming out of high school were the best player in the country, then they ended up being the best player in college, then great NBA careers.

It says a lot about him, about his development. Obviously he has elite size. He's really improved his lateral movement, his mobility overall. Rebounds out of his area. Can change the ends, play ball screen defense, which is so important. He's a great passer now. A couple of those areas that I said positive things about, he just wasn't there four years ago. So now that improvement and that development, you really got to give credit to him, give credit to his teammates.

Brandon Brantley, one of our assistants, has put in a lot of time with him, watching video, working on things, just being fundamentally sound. Kudos to him. He doesn't have a wall. You're the best player in the country when you're 14, you recruit them when they're 18 or 19, like you feel pretty good about yourself, right? He just doesn't have that element to him. He just takes things in. We communicate and kind of collaborate, then we just kind of go from there.

It's pretty refreshing.

Q. I think the last game in Detroit was your worst shooting night of the season. Leaving there, what was the feeling of what a weapon to have rebounding versus not having the worst shooting night in a regional finals?

MATT PAINTER: Well, it's what I said after the Gonzaga game, is after we made a lot of shots, who are we if we miss those shots. Can we still grind that game out and beat Gonzaga. It's very hypothetical, but then the next night that happened.

Our dominance on the glass, Zach's dominance inside. They want to limit our threes, and they did. We were 3-15. Even though Lance made a big one there at the end of the game. I think that's the balance that we search. We search Zach getting the basketball, Braden Smith playing through ball screen action, but having that balance of getting to nine, 10, 11, 12 threes to go along with Zach posting up and scoring the basketball.

If you don't get it, how are you going to offset that. I think we offset that through getting some key stops late in the



game and the rebounding.

Q. When you look at past Final Fours, the shooting numbers, are you even planning on potentially crashing harder? How do you see that as a weapon?

MATT PAINTER: I think we're a great offensive rebounding team, so our problem is if we turn the ball over. I don't think our problem is if we miss shots as much. Even though we're obviously not trying to miss shots, right? That's where we've gotten into our issues.

I think we're 27-0 with 13 turnovers or less. I think we're 6-4 with 14 to 17 turnovers. 17 is the most we've gotten this year. When we get into there, we can still win those games. When we've had 13 turnovers or less, even when we struggle shooting the basketball, we've been successful.

They're a little bit tighter, more of a grinder-type game, but we've been successful there.

Q. Lance has been sort of viewed as the missing piece, the biggest difference personnel-wise from last year. What did you like from him when he was in the portal? What has he brought to the table this season?

MATT PAINTER: We felt that we needed a combination of some athleticism, some quickness, a guy that can make a shot, and somebody that can guard. He's been able to give us all those elements.

The thing that you don't know is just how they are, kind of their makeup. Even though you trying to figure it out. He's got a great personality about him, a good way about him. He competes, but he's got a smile on his face. He's a joy to be around.

He had a good college coach in Bryan Mullins at Southern Illinois. He had a really good high school coach in Mike Ellis. I coached one of Mike Ellis' other guys who knew how to defend, knew what was going on defensively when he came here. You knew you had that.

That's kind of the way of the world right now, the landscape. We got the fruits of their labor. We are very fortunate to be able to get somebody that was a quality player that could step right in. Now we were just kind of piecing the puzzle. Other programs, I think that's a much harder thing. It's a tip of the cap to NC State because all of their guys, most of 'em, have come from other places. Coach Keatts has done a great job of piecing that puzzle together.

It took them a little bit longer, but that's what I've told our

team. That's that 9-0 team. They were 17-14 at one time. That team is gone. Their team is 9-0. But that takes a little bit of time when you're piecing everything together and you got five, six guys that have been there a year or been there a week or two years, versus Zach Edey has been there four years, Braden and Fletch are morphing into their sophomore year, Mason Gillis is in his fifth year, Trey Kaufman is in his third year. You can go right down the thing for us. We have an international trip.

