

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

Monday, April 8, 2024

Phoenix, Arizona, USA

State Farm Stadium

Purdue Boilermakers
Coach Matt Painter
Zach Edey
Braden Smith

Finals Postgame Media Conference



UConn 75, Purdue 60

THE MODERATOR: We're joined now by Purdue.

We'll ask Coach Painter to open things up with a statement.

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, want to congratulate UConn on the win. I thought they had some separation there in the first half. At the end we had a couple plays where they made some tough shots. We had some shots at the rim. It just kind of pushed that lead to six right there. We needed kind of a break to keep that even.

I thought the difference, I thought our guys really gave good effort and energy defensively in guarding them. I thought the real difference ended up being their ability to offensive rebound in the second half.

We just were wasting so much energy to fight once they got it to double-digits; then we would get stops, and we couldn't get rebounds. That was just really hard for us to overcome at that time.

They did a great job of staying home. We were going to go to the well with Zach as much as we could at that point. In a game like this, we had to be able to rebound defensively better, and then we had to have something balance that out. That was threes. They stayed home with us. They did a really good job defensively.

They get a lot of credit. Donovan Clingan is a very good defensive player. But we've played against athletes, played against some really good defensive guys this year

and in the tournament, but not the collection of defensive players like UConn has.

We play against somebody, they would have a lock-down defender. These guys are bringing lock-down defenders off the bench. Defense always travels. Tip the hat to them. They were great. Danny has done a fabulous job. Obviously won back-to-back national championships. Congratulations to UConn.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for the student-athletes first.

Q. Matt, Zach has been able to carry this team in back-to-back years. How do you think he should be remembered as one of the greats in the collegiate game at his position?

MATT PAINTER: Is that for me?

Q. Yes.

MATT PAINTER: Well, when you look at a lot of things, I think the separator normally comes to how successful somebody was, right? So it's hard for me to look at things. But when you look at his numbers against the greats, there's no question he's in the conversation. But he's also the winningest player at Purdue.

We won our league back-to-back years by multiple games. First time that's happened in the Big Ten since I was in kindergarten. We got to the championship game after having a disappointing loss, he got to a Sweet 16. He went to four tournaments.

I think that's always what kind of separates everybody. Everybody wants to have the argument about the G.O.A.T., who is the greatest. That's the ultimate separator because every person in that conversation is great. I think he was great in how he did it, too.

People have no idea the burden you carry when you're as good as he is, produce like he does going into opposing arenas.



A lot of those old-timers, they didn't have to hear it on social media. For young people that are successful, they have to go through a lot of stuff. But in a way you kind of like it 'cause it toughens you up, allows you to focus, allows you to push through things.

I just told him in the locker room, You're not going to go on in life and push past here and not deal with adversity. In the workforce, in relationships, everything. You're going to deal with adversity. He was superior dealing with adversity. He was a guy that didn't get recruited, then all of a sudden he started to get recruited, then that picked up. That got him on edge. All the great ones stay on edge.

He's going to be a terrific NBA player. We're really proud of him.

Q. Braden, a nice bounce-back game for you. You hit the team's only three-pointer. You tried seven on the night. What were they doing specifically to make it so difficult?

BRADEN SMITH: Yeah, they just did a really good job guarding the three. We got in the paint plenty of times. We just didn't convert on a lot of them. We did our job pretty well. They did a good job guarding the three. We just got to convert on those in the paint.

Q. Zach, I know it's terribly difficult to ask you to put things in perspective right now. As you sit here and try to process all of this, can you put some context into what this whole experience has been for you?

ZACH EDEY: You're talking about, like, in relation to Coach Paint or just in general?

Q. (No microphone.)

ZACH EDEY: I don't know. Like you said, it's tough. It's tough to think about that right now.

Paint, like I've always said, Paint is someone who just give me a chance. I've been trying for four years to pay him back for that. He just came in. Like, he believed in me when not a lot of people believed in me. He gave me the ball. Not a lot of coaches did that. Not a lot of coaches trusted me in that role.

