

Crossroads Classic: Purdue vs Notre Dame

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Coach Matt Painter
Purdue Boilermakers
Postgame Media Conference



Purdue 88, Notre Dame 78

Q. Matt, there weren't a lot of turnovers. Obviously you got through the first seven or eight minutes without turning it over. Even when you did turn it over it wasn't the passing and catching stuff, it wasn't the loose with the basketball stuff. It seems like this is what your team is when they don't turn the ball over offensively.

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, you're going to get yourself better opportunities, more opportunities, because you're taking care of the ball. So we didn't have any turnovers today from our guards at all. That's quite an accomplishment when you have six guards that you play and they had no turnovers.

We had a couple turnovers from one of our 4's and then we had I think three turnovers from our 5s. I think we had a team turnover in there.

Just a good team win, and you're going to have success when you out-rebound people and you have fewer turnovers.

Q. What's different about Eric this year? He seemed like he was in pretty good command of this game offensively and then obviously did a great job defensively.

MATT PAINTER: Yeah. You know, just making the normal progress, and obviously that got put on pause because of his injury. He was really playing well in practice before games started and then he got hurt.

It takes time. His first couple games he was so-so, and he was much better in his last game, and now obviously he played better in this game than he did the previous game.

So each game he's been getting better, and that's what you want to see.

Q. Did you see anything different today in the second half from Miami, because I think it was Mason who just mentioned it, but they stopped every run when they had to stop a run, things like that. Did they just carry themselves better or did you see any lessons learned there or anything like that?

MATT PAINTER: Well, the ball went in. I think any time you make shots and you make plays, you're going to build more confidence. Any time you take -- we had such a stretch, especially late in the game, of ill-advised decisions and shots, and you have to do a better job of getting into high-percentage action and take high-percentage shots and make good decisions.

And when you don't, you're not going to score the ball much. It was one of those grind-it-out games that we didn't do a very good job grinding it out, especially late in the game defensively, but you hope you learn from it.

But today's game you can't compare to the Miami game, because when you're not shooting the ball well there's just a feeling that you have to get over so you can still be productive. Because you don't feel good about yourself when the ball doesn't go in. The ball was going in for us in this game.

Even though they made runs and they came at us, it was a different flow to this game. But it was good to see our guys answer on the defensive end and on the glass and offensively. I think you can answer runs a lot of different ways, but if you're executing offensively and you're setting your defense, you're giving yourself a chance.

They still had some looks, especially in the first half, that just didn't go down. We made a lot of mistakes, especially in the first half. Our defense was better in the second half, but it still wasn't like out of this world.

We have to do a better job of not fouling. We have to do a better job of containing the dribble. But they put you in a bind. Obviously we had to guard Wertz a certain way and we made that decision. We gave a lot of respect to everyone else. It wasn't as though we didn't disrespect him. But he is just new on the scene, and so it was like a process of elimination almost in terms of who our 5 guarded.

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And then Djogo comes and makes three threes too, and so the guys you don't guard as well, they made us pay. Good for them, they're good players, but they have a lot of people in front of them that score more and shoot more on their team, and that's just the decision we felt like we had to go in that direction.

Q. Prentiss Hubb not scoring, was that Eric, what that your game plan? What kind of went into --

MATT PAINTER: I think Eric did a good job on him. I think everybody that guarded him, and our team -- we switched a lot, so Eric guarded him the most, but everybody ended up guarding him.

Just one of those games where he didn't get his head up and he didn't get going. He didn't get a lot of cracks at it, either, but they also were trying to go to their matchup some, probably a lot more than they normally do, and it worked for them.

Wertz was very efficient, very productive tonight. But it was just one of those things that there's probably other variables that are involved that I don't know of. It's always a combination of a lot of things when somebody struggles, but I do think Eric especially and the rest of our guys did a good job on him.

Q. Just the contributions you're getting from Mason, what's kind of put him in this position where the second half he had tonight really gave you a lift there early?