I think that was good for Lance, being able to go on that trip, play with our guys, get a feel for things.

Q. We've seen this resurgence in the big man in college basketball. The NBA has gone the other direction. How do you see those two styles of play evolving in the future? Do you think it continues in college or does it morph in the NBA?

MATT PAINTER: That's a good question. I think it could go either way. I think it would definitely be more in the NBA if the best player is Shaquille O'Neal. You have to have a couple guys on every roster to guard him. If you have more players like him, that's the best player in the whole league, which he was for eight to ten years, he was dominant. His career was longer than that, but you would be safe to be able to say that.

When the best guy or you have a couple guys like it, just think David Robinson, Hakeem Olajuwon, Shaquille O'Neal, down the line, Patrick Ewing. There were a lot of great centers through that era.

If that happened again, even though the game has evolved, it would shift because they're the best players. Doesn't mean there's not good guards and forwards in the NBA because there's a bunch of them.

I think that would really change some things coming on. Yao Ming, can he go and do some things and be able to play like that, or if he was coming at that time. Like, I don't understand that piece of it because the only thing I've ever tried to do on our level, which is much different than the professional level, is just circle things around our best players, right? That's what we do.

Who brings value to Zach and how does Zach bring value to you? We try to talk about that. If you can make a shot, not turn the ball over, you can feed the post, you're gold for us because that makes you better and that makes him better.

It's an interesting question. I don't know if you can give a straight answer to that. I know that would upset the apple cart if someone was that dominant like a Tim Duncan or a

Shaquille O'Neal.

Q. The college athlete experience is probably a little bit different now than when you played with questions about employment, revenue sharing, NIL. The term 'student-athlete', does that feel outdated to you?

MATT PAINTER: That's a fabulous question, first of all.

I wouldn't say it's outdated. I just think they have to have a clear definition of what name, image and likeness is. On some fronts that's occurring, other fronts it's an auction in the spring. Make sense?

We have to get some parameters around what we're actually doing and what's actually going on and not try to just do something so we can stay out of the courts. That's all things are happening because for a long time, what's the product. The product is the player. They're viewed as amateurs, but they weren't amateurs. There's a lot of money generated through what they're doing.

Name, image and likeness needed to happen. We just got to get some guardrails around it to be able to get there.

Now when you look at the student-athlete, the thing that I always tell those guys is you're going to be a former player for 50 years, don't be a fool. Understand that your education from Purdue will take you a long way. Understand that. But also the contacts that you will make and how you treat people will take you a long way.

We all know guys that are very, very talented in all of our professions that don't know how to treat people because they're so damn talented they think they can get away from it. That normally ends up being sour milk. Nobody wants to work with that person or be around that person, even though they're talented. Don't be that way. Get the big picture of what's going on. Get the big picture of life. Treat people the right way. But learn to kill it in two different avenues: kill it through basketball and kill it through education. Then things will work out for you.

THE MODERATOR: We're joined now by Purdue student-athlete Fletcher Loyer.

Q. The portal, nothing new about transfers, that's been around forever, but how has the transfer portal, the new evolution of the transfer portal, what do you think about it? Has it made your job easier, the profession easier, better?

MATT PAINTER: For me, I was at the forefront of it because I was the only coach on the subcommittee for the one-time transfer. They were really trying to figure out

what the pillars were going to be so guys could transfer and be eligible right away.

They didn't have the data when they did that. The thing for me was, it wasn't somebody that was going to go be an NBA player or somebody who was going to be a professional basketball player. What everybody has to understand about rules through Division III, Division II, NIAA, Division I, low-major, mid-major, high-major, 99% of them are not professional basketball players.

I'm not sitting here as the coach without having the opportunity to have a scholarship at Purdue. These opportunities save lives. But if you're not loyal to people, there's nothing wrong with transferring, there's people in the stands that have transferred, moved, it's a positive thing. But if you're changing to change, and you're doing what you want to do instead of what's best for you, now at the end of the day if it affects your education, your contacts. Every person in here got something through their education to help them, but every person in here has gotten something through the contacts they've made that have helped them move a little bit. We've all done that.

