

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Sunday, March 12, 2023

Chicago, Illinois, USA

United Center

Purdue Boilermakers

Coach Matt Painter

Zach Edey

Mason Gillis

Postgame Press Conference



**MEN'S BASKETBALL
TOURNAMENT**

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PRESENTED BY
TIAA

Purdue - 67, Penn State - 65

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with our players and come back for Coach Painter.

Q. Zach, I noticed they took the net down at one end, and then you brought the whole party down at the other end. Tell me about your necklace.

ZACH EDEY: I was walking out of the locker room to go back outside, and Painter basically tells me to go -- this is what we do after the Big Ten Conference Championship. He was telling me to cut down the net, and I cut down the net. I'm just holding it until he asks for it back.

Q. You won't give it back, will you?

ZACH EDEY: Not until he asks for sure. You've got to ask nicely.

Q. Zach, every single time you step on and off the court, you get a standing ovation from the entire crowd. How does that feel every single time it happens? Does it ever get any less crazy?

ZACH EDEY: Unh-unh, it's always crazy. I never thought this would be my career at Purdue. Credit to Coach Painter and Coach Brantley for sticking with me and really helping me develop and helping me become the player that I am. But it never gets old.

Q. Mason, how does it feel to exercise your demons from last year and be able to win both a Big Ten regular season championship and a Big Ten Tournament Championship?

MASON GILLIS: We definitely had a letdown season last year. We didn't get anything out of it. This year winning by three games, having the best coach in the country, best player in the country, being able to fight through our ups and downs. We struggled at times, but our team is very connected. The chemistry is very high. We just have great people in our program.

Whenever all of those things come together and everybody is working hard, success can only come at some time or another. So winning by three games in the conference and then winning the tourney, it feels amazing. Great momentum.

Q. If you could both elaborate a little on this, I'd appreciate it. A couple weeks ago, you lost 4 of 6, and people were saying what's wrong with Purdue? It felt like nothing's wrong. The shots weren't falling or maybe it's just turnovers or a poor half or whatever. Momentum now going in and as a Number 1 seed, how important is it for both of you?

ZACH EDEY: I think people just kind of freaked out. We were having a great season. We had the same guys the entire year. It's not like we lost anyone. Just the shots weren't falling. None of us in our program freaked out. It was kind of just the media.

We knew what we had and knew we had everything we need. It was just a matter of the shots going down, and eventually water finds its level.

MASON GILLIS: I agree. We have great coaches who are poised in many different situations, so they kept us levelheaded, and it just trickles down.

Q. What are both your first thoughts looking forward to the NCAA Tournament, get the 1 seed first time since '96 as a team?

ZACH EDEY: It's great. I think this is Paint's first 1 seed, so it's an honor to be a part of that (laughter).

It's great. He's one of the best coaches in the country. He deserves it.



MASON GILLIS: Same thing really.

Q. Zach and Mason, so you finished the season undefeated so far. Neutral courts. How important is that to have that sort of record and moving forward into obviously the NCAA Tournament, which is all neutral court?

MASON GILLIS: It just shows that no matter where we play, who we play, it's about us. We need to take care of what we need to do. Everybody needs to do their job. Usually whenever we do that on a consistent basis, we win.

Q. Zach, last time I talked to you, you had said you never cut down a net before. Now you cut down two in about a week. How important was winning the Big Ten Tournament ahead of the NCAA Tournament?

ZACH EDEY: You want to win every game. You want to win every tournament that you're in. You just want to win. Obviously it's great. It's rewarding. It kind of shows the work that I put in for the last three years. It kind of came to fruition.

It's a great feeling. Obviously we've got two nets, we've got two hats with the netting on them, we've got two trophies. It rewards the work that you're putting in and validates all of it.

Q. Zach, I don't want to make you talk too much here, but two games with 30 or more points in a row, you're stepping up in March. Is that something that you expected yourself to do? Is that a pressure that you kind of felt for yourself from the team?

MASON GILLIS: I expected it.

ZACH EDEY: Yeah, I'm just kind of out there trying to make plays for my teammates, same way I always have all season. It depends on how teams are guarding me obviously. The last two teams tried to leave me one-on-one. My job is really simple when people do that.

Q. Mason and Zach, just the contributions of David Jenkins throughout this tournament and kind of how does that help you guys just become a little bit more well rounded as you head to the NCAA Tournament?

MASON GILLIS: We love David. Coming in as a transfer and him having one year here, I think it's really hard. It would be really hard for anybody to try to fit in, play well, mesh with the guys here, the coaches here. Props to him for how he's handled it this year. I think he's a spectacular

person and a great player.