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, good effort, man. We had talked about his effort, that it wasn't always leading to production, but as he slowly starts to figure it out, his ability to rebound tonight, make some plays, make a couple shots, he's a good three-point shooter, so it was good to see him knock down a couple threes. Hopefully he can get more cracks at it as we go on.

I thought Aaron did a good job rebounding the basketball. So you think about your 4 man, they get us 16 rebounds, and so that's pretty impressive. So you can help in a lot of different ways.

Q. I know you said tonight wasn't like the Miami game because of the way the game was played, but for you guys when they tied it at 53 to quickly answer the way that you did, how much is that a step forward for this team, to get back right after it?

MATT PAINTER: It was. I think it is a good step forward because they put us in a position that we've been in before,

whether it's a tie game, but it was just a different feeling because both teams were able to score the ball, where in the other game neither team were really very efficient on the offensive end, obviously.

But it was good for us to be able to answer that and then have a run of our own after they tied it. That's kind of the way games go. Games sometimes can seesaw, but we had a pretty good lead, and then like the last five minutes of the half we had some things go against our way.

Some of it was self-inflicted, but then the start of the second half we had a couple good hustle plays, and Mason was a part of those hustle plays. Him getting that rebound to start the game when Eric Hunter missed the lay-up was a huge play, and then he got another put-back in there and Trevion got another offensive rebound.

Those were some good hustle plays. But when we tied it at that point, that's another one of those, where can this go? If they get a stop and then they get a score and then take the lead, do they have a different feel to them, and we weren't able to let that happen. That was kind of a pivotal moment of the game.

Q. Notre Dame was able to get a lot of three-pointers and didn't always capitalize on them. Was that a decision that you guys made, you wanted to put emphasis on interior defense and sort of say we're going to take our chances with them out on the perimeter?

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, we had some breakdowns. Any time somebody scores 78 points, that's a lot of points, we had breakdowns. Like I said earlier, they had some good looks, and I think they were going to live with in that first half that just didn't go down.

We were trying to do our best to knock them out of any action by switching a lot, but we knew we were going to get into some vulnerable one-on-one match-ups with their ability to break down some of our guys.

And with that, we wanted to have help and then stop the ball off of certain guys and then be able to bounce off of other guys and get back to shooters, and then just kind of help the helper and try to slow that rotation down. I know it's hard to really explain everything.

That was really our thought process with it. We knew we were in a bind and Wertz had an advantage, but we just didn't feel comfortable starting the game with Trevion when they went small. I'd rather Wertz go off than Laszewski go off, to be frank with you.

I know that might sound crazy, but I just didn't want him to have that matchup, and then my biggest guy is constantly chasing three-point shooters out there. But it ended up happening anyway, just with a different guy.

But we wanted him to prove it, and obviously Wertz proved it, and kudos to him. He's a good player.

We just felt like if we could bottle up Hubb and make it hard for him and try to stay home on the other guys and not let them have any pick-and-pop stuff, trying to get them to score in a different way, which they did, I think they did some good things.

We just were able to -- I just thought our offense was better than their offense is what it gets down to. We shot the ball better than they shot the ball is the way we kind of look at it.

Q. That run Notre Dame had to end of the half, is that as simple as Notre Dame's shots started falling?

MATT PAINTER: Well, I think they made some shots and then we put them to the free-throw line, too. Zach got a couple fouls, so that transaction there, it seems like we'd always have something. We get an illegal screen away from the ball on one possession, and then we get a post-up flagrant one foul and then we foul a couple other times and put them to the free-throw line, and they make a couple plays.

So a combination of that, there's a run in itself. There's probably 10 points right there. We just have to do a better job of not fouling. We have to do a better job of not fouling people away from the basketball or fouling people on post-ups. But we just have to keep working on it.

Q. What is the biggest thing that you can take from this game now going into Iowa?

MATT PAINTER: That we didn't turn the ball over. You know, you give yourself a chance. People are like, Well, you guys shot the ball a lot better. You gave yourself more of a chance. You had a lot of possessions. They had a lot of possessions, we had a lot of possessions. You're just giving yourself a chance to play the game.

