

Allstate Maui Invitational

Monday, November 20, 2023

Honolulu, Hawaii, USA

SimpliFi Arena

Purdue Boilermakers

Matt Painter

Lance Jones

Braden Smith

Postgame Press Conference

Purdue - 73, Gonzaga - 63

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by head coach, Matt Painter, Braden Smith, and Lance Jones. We'll start with an opening statement from Coach.

MATT PAINTER: I thought the start of the second half was key for us, getting some transition baskets, getting some steals. I thought we had some active hands at that time. I think that kind of set the tone for us in the second half.

The other difference I thought was their inability to make threes in the second half. They stretched us out a little bit. They were 6-19 from three in the first half and then they were 0-13 from three in the second. That really obviously helped us. I thought our guys did a good job of defending, making it difficult. Everybody always is going to try to pull Zach out and shoot those shots. He's done a much better job of getting out there.

But at some point, whether it's Nembhard or Hickman, and those guys did a good job of guarding him, you got to try to keep him out of the paint. But with that being said, you get exposed a little bit and you can give up some threes. So we had a lot of different kind of strategies at times on ball screen defense and we really wanted to go on their personnel, but we didn't want to overdo it.

But the way they started the game and those big guys knocking down those shots, it looked like it was going to be a long night for us, but our guys settled into the game and, like I said, I thought we got a little bit of momentum starting that second half and then not letting them get threes, or just getting lucky that they missed, however you want to look at it, was really key in the game, and I thought these two guys did a good job on both ends of helping us, and then Myles Colvin makes two big shots there at the end to



kind of close it out. He doesn't realize their big shots, but they were, so...

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Coach. We'll open it up for questions for the players.

Q. Lance, in the second half there, Zach and Braden both went to the bench, and you and Trey, you guys kind of won minutes with them on the bench. How were you guys able to do that?

LANCE JONES: Just by staying aggressive. Everybody's capable of having a good half or it's next man up. It could be anybody's night. With those two out, we just wanted to stay aggressive.

Q. For both. It looked like you guys both really tried to assert yourself with how you were aggressive in guarding Nembhard and the other guards in particular. As the game wore on, Lance in particular, you really face-guarded 'em close up. Was that something that just emerged over the course of the game or is that something that you guys both focused on, given Nembhard's ability to run their offense?

LANCE JONES: Me personally, I feel like to start off, I kind of was letting him get to his spots, to his pull-ups. He was getting downhill a little bit and I wanted to lock in and be more physical with him in the second half, try to get into the ball a little bit more. That kind of disrupted him coming off ball screens with the big help and just trying to be aggressive.

Q. You guys shot 46 percent from the field, but what kind of sparked the comeback? It was a 9-0 run in the second half.

MATT PAINTER: I thought just getting stops. You can't have a run if they keep scoring. We traded baskets for the one stretch, and I thought that the 9-0 run there was able to get some stops, get some misses, and be able to push it and get some easy ones. I thought our bench was great. When we subbed right there and got Zach a blow for about four or five minutes, that was huge. Trey Kaufman had a couple field goals in there. Lance got to the rim on a couple plays. I think that was key for us.



I don't know if Braden was in at that stretch or not, but he had to get -- yeah, he had to get a break at some point, Zach had to get a break at some point, and I thought our guys really played well.

Q. Braden and Lance, how much of that first four minutes of the second half kind of change the pace of the game?

BRADEN SMITH: I think just our intensity defensively helped us and, obviously, when we're all there rebounding and getting it going and playing in transition, that's super helpful, kind of get those easy baskets. Like, I kicked it up to Lance a couple times and he got to the rim and was able to make those layups. So really just being able to rebound and get the layups.

Q. Coach, yesterday, we were talking yesterday about the field and just how strong this is and how we might see a lot of these same teams from the eight here in March. Can you just talk about the atmosphere and the game itself? To me, I looked at that side of the court and it felt like a March game.

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, no question. Sometimes you'll see in some of those early games, you'll have open seats, right? If you guys go to the NCAA tournament and you go somewhere where your fans can't get there as much, or the other games, do they stay or does that city like come, and so, like, you'll have, like, sections that are just jam-packed, and then you have other sections where it's not because they will come in at halftime and they're always going to root against you if you're the higher seed. It's a lovely feeling.

But to be able to come here and see like Gonzaga and their fans and our fans and they travel, it's pretty cool. It's pretty cool. But there's no doubt it had an NCAA-type tournament atmosphere.

Q. For you guys too, this didn't feel like a November game to me. I don't know about you guys thought.

LANCE JONES: I definitely felt it was like a March game. Both of the fans, they were in it. We kind of -- we played good. We both played good. It was just a competitive game all around.

Q. I'm not great at math, but I believe Edey is now 27-30 from the free-throw line last three games. Just how unique of a big man and the work that he puts in is he?

MATT PAINTER: No question. To be able to go to

somebody and the attention that he gets and then when he does get fouled, to be able to make your free throws, it's a confidence booster. We've had it the other way with him a couple years ago where we think he has an advantage, but if he gets fouled, is that an advantage for us, especially if he's not in there shooting in the bonus. So as a coach, sometimes you can overthink certain things, especially coming down to crunch time.

But, no, he's worked really hard. He's worked really hard on his free throws, he's worked really hard on his game, so obviously it's fun to coach him.