So his contribution is huge. Coach always tells us it can be anybody's game. So it's your job to be ready to do your job. And if you get the ball and you make the shots, great. If you don't, then it's just the next person up. And that's just how we play.

Q. Zach, two unrelated questions. One, will you be hearing from Mama Edey about the F-bomb? And nationally televised no less.

ZACH EDEY: Oh, God (laughter).

Q. And what did you accomplish this week that will serve you well moving forward and toward a long tournament run?

ZACH EDEY: For the first question, I don't think my mom cares at all. She probably will let out way more than me. So it's no big deal.

For the second one, obviously, you want to have that momentum going into the tournament. It's always nice to win games, always nice to cut down nets, and kind of, like I said, validate all the work you put in. So it's been great.

Q. Zach, when the All-Big Ten teams came out, you were the only Purdue player on the first three teams, but you're Player of the Year. No Purdue players on the All-Tournament team other than yourself. How do you view these awards as Purdue awards, team awards, because a lot of guys have contributions. Because you're so deep, I think they don't have stats to show for it, but you know their value.

ZACH EDEY: Yeah, we've got a bunch of guys, like I said, who step up every night. It's a different guy on our team. When you're so deep like that, kind of everyone's averaging like the numbers to put on the All-Big Ten team, but everyone can do that.

So it's like, when you have a lot of talent and the talent is doing like -- is like limiting themselves, not limiting themselves, but they know their role really well, that's when you have a really good team. We have a lot of guys who can go to a different team and average a lot of points, be on All-Big Ten teams or whatever. But they're happy we're here. We have a lot of guys who love winning, and that's what Purdue is.

Q. Kind of piggy-backing off of that, how have you guys been able to stay so close as a team? You can tell you're connected on and off the court. How has that come about this season?

ZACH EDEY: It's been a thing all year, even before the season started. It's the closest group of guys I've been around. It's one big friend group. We all hang around each other, and we're all with each other. It's great, the chemistry. You can see it on the court.

Q. Matt, when you package the regular season title, the Big Ten Tournament title, and now Number 1 seed, what's that say about your season and kind of how does that propel you going into the tournament?

MATT PAINTER: It's obviously your goals every year to win the regular season. I think that's the hardest one, especially now with 20 games. That's the most difficult. And then to be able to win the tournament, it's not -- it's set up for the 1 seed. It doesn't mean you're always going to win, but it's supposed to be set up, right? You're supposed to earn your way into the best position.

We've been able to do that and get knocked off before. It's frustrating. You used to look at it when you first started, you used to be worse, because you see you can lose and then it could help you a little bit. You can win, and it can hurt you a little bit. Or it just doesn't matter, right? So you don't know.

Your preparation is through your play, but to be able to reach our goals and to be 29-5 going into the tournament, but they know, and obviously I know, you get judged on what you do in the tournament. We've been able -- we've had a lot of success getting to that second weekend. We haven't had a lot of success getting past that, and that's what we want to do.

But you've got to stay in the moment, and we've got to wait to see who we play after the play-in game and just focus on that and keep it right there. I'm happy for our guys. Like he's pretty good, but you've got to get people to play with him and to set him up also. So like he's being modest, but he can't bring the ball up the court, right? The people have to deliver the basketball to him, and the other team is trying to stop all that.

So our guys do a good job of having patience and playing through him. Like Mason has 20 points the other night, and then he ends up with 0. It's opportunistic. They took him away. They're not going to let him beat him through all that stuff. You've got to be able to stay the course and stay with it.

I thought today was great because we had three costly turnovers at the end. We couldn't make an open shot, and we still won the game. I know we're up 17 and it looks easy, and they get going, but you still -- you find a way to

kind of get through it.

Now we need to practice right here. I don't know if you guys noticed that about the press. And we do actually practice that. But it's guys that kind of get put in some tough positions. We step on the end line, we throw one up for grabs. We allow them to double us in the middle of the court, and people have to come. We've got to help each other. We've got to do a better job of helping each other, but we get through it.

That's what we've got to be able to do. We've got to be able to go back to practice and work on some stuff and get ready for the tournament and hopefully have a lot of fun.

Q. In a sense, are you trying to win this thing in a different way? Because you've got to go many years back to find a real center, centric dominated team who won it all.

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, I don't care who you are, but I think a lot of people, like, will have a system. No matter who they get, they're going to use that system. We've always been able, when we had, like, Klein and Carson were our two best scorers, we had the record for the most threes taken and the most threes made in the history of the Big Ten. We didn't have a low post guy that year. We had a 7'3" kid who could dive, he could slip screens. It wasn't the same.