Like when you're constantly turning the basketball -- you have 23 turnovers or 16 turnovers, it's no fun to watch. It's no fun to coach. It's like, Take care of the basketball. It's like a pillar of the game. It's just like, Be able to go fast and be under control.

No one is hindering you or handcuffing you by saying don't turn the ball over. It's just something you have to be able

to do. That's what I'm taking away from it is that we've got a bunch of guards that can play this game that are good shooters, that are good passers, that are good decision makers, but at times our shooting percentage goes down because we're turning the ball over or we're not making good decisions.

And today we did. We did a much better job, and you see the results.

Q. After the Miami game you had a quote about the mental toughness and discipline. You said it was zero from your upperclassmen or at least the guys who had played before, and then you have a game like you did today where the upperclassmen contributed in a lot of different ways. I know since that Miami game you've won three straight, but how pleasing was it to see the effort, the contributions that you got from Eric, from Trevion?

MATT PAINTER: Go look at that junior class the last three games. Go look at Sasha Stefanovic, go look at Aaron Wheeler, go look at Trevion, and Eric Hunter, four guys, three games. They all four at their worst in those are solid, they're solid to great, and that's what we need. Every night is not going to be your night, but every night you can guard. Every night you can take care of the ball. Every night you can have a great attitude.

And that's what they've done, and they weren't doing that before. Now, one of the guys was just coming back, but they weren't doing that. You have to get that from people that have played before. It's winning basketball. In the last three games, all of those guys -- Trevion has had a good attitude when I put him on the bench; Aaron has had a good attitude when I put him on the bench.

That's what you need. That's what you need. You need guys with good attitudes, good effort, good energy, especially in this environment. I think all of those guys have -- in the last three games provided leadership through their action, and it's been great.

Q. How do you get that, though? Two years ago we were having the same press conference after you lost to Notre Dame and you went on a tangent about what you needed to see differently from your team, and then obviously look how that season ended. How do you get that? It just seems like it's easier said than done. Do you say something, do something as a coach?

MATT PAINTER: You're never completely have that finished product. Nobody ever does. You're always working on it. You could argue we're talking about culture without saying it. You're always working on your culture.

You're always getting better. You're always improving. You're always deferring to others, not enabling your players. You're always working towards helping them individually, but never at the expense of the team.

And so you just keep working at it. You just keep working like -- this game right here, hopefully we can build on this right here, but who knows if this game was better for Purdue or better for Notre Dame. Like who knows. You just don't know. I hope it's the best for both of us, and now it can expose them on some things, but like they exposed us today on some things.

Don't act like this was a perfect game. They exposed us and we have to be better. So we have to be mature and understand that we've got to get some things fixed. But we've also got to -- once again, I thought overall we played pretty hard. I think we can play harder.

We've got some young, youthful guys that are talented that just don't understand yet what it means to be disciplined on both ends of the court. They just don't get it yet. But yet they're pretty good, and you've got to try to use their talents and just continue to try to grow and hopefully play through some of those mistakes.

The more they can learn on the fly, the more they're going to make me have to make tough decisions. I'd love to make tough decisions on all those guys, you know, start to get at a very high level in terms of their production, because that's great. Because right now we've got a couple guys that can play that don't play a lot of minutes but yet their production is not off the charts yet. It just isn't.

Like Sasha Stefanovic's production is pretty good. He's pretty reliable. Eric Hunter's production is pretty good. He's pretty reliable. Brandon comes and goes. But for where he's at as a redshirt freshman, he's in a pretty good spot even though he's had some struggles.

But those other guys, Isaiah Thompson gave us some good minutes tonight. I thought Ethan Morton did a couple good things when he got in there. He didn't play as much. Jaden Ivey made a couple really nice plays. So now those guys need to keep learning and just getting better.

I think we have a lot of growth on this team, and that's what I'm excited about.

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