Yeah, sorry. It's tough to really think about something like that right now.

Q. Zach, obviously you were facing up against a guy with a lot of size and talent. They were also bringing defensive help. How did you think you were handling all the defensive attention you were getting?

ZACH EDEY: Something I've dealt with all year. Teams kind of game plan around guarding the post a lot of times when they play us. They did a great job showing kind of mixing up some defenses, playing some one on one. Clingan is a great player.

I just got to play better. This is one of those games where I can't go through stretches where I'm not effective. I had a few of those stretches today, and that was the game.

Q. Zach, you clearly have had a huge impact on this program. When you reflect on where you've come in your journey, what do you hope your legacy is with the Purdue Boilermakers?

ZACH EDEY: I don't know. That's kind of for Purdue to decide. I'm not going to tell my own legacy.

I think for me, the big thing is you can say whatever you want about me. You can say -- however I played, you can say whatever. But you can never say that I didn't give it my 100% every single time I stepped on the floor, every single time I went and practiced. That's what I'll always hang my hat on.

I came in, and I never didn't give it 100%.

Q. Braden, what is it about Zach in the two years you've spent with him that you've enjoyed the most and will miss the most when he leaves?

BRADEN SMITH: Yeah, man, I enjoy just playing with him. He taught me so much. I went from 6'4" center, to a 7'4" center. Definitely a huge change.

Two-time national Player of the Year. The most unselfish person you'll ever meet. Like Coach Paint said, he gets more hate for no reason. For what? He's out there dominating everybody?

Just stuff like that. He's just going out there and enjoying the game he loves. He hasn't played it for long. To have somebody like that that just wants to go out there and play, because that's what he loves, and people want to give him crap for it. Just saying that makes me kind of admire him a little bit more. I realize like, Hey, you're the top of the game and you're still getting hate on because you love the game.

When he's gone, just who he is as a person. He's a great dude. Great dude.

THE MODERATOR: We'll excuse the student-athletes and continue with questions for Coach Painter.

Q. Can you talk about the three-point percentage. You didn't get off that many shots. What were they doing to take that away?

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, they were just going to let us play one on one in the post. You see the 25 attempts that Zach had.

For us, we're just going to throw him the basketball and keep going, just be able to keep going to the well.

You hope through the game in, like, what you do, that we could loosen that and get him. When you play in the NCAA tournament, you win six games, they led for I think everything except six minutes, four minutes and 20 seconds, just kind of think about that. You got to get them on their heels.

For us to get them to change, we had to get the lead, get 'em on their heels, and then get in that 10-minute mark. We couldn't get there. We couldn't get rebounds. You can't go on runs if you can't get stops.

They're a great defensive team. So they just made a decision, like, we can defend the perimeter and we can take this away from you, then you're just going to get the ball to your best player, he's going to be one on one, then that's that.

They were going to live with that.

If we could have rebounded the basketball better, we could have got them to change and do that, but we weren't able to do that. Then they stayed in control of the game.

Not everybody can do what they just did. You have to give credit to their defense and their coach and how they're wired.

Q. You talked about the burden he had to go through, all the crap for four years. There was another kind of burden. Could you expand on that, all of that he had to go through.

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, it's also a backhanded compliment, right? People like myself who averaged four points, no one cares about you. The fans don't, like, pay attention to you. I call it cartoon bad guy. Ever watch the cartoons, there's the bad guy that gets all the hate and everybody is coming at him? The best player in college basketball, the best player in your conference becomes cartoon bad guy.

That's the way it is. But it's also a backhanded compliment. There's millions of basketball players out

there that would love to carry that burden. Not everybody can do it. Very few get that. He's done it. He shows up.

I'd always say, When is he going to have a bad game? When is he just not going to show up? He always showed up. He always competed. He always played through physicality. He's a very unselfish player. I think that's the piece of it.

