

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 10, 2023

Chicago, Illinois, USA

United Center

Purdue Boilermakers

Coach Matt Painter

David Jenkins Jr.

Mason Gills

Postgame Press Conference

Purdue - 70, Rutgers - 65

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by the Purdue Boilermakers. Head Coach Matt Painter, Mason Gillis, and David Jenkins Jr.

MATT PAINTER: Proud of our guys for hanging in there. Obviously we had some Keystone Cops moments in the last three minutes, but I thought our effort was really good. I thought we embraced the physicality.

Rutgers had beaten us five out of our last six games, and most of them have been really close games. Just thought they had a little bit more edge than we've had here the past three, four years in the games, just thought they were a little bit tougher than we were. Not to say we were tougher than them tonight, but we were much better than we've been. We just had to be a little grimy.

These guys right here stepped up and made big shots. David made three threes. Mason had a huge game. That's what you've got to be able to do. We have put together a team that has elite size, but then we have a lot of skill around it. That's something for me that we've just got to stay with, but then we've got to be grimy and tough on the defensive end.

So huge win for us. We've got all the respect for Coach and what he's done at Rutgers. Really amazing what he's done at Rutgers. They're obviously an NCAA Tournament team, and I think they could do some real damage. Just proud of our guys for hanging in there and making plays and competing today.

Q. David, when you were brought here, part of the reason, you said Matt liked you're ISO scoring,



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especially late in the clock. Can you walk us through the back-to-back possessions where you were able to knock down two pull-ups?

DAVID JENKINS JR.: I think honestly a little opportunity to play a little ISO ball. In the early shot clock, we run our offense. Paint says, when it's seven or eight seconds below, go and get it. I light up at that. And just go get it.

MATT PAINTER: Good coaching.

DAVID JENKINS JR.: Yes. My teammates do a good job of looking for me when the shot clock is low, so credit to them.

Q. It's been talked a lot about how you picked up the two freshmen guards through words and encouragement. To pick them up, Fletcher didn't shoot well today, Braden struggled early. How big of a moment was that for you? This is why you came here, for moments like this.

DAVID JENKINS JR.: I do what I can obviously when they're not playing well. I have no doubt in my mind next games they're going to pick it up. Fletcher and Braden are poised guards at a young age.

I just try to do what I can. When my number is called, I'm going to stay ready. It's a game to game situation, so whatever the game is, I'll be ready.

Q. Mason, at what point did you feel like you were matching or go beyond Rutgers' toughness and physicality to get control of this game?

MASON GILLIS: I don't know if there was ever a point I felt that. I just went into the game knowing they have out-competed us, out-toughed us the past couple years. I knew my mentality was I had to get on the boards and set that tone, and then just the rest is it.

Q. Mason, you've been kind of coined as a glue guy or a hustle guy. You don't always score points in that role. How did it feel to have that role score for you like you did today?



MASON GILLIS: It always feels great whenever the ball goes in, but the thing with not scoring as much is that I have to be able to do other things on the court, whether that's helping my teammates score, feeding the post to Zach, screening when I'm supposed to screen, doing what Coach Painter says. It doesn't always happen, but I try my best.

Q. Mason, you've faced them off multiple times. As Coach Painter said, it's been a tough matchup. Why in your eyes is Rutgers such a tough matchup to play against?

MASON GILLIS: They're experienced, and they just play harder than whoever they're playing. The majority of times, whenever they win, their defense is winning the game for them. Maybe not their offense.

Just like tonight. Whenever they get into their press, and teams like us, other teams struggle with it. We work on a press break here, but it's still tough going at it in the real live game. So we've got a lot more to work on, and we'll be all right.

Q. When your shooting is on, it seems to be very on. Is there something that's pregame that leads to that, or does it just happen?

MASON GILLIS: I wouldn't say it doesn't just happen. It's an everyday process. I have a routine building up to our games. In the game, I go through the same routine, warmup, and whenever we get into the game, I'm just prepared, whether that's my time to shoot the ball or whatever I need to do. Just making sure I'm ready.

Q. Mason, this was your second highest points for the year, but beyond that, great stat line. You drew a couple fouls. You were aggressive defensively. Where do you rank this game for yourself personally this year?

MASON GILLIS: I don't know. I'd put it up there with 2, 3 maybe.

Q. David, you guys have mentioned what a grind it is to have to beat Rutgers. When you walk off the court and you've beaten that grind, what's the satisfaction in the toughness that it takes to not only beat that team, but beat the style of play that they play with?

DAVID JENKINS JR.: Obviously, like you said, Rutgers is hard -- they're a very physical and hard team. Each and every day we work on what they do, as far as press break goes. But, again, going against it and how physical they

are and how they get to spots, it's difficult to kind of match that.

