

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

Saturday, April 6, 2024

Phoenix, Arizona, USA

State Farm Stadium

**Purdue Boilermakers**  
**Coach Matt Painter**  
**Zach Edey**  
**Fletcher Loyer**  
**Lance Jones**

Semifinals Postgame Media Conference

Purdue 63, NC State 50

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Purdue. We'll ask Coach to open things up with a statement.

Coach.

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, obviously very competitive game. I thought both teams' defense was way better than their offense. Especially in the second half.

With that being said, NC State holding us to 28 points in the second half did a good job also.

It was one of those grinder-type games where we made a few more shots, a few more threes. Obviously wanted to keep establishing Zach inside, kind of playing off of that in terms of they were doing some different things with him and just making the right decision, then being able to attack at that point or take the threes that we were given.

We made enough of those.

I thought our defense was really good in the second half. We didn't have any breakdowns. In my opinion, we had too many breakdowns in the first half defensively. Anytime we have those breakdowns in that one stretch, it seemed like they scored, so...

But I thought we were very competitive, played hard. We just didn't play great. I don't think either team played great. If you look at their run to get here and our run to get here,



both teams were way better offensively than you saw today. That happens in basketball at times. You got to give our guys credit for hanging in there and grinding one out. Really we've grinded it out the last two games.

When it's freewheeling and you're scoring the basketball, it's more enjoyable to watch, more enjoyable to play, more enjoyable to coach. To be able to win six games, you're going to have a game in there, a game or two, where you don't play as well offensively. You got to find a way to win that. So congrats to our guys for finding a way to do that.

THE MODERATOR: First question...

**Q. Zach, you made the decision to come back this year. To now be one win away, playing Monday night action means what to you at this point?**

ZACH EDEY: What we've been talking about all year. The reason I came back is playing games like this. The reason I'm playing college basketball for four years. To finally get this game, big-time. We obviously got to keep going and keep playing.

But, yeah, these are the games you can come back, these are the games you work and practice every day for.

**Q. Zach and Fletcher, could you describe what it feels like to be in the title game after obviously last year, losing first round, to come back and kind of bury those demons obviously.**

FLETCHER LOYER: It's everything. It's everything we've worked for, everything we thought about. A lot of late nights, can't even sleep because you're thinking about it.

It's been tough. But we fought. We're going to keep fighting. We've got 40 more minutes until we're national champs. We're going to push everybody as far as we can, and we're going to play as hard as we can.

ZACH EDEY: Like he said, it's a really big deal. We still have a game to play. No one's celebrating right now. We're going to keep locked in and keep focusing on these games, get back to work.

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**Q. Lance, as Coach said, this wasn't always the prettiest game. You supplied some big-time shots for your team. What does it say about this team that maybe when it's not the most glamorous game, you guys can outwill the other team?**

LANCE JONES: It says a lot about our team. Every win is not going to be nice and pretty. This one happened to be grind it out. We stuck with it. They made runs. We had bad periods. Most important we stayed with it and got necessary stops down the stretch.

**Q. Lance and Fletcher, the confidence that you guys elevated on some of those threes, especially in the second half, to put them away, what does that say about the personality of this group and the way you guide believe in yourselves at this moment?**

LANCE JONES: Yeah, I think it's about repetition. I know me and Fletcher, we get in the gym extra, we shoot after bad games, after good games. The work stays the same. We don't want to shy from moments like this. We worked our whole lives to be in this position.

I think it's about having confidence. I can speak for me and Fletcher, that we have a lot of confidence right now.

FLETCHER LOYER: Yeah, we've just done too much to not shoot it with confidence. We've played basketball for so many years, now we're on the stage that we've worked for. This is why we play. There's no reason for us to go out there not confident or not trusting in one another to go make a play.

**Q. Zach, you played 40 today. Did you expect to play 40 today? What's it going to take to come out of the title game?**

ZACH EDEY: I don't know if I expected it, but I was ready for it. I'm ready for it every game. Like I've said all weekend now, no one on the team wants to come out of the game. Obviously if Paint subs us, we're going to sub. You want to play every minute of the game, every second of the game. I'm never going to complain about Paint leaving me on the floor.

**Q. Zach, seemed like they brought a lot of different looks to you, turnovers that are uncharacteristic. How did you try to handle what they were doing with you defensively?**

ZACH EDEY: They threw a lot of different looks at me. Be more ready for it. I think I kind of tried to force it a few times. That led to some bad offensive possessions for us.

When they keep going, you get the rhythm, you get the flow, you understand it. I think towards the end of the game they kind of picked it up, I understood what they were doing, we kind of made that run there.

THE MODERATOR: We thank the student-athletes. We're going to take questions for Coach Painter.

**Q. After losing the last few years to double-digit seeds, how satisfying is this for you and your guys? What does it mean in the light of what's happened?**

MATT PAINTER: Obviously if you look at their run and who they've beaten -- Duke, Marquette, obviously Oakland, beat Kentucky, they beat a good Texas Tech team, they got third in the Big 12 -- pretty impressive run.