So we've always circled it around our best guys and tried to get a lot of skill with it. That's why you see 6 for 28 from three. The guys shooting them that are missing them can make them. I really believe the combination for us is having that size and having that skill together and then your decision-making that goes with it.

We just kind of curtail things to our best guy, and that's what I always tell people in recruiting because kids hear so much. In recruiting I just tell them, if you become one of our top two or three scorers, here's how we'll use you. If you don't, you're going to play a role. At least I'm telling them the truth. The other guys go out and tell them this is how I'm going to use you. And then if they're the eighth man, you don't run plays for your eighth man. We don't run plays for our fifth guy. We run plays for him.

The one thing about him that's different, and everybody goes, you go to him so much. If they call it by the rules, they're fouling him on every possession. So why shouldn't we get it to him and just try to get in that bonus early and steal points. Obviously he can make tough post-ups and he can get at the rim, and he gets offensive rebounds when you take him away.

Once again, we just try to circle that, but you've got to have people that will play roles, and that's really for our other guys, it's a tip of the hat to those guys because they really sacrifice for our team.

Q. Matt, can you talk about Braden's evolution from his first game of the season until now? Obviously didn't shoot well tonight, but from the field yesterday, really orchestrates your offense.

MATT PAINTER: He does some really good things. He has seven assists. He should have double that. He really set people up today. We just missed a lot of open shots. You make some of those shots, and the game changes. We got it to 17 with about 6:30 to go, and then the game changed.

Braden's done a really good job. He still gets frustrated when he doesn't make a shot. You look at our starting backcourt, they're 2 for 20, is that right, and we still win the game. But still good decision-making. All those guys just had one turnover. Two of the three turnovers were real costly at the end. We got four turnovers with about four minutes to go in the game.

We did a really good job in this tournament taking care of the basketball, and Braden did a fabulous job. He really did some good things. He goes 5 for 5 yesterday and then 0 for 8 today, so he balanced it out a little bit, kind of all or nothing. But he's been great for us all year. He's got to learn to keep going. Keep going, run the team, guard every possession, and stay with it. He's done a lot of really great things, but he gets frustrated when things aren't perfect.

Q. Going back to the game in Bloomington, it was kind of a rough stretch where you lost 4 of 6 and you said this team is doing all the right things. Statistically, we should be winning these games when you look at rebounds, the free throws, things like that. Now you've got the momentum. How did you stay the course and have these guys stay the course, and know that every team has a little adversity through the course of the regular season?

MATT PAINTER: Just work on what you're struggling on. Don't take a step back and give some speech to make it right. Just work on the things you're struggling with, but also try to magnify and enhance the things you're doing well. Just leave it there.

You follow us, so you know. It's a lot harder for them because they hear a lot of different things. So you've got to really kind of set it through film because film never lies. Okay, you got in that position in Bloomington because you

turned the ball over. Like don't turn the ball over. And we did it the year before and watched tape and went through it and drilled it, and we still did it again.

I don't know how many people have been in those beehives. You get 18, 19-year-old guys that have never been in that kind of a beehive going into Assembly Hall, it's difficult. Then when they came to our place, we did a really good job getting them into shots we wanted. Then we got the shots we wanted, but yet they made theirs, and we missed ours.

It wasn't as bad as it looked, and Jalen Hood-Schifino was fabulous. You go back to the drawing board and make sure you're being positive about things. Sometimes it doesn't go your way when you're doing what you're supposed to. That's the only way to go about it. If you react to everything, you're going to end up chasing your tail. You've got to stay and play to your strengths.

And never forget about the possession war. If you have a good team and you can outrebound somebody by seven and you can have three or fewer turnovers, you're going to win the game. The only way you can't is if you shoot poorly. Which we came close to doing today at the end. That's the only way, right? You're taking care of it. You're getting shots. You're getting rebounds. You're getting more possessions. They've got to shoot a lot better than you to be able to win the game. Most of the time you're going to win. They just have to understand that and stick with it, and they've done a pretty good job of it.

Q. Matt, you talked about officiating throughout the Big Ten season. Big Ten has its own kind of style of play. Do you expect that the change, the officiating in March?

MATT PAINTER: I think our officiating the past month has been pretty good. I think we had a stretch there of about four, five, six games where it wasn't. And mainly what I'm talking about is Zach. And like -- but we kind of kiboshed it, we talked about it. We went a while where we didn't talk about it, and we felt like we had to speak up because it was so egregious.