Q. Lance, how much was this a testament to your guys' ability to wear people down and kind of keep coming and coming until things start to turn?

LANCE JONES: I feel like we stayed connected as a group. They came out, they were hitting tough shots, but we never let it get to us. We stayed together because there's only so much the coaches can say, so I feel like within the group, we stayed together, we knew it was a game of runs, and we just fought it out at the end.

Q. What's it like to have a force in the paint like Zach in there to play off of in general, but also today specifically?

BRADEN SMITH: Yeah, for sure. It's definitely an advantage. It took me awhile last year to kind of figure out how to play with him because I'm used to six-two, six-three guys. So it took me a long time. Paints was on me for that for a very, very long time.

But now that I finally figured it out, just kind of letting him work. Also, it helps us on the perimeter, us guards and Fletch, when he's getting double-teamed and all that attention, being able for him to make that pass out and get us the ball.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Braden and Lance. We'll take questions for Coach.

Q. How much was this a testament to your guys' ability to adapt to the physicality and kind of outlast Gonzaga?

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, you know, we didn't shoot the ball great, and I think a lot of times when you have some skilled guys, now that affects other parts of their game. I don't think it affected other parts of our game. I didn't think we did a great job of boxing out and rebounding the basketball tonight. We had good stretches, but we just were inconsistent.

But yeah, I think to be able to -- I wouldn't say it was like an ultimate grinder, but it was still one of those games -- probably to them it seemed like one because the way they have always scored the basketball and they have done such a great job. But we just couldn't get that rhythm until the end of getting stops and getting scores and getting that run and putting that run together to get some separation.

Q. What did you think of Braden's overall floor game and your confidence in him to just kind of always make the right play?

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, I thought it was good. We've handled a lot of drops and ball screen defense, and tonight, they were high-hedging him, and we new that was coming, obviously, we played 'em last year. I thought they did a pretty good job with it, Gonzaga did, and then I thought he started a little bit less is more. Like, you can't just attack and get past their outside shoulder every time. If they beat to you that spot, you got to be able to retreat dribble and get the ball out of your hands and get in the rotations and let other people do the work.

Sometimes he just wants total direct assist and at times he's got to be able to move it and get those hockey assists. He's good. Man, he's got a level of toughness to him, he's got some poise, he can make pull-ups, and you didn't see much of it tonight because the ball screen defense was more aggressive. But just trying to get him to make reads no matter what people are doing.

They switched on him one time and he waited and he took the guy and got to the rim a couple times when they switched. I thought he did a good job of breaking down the defense and just making the right read.

Q. You touched on that stretch when Zach came out for a few minutes in the second half and how important that was. During that stretch your team still had a large edge in points in the paint, Lance in particular. What does that say about your low post game to still come through without Zach on the floor?

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, you want to live in the paint offensively and you want to keep it out of the paint defensively, to the best of your ability. But, yeah, Trey Kaufman-Renn, he didn't get off to a good start, but then trying to get him in more minutes, I've kind of screwed up the rotations unintentionally as the game progresses because I like having him in the game when Zach's not in there. It gives us that other low post threat, even though they start together, and then we didn't get that.

And then when we started the second half, I just felt like starting Mason and getting some better spacing to kind of

see how they would handle that. If they would overdo things with their 4, then he would get some shots. But they were pretty committed to staying, even though they came in on the dribble some, one-on-one, but then once it went to Trey, we thought they wouldn't come and they didn't, so if that was the case we were going to just try to go to him and let him make some plays. I thought he did a great job with that at that stretch.

Lance got a couple plays where he got in the open court and drove. I think he made one layup and missed another layup in that stretch.

Q. Looked like they did a good job of making sure Edey didn't catch the ball real deep in the block and prevented a lot of easier baskets for him. And you'll most likely see the same thing again tomorrow with Tennessee, who can throw similar size to him. What kind of adjustments will you make in game? It feels like to me you guys did a good job of adjusting that already today. How will you make sure that the offense doesn't collapse around him?

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, they have a choice in what they're going to do. It's every team that we play. Like, you go into the game and, like, you can watch. What happens is most of the time everybody has like a comp on the other team, so you see, like, okay, they're going under, pin downs, so they're staying tight on pin downs, so their doing things.

He doesn't really have a comp. So, like, sometimes you'll watch a lot of film, like, Oh, okay, this team's played 18 games, this is how they have handled low post situations. Then you'll face 'em and it's totally different, because they feel if they do it that way he'll have the advantage.

So we have seen about everything. I've seen almost everything work at times, too. Like, a lot of people say this doesn't work and that doesn't work, it's really the fight. It's like who wants to fight to get deep position, who wants to fight to keep you from getting deep position, who wants to be active, who wants to have an understanding of who they're guarding in weak-side help. We've had games where we had struggles. Like, this isn't something where we just have success every time. But he's smart and he figures things out, and he's tough. These guys up here are unselfish and that's what make it's cool, because if he's not going to have a big scoring night, then he's a passer, and he's fine with that. As long as he has a big rebound night and then handles his business on the defensive end. But, yeah, there's no doubt there's always a little bit of a chess match in terms of what people do and how they do it.

The only thing we ask for is just, like, however you're going to call it, just call it the same way for him, too. Look, we

can't have two separate rules here.

THE MODERATOR: That will do it. Thanks, Coach.

MATT PAINTER: All right. Thank you.

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