

Big Ten Basketball Media Days

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Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Purdue Boilermakers

Men's Head Coach

Matt Painter



KEVIN WARREN: Our next coach to the podium is one of the most successful coaches in the country, Matt Painter, Purdue University. He's been a great supporter of the Coaches Versus Cancer event. He has reached the Sweet 16 for the fourth time in the last five years. Has another great team this year. I'm so grateful that Coach Painter is in the Big Ten Conference and looking forward to seeing him coach and his team play during the upcoming season.

Welcome to the stage head basketball coach at Purdue University, Matt Painter.

MATT PAINTER: Good morning. Like everybody else: "We had a fabulous summer, and we're excited for the season." So I know you guys couldn't write your articles without an opening statement (laughter).

Does anybody ever have a bad summer? Like someone has to have a bad summer, right? Somebody has to have some things not go their way. I've always wanted to do that, come up and say, "We really had a bad summer and things just haven't been clicking, but we think we're going to be really good this year." (Smiling.)

You guys hear the same kind of opening speeches and opening remarks from a lot of different people.

It was a tough year for us last year because we thought we had a team that could do more damage than it did. As a coach, you take sole responsibility for that.

Just trying as a coach to be better for our program, to be better for our team. I thought we should have won our league. I thought we should have won our tournament. I thought we should have gotten to the Final Four. We didn't. Any of those three things.

Our talent was just a little bit above our production. I think that's the key for a coach, to be able to get his team more productive than its talent.

I think Coach Keady was marvelous at that with his team and the program at Purdue for 25 years. We've really tried

to take that blueprint. Last year I just didn't feel like even though we won 29 games, went to a Sweet 16, we didn't quite get to that point. I think that from a coaching standpoint I got to be better for us, be better for our guys. Hopefully we can do that this year.

We lost some really talented guys, but I like where we are. I like our pieces. I think our staff has done a great job in evaluating and getting good players for Purdue. I think we have one of the best front lines in the country. I really like our guard play. I don't like our experience at the guard positions, but it's also great opportunities for young players.

How well we'll be together is really going to be key on everybody being on the same page, everybody growing and being ready to play right away.

We have a fifth-year transfer in David Jenkins that I think is going to really help us. We have some returners in Ethan Morton, Brandon Newman, Mason Gillis, Zach Edey, Caleb Furst. We have two redshirts in Trey Kaufman-Renn and Brian Waddell that I think both have fabulous careers at Purdue.

We have a couple freshmen guards that are going to play right away, have really played well here early in the season, in Fletcher Loyer and Braden Smith.

I think I've covered about everybody. If I forgot a couple guys there. We have a 7'2" freshman named Will Berg from Sweden. I like his upshot. You guys are shocked we signed another 7-footer.

But, no, open this up for any questions and we can go from there.

Q. Zach Edey, playing through him, how does that change how you operate?

MATT PAINTER: Zach had great per-40 numbers last year. A lot of people have to scheme towards him because he's skilled and so big. He averaged 31 1/2, 16 rebounds per 40 numbers. Pretty impressive.

The fact he only played 19 minutes, we simply couldn't play



those two guys together even though we tried in the summer to piece it together. We have two different looks.

I think we'll be able to do the same thing, but he obviously will play more minutes than he did last year. He kind of determines that. I always allow, like, organically, things to evolve. Instead of trying to win the press conference when you come here, just allow your eyes to tell you what's going on and what we're doing.

I like our other guys on our front line. Caleb Furst, Trey Kaufman, Mason Gillis are all All-Conference level players. I don't think they're all going to be All-Conference in the same year, but they are All-Conference players.

Just excited about it. Excited about what Zach can do. He can move for a guy his size. He can rebound out of his area, which is huge for a guy his size. He plays in ball screen defense a lot better than people give him credit for.

I think just stereotypically, because he's so big, people automatically say get him in a ball screen. But he's pretty active. He's a good athlete. Obviously he played hockey and baseball growing up.

I'm excited. I think he's one of the best players in the country.

Q. You mentioned a lot of different guys who can play guard, but the one question when people look at your team is how do you handle point guard? You mentioned David. Is he your answer or...

MATT PAINTER: That's a great question. We might have to do it through committee. Our only quintessential point guard is a kid named Braden Smith who is a fabulous player.

How he wasn't ranked in the top 75, 100 in the country, you guys will have the same question after the first month of the season because he's a really good player, can really pass, very competitive.

From David Jenkins to Braden to Ethan Morton to Fletcher Loyer, I think when Braden is not in the game, it can be by committee because Ethan Morton does a lot of good point guard things. David Jenkins can guard the basketball, can really score, but he's not been that true point guard there. Then Fletcher Loyer is a guy that can handle the ball and help out when he's playing the two.