I think they kind of rallied. The two hands in the back and the knees, the obvious stuff. Just get those called. You can't mess with a shooter. Anybody who's ever officiated, I don't care how physical it is, when you shoot the basketball, you can't hit people. They were just hitting him any time and just praying on officials not calling it. You've got to get those called.

I think here the last five, six, seven games for us, they've done a really good job. I think in this tournament, they did

a really good job. I think it was called pretty straight up in the stuff that was obvious. That was all we're asking for. We're not asking for anything else. But he's a tough cover.

You can't have two sets of rules. You have one set of rules for all the NCAA and then a set of rules for Zach Edey. That's not the way it works. I'm sorry he's 7'4", 300 pounds. The rules are for everyone. When they call it that way, now it's pretty advantageous for us.

Q. Do you expect that to hold up in the Big Dance?

MATT PAINTER: I have no idea. I ref in practice. I can tell you what I do in practice. Who knows? You know what I mean?

I know this, it's supposed to be called a certain way. Last time I checked, the referees are pretty competitive, and they want to advance themselves.

Q. How important do you feel it was to do well or even win this tournament going into the NCAA Tournament?

MATT PAINTER: Any time you're competitive, you want to win the games that are in front of you. Like I talked about earlier, sometimes it simply doesn't matter. Sometimes it does matter, and it can go the other direction. You also can build off of things. That's why like there are things that reared its ugly head with Preston and taking care of the basketball in key times that we've got to do a better job of.

That's what you need to work on. You need to work on that. You also can't forget, hey, we've got to keep taking care of the basketball. Seven turnovers are still pretty good. Our average for the tournament was under ten. That's pretty good. We've got to keep it there, but we've also got to dominate the glass.

You hope to shoot better, but defensive rebounding and travel, and sometimes your jumper doesn't. We hope our jumper's packed, but that's part of basketball. If you have a cold night, can you still beat a really good team on a neutral court? That's a challenge. The great ones can do that. They can survive a tough one like today and be able to move on.

Q. Looking forward a little bit, you will take on one of the play-in game winners. Do you anticipate any extra degree of difficulty not knowing your opponent for a couple days?

MATT PAINTER: No, because I think from what I was saying, we just need to work on ourselves until we find that out. Then watch that game. I don't think there's a lot that they're going to change in two days. So just watch that

game and evaluate it and get ourselves ready before that. But the most important team in the tournament is your team.

You've still got to be able to execute and know what you're doing out on the court.

Q. Does this look or feel like a different team to you than the ones that you've brought into the NCAA Tournament? And do you have any sense of how they're going to do, how they're going to handle it after a tough situation last year with St. Peters?

MATT PAINTER: We obviously won two games in the tournament before we played St. Peters. I thought we played really well against Texas, and I thought St. Peters was tougher than us. I thought they were physically and mentally tougher than us, and they did a great job defensively. We just didn't play like we were connected.

We had to do a better job. Defensively we had to do a better job of just being organized and being together. Hopefully you can learn from that. I talked about that. I said, if Penn State has to play four games and we have to play three games, people would say we have an advantage, and I was like, I don't think we have an advantage. Like that's not -- so if we had an advantage, then why didn't we beat Iowa last year? Because they had to play four games.

It's not an advantage. You still have to go out there and earn it, and I thought we did a really good job for about 35 minutes of that and put ourselves in a really good position. But getting back to that, you still have to get back to that position. We don't automatically land in the Sweet 16. We've got to win our first game, and then you've got to move to your second game. Some styles can be different. Some other things can be different. But it's still your team and you've got to play to your strengths.

If we do get to that point -- we always talk about it. We've been upset in the first round. We've gotten beat in the second round. We've gotten beat in the Sweet 16. We've gotten beat in the Elite Eight. There's a lot of examples, when you've been in the tournament and had some success, you can talk to the guys about. Everybody earned their way here. Understand that. Everybody earned their way. Nobody slipped on a banana peel and ended up in the NCAA Tournament.

We've got to watch that game on Tuesday and -- the game's on Tuesday, right? Wednesday? Come on, man. You guys are supposed to know. I was eating chicken fingers when we got called. Wednesday?

So we'll watch it on Wednesday. We'll definitely take tomorrow off. We might even take Tuesday off. Just having your legs, we might do small things on Tuesday, but not a lot. It's important to have your legs and to be fresh and to get going.

Yeah, you have some different styles in the NCAA Tournament you can learn from those things and talk in theory, but the teams you're getting ready to face, it's important to try to keep them away from their strengths.

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