But it's hard, man. It's hard to go through that, especially in today's world. What eats up a young player is positive comments, because then they get full of themselves. Then the negative comments, like you feel sorry for him. This guy doesn't deserve this or whatever. It's kind of how you look at things, how you handle things. He always stayed really professional. Even when they're hanging on him and fouling him, doing stuff throughout the year.

They didn't do that at first 'cause who he is today, that's not who he was three years ago. I always would talk about, like, he'd play 17 minutes, he'd get 12 points, six rebounds, four fouls, six turnovers, we'd go to the monitor twice. Then all of a sudden six games later, like, he's not elbowing people in the head anymore. He couldn't pass at one time. Then all of a sudden he could pass. Well, he never got doubled so why should he have to pass?

It's amazing the way he's grown and the way he's developed, but also how he's went about it, the way he's stayed professional.

Q. Earlier this season you played a lot of good non-conference opponents and took down the No. 1 team at the time. Did you use any of those games as a point of emphasis coming into this one since you were playing the No. 1 team in the country?

MATT PAINTER: No, not really. The point of interest is, like, you play Illinois, Terrence Shannon can really guard you. You play Tennessee, and Zeigler can really guard you. It doesn't mean the other guys aren't great defensive players. Probably good defensive players, right? I'm kind of in theory here.

They just had so many good defensive players. Like, at every position those guys do a great job. They know how to play. They move without the basketball. They have experience. From Tristen Newton's fifth-year, Cam Spencer's fifth-year, but Karaban and Clingan in their second year, they played like veterans. They have a great program a great system both offensively and defensively. They're a well-oiled machine.

That's where they separate because they do have lulls offensively, if you watch 'em. They'll beat somebody by 25,

go three of 20 for three. What if they go 12 for 20? It shows you who they are.

They didn't get out on us and really get in transition because we didn't turn the ball over as much as some other people they played.

They're so good when they get in transition, they get those runs. But the difference with them is how they are defensively. They're a better defensive team overall than all those other teams we played, and that says something because those are some pretty good teams.

Q. Talk about the on-the-ball pressure and how daunting it was for you guys to get into your sets.

MATT PAINTER: We were one-dimensional because of how good Zach Edey is. We were comfortable going to him, right? We were comfortable continuing to do that. That's what they're giving you.

When a great defensive team says, Here is how we're going to play it, you want to fight, that take tough, bad threes, bad throws are going to be run-outs for them. We kept showing those clips. You hear people say they get thirsty. Three-point shooters, they don't get looks, now start taking ones they shouldn't take.

For them, they're just going to go score at the other end. That's what we were talking about. Take what they give you. If they take something away, whether it's Zach's post-up, Braden's ball screen, our threes, we still can get a quality shot.

We had to be better on the glass, in my opinion. Then we had to be a little more efficient in the shots we were getting that. Balance right there could have gotten us into the game. It would have gotten us into the game and made it a game, but we simply weren't able to do that.

Q. Last year when you lost to Fairleigh Dickinson, you said you had to sit in it. You lose in the national championship this year, how is that feeling the same, or is it different? How does it motivate you to get back to this point?

MATT PAINTER: No, it's a lot different. It's obviously a lot different to get to the Final Four and get into the championship game.

It hurts because these opportunities are slim. You say you're going to get back here, but you want to use this as motivation to get back here and keep growing your program.

But, no, it's a lot different than last year. When you put yourself in a great position and you don't take advantage of it. We put ourselves in a great position now and we took advantage of it. We just came up a little bit short to a great team.

I told our guys in the locker room, like, when you have the most wins in school history, you're the first team to win back-to-back championships by multiple games since 1976, which was the last undefeated team in college basketball, and you get an eyelash away from winning it all, that's the standard.

So, like, now just like any other year we're going to take two to three weeks off, then get back to work. It's not going to be a lot of work until the summer in terms of from a team standpoint. Those guys are going to be getting into the gym, fighting, competing. We like our young guys that are coming in next year, so we're excited.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach Painter.

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