That's your question, that's our question. Really the youth is more of our question than anything in that backcourt. We have a lot of really good players, but they haven't played together. We have some true freshmen that are

going to play right away.

The one guy I forgot who's from Minnesota is Cam Heide, who missed last year, only played three games last year, then he missed this summer. Caleb Furst, Braden Smith, Cam Heide, and one more, they all missed our summer. I wasn't totally lying when I said we didn't have a great summer.

But, no, Cam is very athletic, can really shoot the basketball. We're excited about him. But he's had a little bit of that injury bug like the rest of our guys.

Q. The Big Ten has been known for its centers. You have a very dominant one in Zach. How important is it for teams this season to have a dominant big man in the Big Ten and how have you seen the league move towards more positionless basketball?

MATT PAINTER: Obviously with positionless basketball, you have guys of that size, that kind of knocks that theory off a little bit.

But the people that do play that way against size cause us problems. Just like we're causing them problems at one end, they're causing us problems at the other end in terms of matchups and how you play.

Schematically you just go towards your best players. I think that's something I always talk about in recruiting, like this is how I see you if you're one of our top two or three scorers. I think that's why you see a lot of guys transfer, because that doesn't get put out as a caveat. You say this is how you said I was going to play. You don't run plays for your eighth man, you just don't.

When you look at it, like how can you get the basketball to the rim, in positionless basketball you're driving that basketball a lot more. When you're playing post-up basketball, you're throwing that ball in there, then they have to react.

At the end of the day the ball needs to live in the paint no matter how you play. The ball has to get there. Whether you're driving it, posting it, getting it off the glass, playing in transition off your defense, that is so important for it.

But the thing about our bigs in our league, they're quality. A lot of times people say, You can't place these two guys together. It just depends on their functionality. That's really what it gets down there.

Taking your best players, especially of size, and now who plays well with them, that's going to ultimately bring them more value.

Q. You guys maybe more than any team experienced the ups and downs of Big Ten play last year. You mentioned a lot of the new guys. How do you get them prepared for the grind week in and week out for Big Ten play?

MATT PAINTER: Just the mental toughness. Mental toughness is doing simple things consistently. A lot of times the redundancy of the game of basketball kind of bores people.

You're going to have pillars in terms of taking care of the basketball, rebounding the basketball, then having a high competitive spirit.

Who you are when the wheels are starting to fall off is really who you are. So it's so important to be able to kind of have that false adversity through practices and through scrimmages. Your close scrimmage, exhibition, things of that nature, just to see how guys are going to react.

When you're not quite ready for it, someone's probably going to play instead of you. As a coach, the best motivator is get enough good players to where, if somebody is not ready or somebody doesn't want to do what you're asking them to do, you can just move to the next guy. That's the best motivator and gets it going.

But our guys that come and attend Purdue and play for us, they know we don't try to trick them in recruiting. We try to paint a clear picture of this is how it is. We don't become you, you become us. Go from there.

We're not having a get-together and powwow every time you don't get the minutes you want. Go out there and produce. Go out there and practice every day, put in extra time, keep your nose clean, be on time. All the things that translate to winning. Do those things.

Complaining doesn't go over too much with us.

Q. You've been around this league as long as anyone. It always has good teams. This year, whether it's through returning players or transfers, the top half seems to be as solid as it has been for a long time. The top half of this league seems to be really strong. What are your thoughts on that?

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, it's different because you have some people that are being picked in the top half, and 70 to 80% of their guys didn't play for them last year. Normally when that's the case, they don't get picked in the top half. Not all of them, but you got a good chunk of some of these guys that have had really good careers so far so

it's easier to gauge, easier to say, this guy averaged 16 points in another high major conference, he's going to be successful here.

Having that experience of success together is still important. So like a lot of times, you see it in the NBA all the time, they take three or four guys that are all fabulous individual players, and they just don't work together, or they do work together. You go back to the drawing board, say, Why did this work, this not work?

You're constantly dealing with that as a coach. Now it's come to college basketball with the transfer portal and name, image and likeness, guys kind of searching things out.

It's going to be interesting what we think in three, four, five years about that. The whole thing, it's hard to have chemistry within a team, so that starts. When you hear the overused word of 'culture,' how can you have culture right away? I say things don't always work with a speech. It takes time to grow, develop, to come together. But we've all seen some quick fixes work. They don't always work, but we've all seen that work.

For us, we know each game that we play in our league is going to be difficult. Some of the unfamiliarity, when you lose a lot of people from your league, then you gain a lot of really talented guys, I think gets really worked out non-conference. Then it ramps us.

For us it's a little different because we play the two conference games in December so you get that taste of it.

I don't really have a great answer for us because I think the answer is still out there. It will be interesting to see who's going to be there in the last week and a half of our league because it's a bear, man. You can have a really good team. Doesn't mean you're going to be a really good road team. The really good road team is normally the one that wins it.

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