

Big Ten Basketball Media Days

Tuesday, October 10, 2023

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Purdue Boilermakers

Men's Head Coach

Matt Painter

THE MODERATOR: Now coming to the stage from Purdue University, Head Coach Matt Painter. Coach Painter is entering his 19th season after leading the Boilermakers to both the Big Ten regular season and tournament titles last year.

Coach Painter, we'll begin with your opening statement.

MATT PAINTER: Thank you very much. Obviously we're really excited for the season. I think the fact that we return a lot of guys. We have a couple of guys sitting out that we think are really good players, except we lost two guys, David Jenkins and Brandon Newman, that really helped us last year. But excited for our new guys to blend in. Excited for our returners to grow and use the experiences that we had last year across the board to really help us have a better year than we did last year.

That's the goal for us. Obviously we had a tough finish to the season losing in the first round. Hopefully that sits with us as a coaching staff and really as a program to make us better, so we can have more success in March, but as you guys all know, it doesn't start there. The process starts all over, and you can't miss any steps. You've got to just keep growing your program and keep growing your group. You just have to be collectively a little more confident than we were at the end of the year.

Really looking forward to working with our guys, and we had a good summer. We've done a good job here in the fall of competing and practicing. We have a very deep team, so I think that competition has to get us better. Every single day, not just on game night.

It has so far, but we have to just keep competing against each other and getting better and really just kind of staying on edge. I think that's an important piece when you have some success is to keep everybody grounded, keep everybody together, but stay on edge.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. We'll open the floor to questions.



Q. For some coaches after a tough loss like that in the postseason maybe they erase the game film and move forward. Others, it lingers for them. For you, what was sort of your process after that difficult loss?

MATT PAINTER: I think I'm more of the latter in terms of -- I don't think it will stay with me through the year. I think it will stay with me forever.

I wish it didn't, but I think that's part of being competitive. I think that's part of coaching. Like, you don't sit around and shine your trophies. You sit around and wonder why in the hell you couldn't beat somebody 17 years ago on a cold Wednesday night.

But for us it's part of a process. It's part of getting out there and putting yourself in a great position. I think we've had a lot of pushback, so I tell our guys about that.

You have to understand that some of that pushback is true, and you have to embrace that. We have lost to some people where we've been the better seed in the NCAA Tournament here in the past four or five years, but you know, our freshmen backcourt lost one of those games. They haven't been with us for five years.

I always say I'm the common denominator. Our staff is. We have to be able to make some adjustments and do some different things.

I don't care what game you play in, if you turn the basketball over and shoot a high volume of threes and shoot a low percentage, you're going to have a tough time winning, and that's where we struggle in any game we play, but that's where everybody struggles, if they use the three as much as we do. That's one of the things if you just get shots up, you are constantly giving yourself a chance to score, but you are also when you are one of the top five rebounding teams in the country, you are giving yourself a chance to rebound as well also.

We have to keep playing to our strengths and understand, like we had the number one offense versus the top 100 last year, and somebody says, well, looks like you need to change your offense. I'm, like, eh, you know, I don't think



we need to change our offense. I think we need to play better. I think we need to collectively grow as a group and be more confident.

I think that's really going to help us through competition this year with some of the new guys that we have and some of the returners that we have. I think that competition can really help us.

Q. You had a freshman backcourt last year. Two starters, neither of whom was a five-star guy, and you got two championships out of them, but towards the end of the year it did appear that they got worn down. How much has the offseason and a full year of college strength training, Purdue strength training helped them and will it help them through the year?

MATT PAINTER: I think the answer lies in how they play this year, right? But both of them are workers. Both of them put in a lot of time, Braden Smith and Fletcher Loyer. Good players, cerebral, competitive.

So just looking for them to keep making strides and having that better season. You know, you're on the job. You know basketball, but you haven't been through it, kind of like what you alluded to. You get to the end, and it gets harder. There's no question, but it gets harder for everybody. The rules aren't different for them than they are for anybody else.

I think you learn from that, and you learn from that experience. Obviously you become better, but I think for us collectively also, I think everybody needs to be able to keep improving and making jumps. Sometimes when you have success that's hard to do, but I don't think it's hard to do in our situation for what happened to us in the Tournament.