If I need to get another job, do something, you make a call for me, put in a call for me, help me out here. We all do that.

I wasn't fighting for the Zach Edeys of the world. I was fighting for the people on my team, the low-majors, the mid-majors, Division II, that aren't pros. Now they want to do something -- it's like your parents, right? -- that stop you from you doing what you want to do so you can do what's best for you so you can have a great life.

It is not about going pro or anything of that nature in my mind because 99% of them aren't pros.

With that being said, I don't want to take somebody's dream away from them. You want them to have that dream, be able to accomplish some of those things. But education is going to take you a lot longer in life and help you so you can have a quality life.

Getting a scholarship and then being able to take that, get an education, is not always about basketball, it's about having a great life and having your own family, helping other people.

If you change three or four times, you don't get your degree, don't become a pro, don't have any contacts, you didn't take that opportunity and get any better, then what are we doing for young people? That doesn't make any sense to me. I don't like anybody that devalues education. A part of this devalues education. We've all seen the story,

first person in their family to get their education, then they start that good cycle. We all hear the news about a bad cycle. He was a great player, what happened to him? He hit some hard times. I don't want players to hit hard times. I want to help 'em.

We've tried to stay the same where we are with it, but I think we're kind of an outlier. I also think where we are in our state, because we have good players there, we have good high school coaches there, Purdue has great education, so people really got to take a step back and say, If you want to move, everything on movement, not everything, but most everything on movement is not about winning and is not about maybe going to the NCAA tournament, it's about their role. They want to shoot more, they want to play more.

Now, if you have that opportunity to move, then you just want to move again, then you want to move again, the only thing you got good at was moving. Get good at basketball and get good at education, get good at doing what's best for you and your future.

Q. There have been a lot of people in your profession, coaches and players, whose careers were ended because they took extra benefits, stuff that today would just be minuscule. What do you think that, I don't know what the word would be, amnesty, about acknowledging that? What do you think about going back and saying, Maybe we should clear the record, whatever?

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, I agree with that. I think there needs to be a lot of deregulation on a lot of things that has happened in the past. They need to take a hard dive into looking because the amateurism was really never there, but yet we called it an amateurism. If you don't like that, take the chance of being a pro, but yet I'm making a lot of money off of it and they're the product, right?

It was a total contradiction. I think everybody in this room agrees with that. Hopefully we can grow. Where I don't like it like through the NCAA, and I've served on a lot of committees, there needs to be a collaboration. I think his opinion matters, but I don't know if his opinion matters over mine. I've sat in his chair, he hasn't sat in mine. Your opinion matters, too.

When you collaborate, you hear everybody. Now to come together and just do a better job of, you know, because the adults were making that decision at the time that person that you mentioned, he wasn't an adult, right? He was a supposed student-athlete. He was just kind of doing... What's he supposed to do, right?

Yeah, I wish they could go back and be able to do that. I think that would probably be the right thing.

Q. Fletcher, I'm a student as well, I played sports, for you on this big stage, how have you been able to focus on being present in this moment, executing these next two wins, but at the same time still focusing on your education? School doesn't stop. How have you been able to find that balance, or has it been difficult?

FLETCHER LOYER: Yeah, it's definitely been different, something you have to adjust to, something you have to adjust to throughout the winter, traveling to away Big Ten games. These last three weeks away has been tough. We have the right people in place. They've done a good job, whether it's getting us tutors or people, making sure we're getting our work done, emailing our professors, all that.

Ultimately it's been a lot. It's been busy here. Having good people in place, they've done a good job of doing that.

Q. Speaking about balance again, you're playing on the big stage, which is the Final Four. You're in this situation where you want to execute, but at the same time you're in the Final Four. How have you been able to find that balance between being grateful of being here but at the same time just still focusing in on what's ahead?