I think we did a really good job of -- we had a couple late turnovers, but besides that, I think we did a good job getting it past half-court and getting into our offense. It feels good to get a win against them, but obviously that's a temporary feeling because we've got the next game tomorrow, and we've got to be prepared for that.

Q. David, you're new to this team, but you're not new to college basketball. How much do you feel like this is your moment here in March to be a veteran presence for this team?

DAVID JENKINS JR.: As I mentioned before, it really is just staying ready when my number's called. I feel like half the battle is to be able to stay in the game for Coach Painter, to be able to play defensively and be able to get rebounds and do the little things, kind of a lot of things that Mason does over here.

That's kind of the role I've been trying to take on, and if the shots fall, that's good to add on. Just staying ready offensively and defensively.

Q. Matt, you guys took notice of the fact that you only had one player on the all Big Ten Team. What does a game like this tell people about your team? Because usually it's Zach and usually Braden up here talking to us.

MATT PAINTER: I just think we have good balance. I always talk about everybody's going to have to sacrifice to be able to win big, and then if you win big collectively, you get individual honors, where obviously that goes against my theory for a couple of our guys.

It's a collection of votes. It isn't one person voting. So it's a little bit different. It's a lot of people's opinion in there. And then with the coaches, you've got biased opinions. Like I'm a biased voter towards my guys, right? And rightfully so. Guys sacrifice for you. Guys play for you.

But when you win a championship by three games, I would hope people can kind of open their eyes to it. I'm not asking you guys to open your eyes to it because you've never been in my position, but the people that have been in my position, they would like to be a Big Ten champion, and some of them have and some of them haven't.

So when you kind of look at it that way, that to me kind of takes a step back because like that's how I vote at the end. I think I got to seven or eight people that I thought automatically are the top seven or eight, and then when I

went from eight to 15, a big part of what I think is who wins and who doesn't win. You can average 18, 19 points, and if you're not going to any postseason, I just can't vote for you. That doesn't mean you're not a good player, but that's the way I'm wired.

Q. That in game situation with the technical foul on Zach, what explanation did you get? Is that what you want your guys to do?

MATT PAINTER: They went to the monitor and said he hit him in the head. If they go to the monitor, he obviously must have. I don't see them making it up. Can I take that back?

(Laughter).

What does a judge say? Can you please retract that? No, you've got to trust them when they go to the monitor to be able to get that right. But it's on the other end, so it's hard for me to see.

Q. You have two very talented freshmen guards. They've had some good games, had some not so good games. Today it was veteran guards, Ethan and David, doing a lot of good things. How important is it when you get to this point of the season that you have veterans who have done this before?

MATT PAINTER: No question. David gave us a spark. He's done that three games, where he's been 3 for 3 from three. That's huge at the end of those shot clocks being able to make those tough threes.

Ethan has been great for our program. Obviously we took him out of the starting lineup, and he's played really well since then. He has the same attitude, the same approach defensively. He hits two big threes at Wisconsin for us. He hits two big threes today. It's great to see him step up and knock those shots down.

Both of those guys have been great. That's what having a great team does. It's frustrating when you don't get the minutes and you're capable. A lot of times people that are frustrated with things, normally they're just not quite ready. On a deep team, you're going to have people -- I've got guys playing under ten minutes that are really good players, but when Mason plays that way, it's going to shorten some people's minutes. And obviously Zach always shortens people's minutes.

Q. What was the problem with your guys' start tonight, and how did you kind of get your footing?

MATT PAINTER: I thought we had some pretty good

looks. We were a little careless on a couple of turnovers, but I thought we had some pretty good looks. So kind of just hanging in there. We had a couple of defensive breakdowns.

But it's part of a game. Sometimes you get off to those starts, and it's the worst thing you could possibly do, but who wouldn't want to be up 12-4? You always want to be the team that's up 12-4. You have to stay in it, stay process based in that situation.

I don't think it's anything they were doing. They have really struggled offensively, so we really wanted to get them off the arc and make it difficult for them and get them in the tough twos and keep them out of the paint. When they get the ball in the paint, they have more success, like everybody does.

Q. Going into the next game tomorrow, what are the big key takeaways from this game that you want to work on for the semis?

MATT PAINTER: Obviously just at the end taking care of the basketball. I thought, if we could take care of the basketball and pass and catch and handle their pressure, we did some good things getting it. Like we make one shovel pass and don't see that somebody's behind them, we make another pass where a guy doesn't come to the ball, make another pass, dribble it up the court across our body.

So just be fundamentally sound. You sound like you're 80 years old when you're telling them to jump stop and be fundamentally sound, but it's careless passing, and you have to be better with it. No matter what style we'll see tomorrow and what they will do, you've got to take care of the basketball. So I think that's first and foremost.