Q. Two-part question for you: The success you guys had last year, how do you keep your guys engaged and ready to go this year with the expectations they have and as well for you, we always talk about how the players prepare for the season. What is your preparation mentally getting ready just for the non-conference and getting ready for the Big Ten with the expectations you have?

MATT PAINTER: Good questions. You know, for us it's trying to start in June and July. I'm not really -- we work out. We do different things, but if they give you a time to practice, I normally practice because I think when you run a lot of stuff, you have to have everybody on the same page, and you have to have -- you have to give your young guys a chance. If you just don't know what is going on and you're not up to speed on our defensive rules and what we

run offensively, you're just going to be behind. You want to get everybody together in that sense.

So I think we've started years. We're the only team in college basketball that's been undefeated in nonconference back-to-back years, and we faced some really good people on neutral courts. So some of the wins that we've had have been really good. They've got us to where we've been ranked No. 1 in the country at different times two years in a row.

Two years ago we thought we were in position to win the league, and we didn't. That was hard. We get to the Sweet 16, but that was still difficult. Last year we win the league by three games, but we didn't play great down the stretch. We still had moments. I shouldn't say we didn't play great. We didn't shoot great. I think that took away from us. Even though we win the Big Ten Tournament, it was still kind of a little bit of that slow deterioration when it came to our confidence.

As a coach you try to do everything in your power to help them. Like, you shoot more, you're more positive, but when you get into those games and then that's not working, now you try to find mixes and find different groups that maybe can help you. Sometimes you have to win a different way. You have to be a little grimmer and tougher on defense. You have to be better on the glass.

Just trying to get everybody prepared for the season and ready for the season. I think that's the key is getting off to that good start, which we've been able to do. You can get off to those good starts, and now, like you get to conference season, even though we play a couple of conference games in December, I think you can really pick up steam that way.

Also, injuries or foul trouble or confidence issues that we mentioned can hold you back a little bit, so everybody has adversity. No one is excused from adversity and how you handle that adversity.

So in the last couple of years I've been really proud of our guys because I thought we've done a great job throughout the course of the season in that area. We just have to keep getting better.

Q. Obviously Zach Edey (Audio interruption) -- or two times I think Ralph Sampson is the last one to do that. What are you all hearing about him at the next level and whether or not there is a place for him in the NBA?

MATT PAINTER: Obviously we were excited about Zach coming back. This is his seventh year of organized basketball. His fourth in college and third in high school.

He didn't play freshman basketball.

He is at a different learning curve and growth than normal people at age 22 and playing in college basketball. So I think he still is getting better. He really improved last year his free-throw percentage, his rebounds per minute, his ability to protect the rim. Two years ago he was borderline nonexistent as a rim protector. He might have changed some things, but he wasn't getting blocks.

Last year he got blocks. He changed things. His ball screen defense was good. His motor was better.

Now I think is kind of his next step is really just how can't you believe in yourself when you are the consensus National Player of the Year, right? But he doesn't have those experiences where when he was 8, 9, 10 years old he is the best player. He is the best player in his area. He didn't have those things. So the confidence thing for him is so important.

In terms of growth and the NBA, I believe he is an NBA player. I think if people were around him all the time, he is very functional in what he does.

When he first got here, his inability to pass was a tough thing. Now he's a very good passer. He understands things. He really conceptualizes what's going on the offensive end of the court.

So he can rebound. He can defend, protect the rim. A lot of people want to equate his success needs to be from shooting perimeter shots, and the game is different. It's not a post-up game in the NBA anymore.

But I still think with all the attributes that I mentioned that he is an NBA player, but he has to prove that. He has to knock down that threshold. It's no different than buying a house. There's just not a lot of comps out there for him. Normally when you buy a house, you find the five comps and get to your price. That's how they kind of gauge that. Well, he doesn't he have that.

It would really help if somebody like Shaquille O'Neal was in the NBA and everybody had to have two to three guys on a roster to guard him. Things of that nature. They just don't have those type of guys anymore, and it's going away from it, but I think he has more to him than just a low-post player. I think he can do other things. I think if somebody gives him a chance, he'll show that.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Matt Painter, thank you for your time.

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