So for us to be able to beat them, no matter what their seed it, I think they proved that they belong. The thing that we just tried to sell more than anything is that we weren't facing that team that was 17-14 at one time. We're facing the team that's 9-0.

Just getting a win without any of the particulars is worth it, right, to be able to advance. I always talk about that, trying to win a Big Ten championship. Everybody wants to talk about winning it. I said, Man, you got to get yourself in position before you can win one. It's like winning a national championship. You can talk all you want, but if you're not going to play on Monday, you don't have a chance.

Obviously we put ourselves in a position to win one. Got to give our guys credit. They've been able to battle back. They've also been able to handle a lot of adversity.

**Q. It was interesting after the Elite Eight all the emotion and joy, today you punched your ticket to Monday night. It was so much more muted from the guys. What does that tell you about the mindset going into this, the dichotomy from last Sunday to tonight?**

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, we talked about not getting caught up, not jumping over the fight, being able to compete, keep our composure.

When you deal with a team that's a good shooting team, sometimes, like, when they miss shots, it's like the end of the world. How can I miss shots? How can I do this? The number one three-point field goal percentage in the country. Sometimes our body language, if we miss shots, we can still win the game. Obviously you want to make those shots. It kind of depends on how the game flows.

It was pretty emotional to go through that. Every team that's playing has to go through that. You had one team

that's been through it, they're national champs, so they have that experience, where the rest of us do not have that experience.

You don't want to be emotional at that time, then not go out there and play to your strengths. I thought our guys did a good job handling that.

**Q. You mentioned the offense not being what you'd hoped it would be. Given the sight lines, the amount of people, how much of an effect do you think that had?**

MATT PAINTER: I don't think it had any effect on it. I thought we had a couple over-and-back turnovers, just a couple concentration turnovers. We dribbled into traffic a couple times. Zach was loose with the basketball. We work a lot with him on a crouch dribble just because he's so damn big. That ball's coming up high. If he's standing straight up, Middlebrooks pokes it from behind...

I also think a lot of it had to do with NC State. I think they're a good defensive team. I think they put a lot of pressure on the basketball, they make it tough on you.

I didn't think the environment had anything to do with that. I thought it was NC State's defense and at times our lack of concentration.

**Q. I'm sure you've been asked this a lot, but what characteristics do you think you guys have that's enabled basically the same team to rebound the way you have this year?**

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, we've added some pieces. Lance Jones is a piece that's really helped us. I thought his defense tonight on DJ Horne was really good. The moment wasn't too big for him. He took the shots that were there for him. To be able to knock them down... The addition of that.

We got the best player in the country. It's a hell of a place to start, right? A lot of times people are congratulating. It's like, He's pretty damn good, but you've got to have the right pieces with him from a skill standpoint and then still be able to guard elite players. I think we're just better in those areas.

We had guys step up tonight. Us going 10-25, that's our average. We shoot 40% from three. Like, now if we can have games where we can get more, then shoot a better percentage, that really helps him.

We got to do a better job of helping him. He turned it over tonight. Braden turned it over tonight. We didn't give

ourselves a great chance there. That's what you want. You want that complete game. I think that's where we've been able to adjust. We haven't turned the ball over as much, even though tonight we had more than 13.

We're now 7-4 when we have 14 to 17 turnovers. But we're 27-0 when we have 13 or less. Keeping that number down. Why you got to, like, jump on that, have such a magic number, but doesn't mean we can't win when we have more than 13. So far we haven't gotten beat when we've had 13 or less.

**Q. Zach has become the first player in the NCAA tournament's history to have 20-10 while shooting at least 60% in five games in a single tournament. A lot of times on this stage we sometimes see the best-of-the-best players could get rattled. It feels like nothing does that to him. What are you continually seeing from this person?**

MATT PAINTER: Right. Well, I thought they did a good job tonight. I thought they battled him, pushed him out some, made it difficult on him, forced him into five turnovers. He still got to his spots. If he can get to his spot for his jump hook, get it to the rim. He didn't have a lot of dunks, easy ones tonight. He had to earn almost everything, whether he was going to his left hook or right hook, just continue to play and continue to compete.

It's really about running things and getting in that position. If he can get there, he's had a lot of success. Doesn't guarantee he will. The numbers kind of show that once he gets there and gets settled, he's been pretty successful.

**Q. Braden Smith obviously had a very rough first half. What kind of adjustments do you make at halftime with him to try to get him back on track?**

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, not really adjustments as much as just try to be encouraging, to tell him. Two of those turnovers are over and backs. He hasn't done that the whole year. You don't know if it's just, like, you got jitters or the anxiety a little bit of being out there.

To me, you can't dribble across halfcourt and stop. You can't go the other way. You're two feet, the ball gets across halfcourt...

He's a quintessential point guard, runs the show for us. Just trying to get him in good spirits. Hey, go out and play your game. When we run stuff, just be aggressive, look for your shot, keep shooting.

But no adjustments really. Obviously he didn't turn the ball over in the second half, so that was good. We rely a lot on

him. When he has a little bit of struggles, it's easier for him to get out of it because he stays out there, he plays through his mistakes.

THE MODERATOR: We want to congratulate Coach Painter and thank you.

MATT PAINTER: Thank you.

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