FLETCHER LOYER: Yeah, for us, I think we've all talked about right now we're on a business trip. Yeah, it's great, you want to enjoy it, you see your families get to enjoy it, all the fans here. It's really special. You don't want to take it for granted.

At the same time, like Coach said, we're going to be past players for 50 years. We got all the time in the world to enjoy it. Making sure we're locked in and making the most of it, making sure we're ready for tip-off come Saturday.

Q. Purdue has been no stranger to success, making it to their ninth consecutive appearance here in the tournament. You haven't before made it to this point. What is the difference between those eight seasons and now?

MATT PAINTER: Obviously playing better at key times. A lot comes to matchups. For us, our losses have been to more of the low to mid-major teams. That's something like you take a hard look at.

At the end of every year, you take inventory of yourself, your staff, your player, your styles, what works, what doesn't work.

I don't like to think in theory. I like to crunch it and get it figured out. No different than a hypothesis, right? You're trying to confirm what's your hypothesis is true, but you can't sit there and have a bias towards it or you're going to slant it, right?

Just allowing it to come to you, collaborate with analytical people, looking at different things.

For me as the season progressed, I just felt like I had to play more offensive guys. I think that allows us more spacing with Zach, that allows Braden Smith to navigate through ball screens better. It allows the people that do have skill, they have a decision to make. If you want to take Fletcher away, you gave Zach and Braden more space. If you want to shrink from that, you gave him opportunities to shoot the basketball, play in the closeouts, get the angles, just using him as an example. Obviously I'm not going to go through everybody on our team.

That for us was always, like, being honest, being honest with myself and saying, Where can I make some moves here?

A lot of times it's personnel, too. I think we added some athleticism, some quickness. That helped us. Lance Jones helped us. Cam Heide helped us. Myles Colvin helps us. A couple of them don't play a lot. When they do, they really give us that spark with that.

I think that's been a real key for us there. We've been able to get to that second weekend. We've only gotten to the Elite Eight game twice. Both times I think we've had really good offensive teams. We got beat by a 16 seed. We this a top five or six offensive team. We turned the basketball over, too. You go through all those things. At the end of the day, I'm like, Don't turn the ball over.

Analytical people talk, you hire new people, you chew on something, you spend three to four weeks doing different things to get it figured out. At the end of the day, just tell Fletch, Don't turn the ball over. Braden, don't turn the ball over. Zach, don't turn the ball over. When we don't turn the basketball over, we're 27-0. Obviously we have really good players, too. I think that's more important than my words.

Q. I know some players listen to music before getting on the court. Do you have any kind of music that you prefer to listen to on the court during warm-ups?

FLETCHER LOYER: Yeah, I kind of like to switch it up. Everybody has their own thing. I usually listen to like country to get me calmed down a little bit, where I'd say most guys listen to rap to get them going for the game.

Q. Since you've been here, you've been in the tournament for three weeks, what has been your favorite moment so far inside the game or even outside the game?

FLETCHER LOYER: Yeah, I have two. I'd say hearing that buzzer against Tennessee, knowing all the work we put in, we got to the Final Four. One of our goals at the start of the year, something we worked really hard to do. Obviously we didn't get to do it last year.

That and then coming home off the airplane in West Lafayette, seeing all those fans there on a Sunday night means a lot to us. We know us playing hard and us winning games, they like that. They cheer us on, support us, win or loss. Kind of putting on a show for them and them welcoming us when we got back.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, a favorite moment from the last few weeks?

MATT PAINTER: Obviously winning against Tennessee to go to the Final Four. It's a relief, to be honest with you. Obviously you want to cherish the moment.

Then for Coach Keady, that was cool for him. He deserved to coach in a Final Four. Him being a part of this is pretty cool.

Do you have any moments of living with Coach Keady that you want to share?

THE MODERATOR: That's all the time we have for this session (laughter).

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