But just building on it. We had some guys that had good games, build on it. We had a couple other guys that didn't have the best game, it's all right. It's all right when you still advance. So just learn from it and get better and be ready to play. Everybody that played today will play tomorrow.

Q. Saw a lot of different combinations on the perimeter for you guys, probably more than what we've seen all year. What were you searching for, and which combination did you eventually -- did you like today?

MATT PAINTER: Just trying to more or less in our backcourt find people that can guard and then make an open shot. That balance of they have really good size with McConnell, Spencer, and Mulcahy. Sometimes we have smaller guards, and they get on them, it causes some issues with them.



But I thought our guys did a pretty good job. They didn't get us in those dribble down post-ups as much as they've gotten us in the past. But, yeah, just trying to find guys that were stingy on defense and felt good about themselves on offense. So just trying to kind of keep going.

If you were going to make a shot or make more than one shot, I was probably going to stay with you. I like seeing it go in.

Q. Coach, what can you say about Rutgers' play on both the offensive and defensive side of the ball today?

MATT PAINTER: They're very hard to go against, just for their ability to try to take passes away. We alleviate some of that pressure because they have to help so much with Zach. So they do a good job once he gets it, but they also don't want him to get it. So it's that in between right there, like as Rutgers is trying to play post defense or hold the guy in there, well, if they're holding the guy in there, then the ball should be able to be moved at that time.

So they can't do both, and that's what we try to tell our guys. When we had good ball movement and we shared it and reversed it, we have a better chance to score, and we have a better chance to get it to him. When we didn't and we got stagnant and stood or over dribbled, I think that played right into Rutgers' hands. I think they would rather see that.

The more you're dribbling, from our perspective, you've got to be constructive in what you're doing. So if you're throwing the ball back, you're throwing the ball back in to take an open shot or throw the ball inside because we play inside-outside basketball a lot.

So they realize that, but fatigue goes on, not everybody is as clued in as Caleb McConnell and Paul Mulcahy. So trying to figure out the other guys and are they actually paying attention? Because those two dudes are always paying attention. That's how we try to navigate and run stuff.

Especially Caleb McConnell, get him over in the corner, eat a nacho, and we can play four-on-four because he is so good on the ball, man. He is so good. A lot of times it's not us running stuff to certain people as much as we're running stuff away from him. Like he's really become a good player. Anytime you have that and that kind of size, you've got a chance to really play beyond college now with that emphasis on defense.

Then offensively, just not letting Cliff have any easy ones,

even though he got some putbacks and he had some things around the rim. And then Spencer, like really trying to stay with Spencer as much as we can. We knew they put Derek Simpson in there and they knew they were really encouraging him to be more aggressive.

They bogged down here the last month offensively and they haven't played as well as they did the previous month offensively, and I think Derek really gives them that guy that can break people down, get to his pullup. But we would rather Derek get to his pullup and contest it than getting in the paint. So that was one of our main focuses with those guys.

Mulcahy hits those two threes early, and that was kind of a tough break. We also just let him have one of them. More than anything, we were trying to keep the ball out of the paint as much as we could and keep them in front of us, but get them out of rhythm so they're not making any threes. But also know that Cam Spencer can't be the guy getting those good looks.

If a couple of those other guys get good looks, we can live with that. It might end up cooking our goose, but like we're just playing the percentages.

Q. How does a grind-it-out game like this against Rutgers prepare you for whoever your next opponent is going to be tomorrow?

MATT PAINTER: I think any time you can just move on and just kind of survive, you've been out there. You know, Rutgers has been out there, right? We hadn't. Even though we'd rather be in our position with the 1 seed and the double bye and more rest, I do think it kind of leads to the question that was asked to me earlier, we've had the double bye ever since we went to the double bye. So we're the only team in our league to do that.

So we've always been in this position. We know of no other position. We've had different seeds, but we've always been there. That start a little bit has been tough for us. Not always, but you just have a little bit of a feel.

Now both of these teams will have a feel too. I don't think it's an advantage going forward, but I do think it's an advantage in the Friday quarters to start. As long as you settle in, that's what we had to do. We had to settle into the game, and when those guys made some of those shots, that really helped us.

Q. Are you starting to find some of the things that maybe went a little off script here in the middle of the season, late in the season? Are you starting to find some things that you like about this team?

MATT PAINTER: We're a better defensive team than we were last year. We're not like an elite defensive team or nothing. We're better than we were. We could win some games and grind it out, and we've proven that. But just make shots. Like I'm kind of floored that we haven't made more shots, and that's what makes it exciting for me because I know we have that ability to. So I know people that are watching us will overdo Zach, and you've got to step in there.

We're not missing a lot of contested shots. We're missing open shots. The guys that are missing them, I believe in them. I think they're going to make their next one. So I think that's always a positive and good, collective thought as a staff is always support your guys that you know that can knock those shots down even when they're struggling.

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