

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Grambling State vs Purdue

Thursday, March 21, 2024

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

Purdue Boilermakers

Matt Painter

Zach Edey

Fletcher Loyer

Media Conference

Q. Fletcher, one year later, how much older do you feel and how much have you learned about basketball in the last 365 days?

FLETCHER LOYER: Yeah, obviously learned a lot. Took a hard loss, but ultimately I think it makes you stronger. It gave us a lot of room for improvement this summer in the workouts, in the lifting and conditioning, and just team getting ready to go. I think it's been a special year, and I think we're ready to prove what we've learned.

Q. Zach, what's the mentality going into this game for you and the team?

ZACH EDEY: I think our mentality is come in and win the basketball game. I think we want to execute, we want to prove people wrong. I think a lot of people on this team have that game in the back of our mind, and that's not who we are. That's not what we're defined by. I think a lot of people on the team want to show that's not the truth.

Q. What does it mean to be playing here in Indianapolis and be playing so close to campus?

FLETCHER LOYER: Yeah, it's special. It's something we've worked for, something we've earned, to be here in the Midwest, the No. 1 seed. It's really cool. It's something we won't take for granted to hopefully have a sold-out crowd with a bunch of Boilermaker fans in the crowd. It's something really cool and something we're looking forward to.

ZACH EDEY: Yeah, same here, kind of same sentiments. It's really cool to be close to Purdue, be close to where



we're living at and probably have a lot of fans at these games.

Q. Zach, how much do you think about, given your personal career, what you've accomplished so far? How much do you think about your legacy and what this run could enhance or what it will do for your legacy when it's all said and done?

ZACH EDEY: It's not something I really focus on. I just try to every game play my hardest, give my all, and however that defines my legacy is how it defines it.

I wouldn't want to win this for my legacy, I want to win this for Coach Paint, I want to win this for all my teammates, I want to win this for myself, I want to win this for my family, whoever has supported me. It's not just because of my legacy.

Q. Fletcher, how is this team different than last year's team?

FLETCHER LOYER: Yeah, I'd say we're hungrier than we were last year. Last year we won the Big Ten and the Big Ten Tournament, something that's very hard to do, and we still know that's not enough. We know winning the regular season this year putting in all that work to fight back and win another ring, it's huge but it's not what we want to do. We want to win a National Championship.

I think with the addition of Lance Jones and some freshmen, Cam and Myles coming in, too, we're a different team but we're also hungrier and we're going to go out and play harder and prove that to people.

Q. Zach, you've obviously had a really good relationship with the guards the last couple years. What do you see is different the most with him and Braden 35 games later compared to last year?

ZACH EDEY: I just think when you go through a full season, you learn a lot of things. Your body learns a lot of things, your mind learns a lot of things. He won't get as tired kind of the midway point. He's fine now. His body has been through it, his mind has been through it. He



understands stuff like he wouldn't understand last year. He's more confident in himself. He believes in himself. We all believe in him.

We have the utmost trust in him to take the big shot at any point to play in the big games and give him the ball. I think it can't be understated the kind of jump that he's taken this year.

Q. Zach, obviously you've been a part of several tournament runs for Purdue. Are previous years something you guys think about when preparing, or do you view this year as a completely new slate?

ZACH EDEY: It's a new team, so I wouldn't compare it to any other teams I've been on. We might have a lot of the same roster pieces but we have Lance, we have Cam, we have older guards. It feels like a new team to me. So I would never compare it to another run.

Q. Fletcher, given what happened last year, as you get closer to this game, what is the mentality like as you get a chance to get back to where you were a year before? What's the mindset like as you get closer and closer to tip-off?

FLETCHER LOYER: Do everything you can to get your body right, your mind right, your team right to win the game. There's nothing we're looking past. We're not looking anything past Grambling State, not thinking who we'd play next. We're getting ourselves ready to play Friday night.

Q. Zach, you referenced that you want to show people what the truth was of what this team is, what this program is. How much has this been a talking point over the course of workouts and throughout the last year and making sure that you show people what the program is really all about? How much has that been a talking point amongst y'all, as y'all got ready for the upcoming season and went through the season?

ZACH EDEY: I think it's kind of something you don't need to talk about. I think everybody just understands who we are. Everybody understands what this game is. We've talked about it a little bit, but it's something that kind of goes unspoken. Everybody is understanding what this is.

Q. Fletcher, have you guys had a chance to look at Grambling State tape and what are some things they do well?

FLETCHER LOYER: Yeah, we got to watch their play-in game last night and this morning watched quite a bit of their offensive and defensive clips. You see a lot of drives

to the rim. They like to get to the paint. They like to turn you over. They like to create mismatches out on the open floor.

Really it comes down to us taking care of the ball and rebounding, two very simple things, two things you get taught in second grade playing basketball. Two things that are going to win you a March Madness game.

Really just getting ourselves ready, knowing what they like to do, and being ready to go come tip-off.

MATT PAINTER: Really excited. Our guys are looking forward to playing our first game and getting out there and competing. We've waited a full year after sitting in it for the full year, but we've done a great job of getting better and working and being functional, and obviously winning our league by three games was quite an accomplishment for our guys after doing it back-to-back years.

But this is what we've been waiting for. We've been waiting to get out here and compete and have fun and win some basketball games.

Q. I asked Fletcher earlier about what he thought he had improved on the most in his 365 days since last year being a sophomore from a freshman. What is it you see most in Fletcher and Braden over the course of this year that makes them so much better now compared to a year ago?

MATT PAINTER: Just all around. Obviously for us, I think the biggest thing from an offensive standpoint is our ability to make shots as the second-best three-point three-point shooting team in the country behind Kentucky. But I think going from a freshman to a sophomore, you see that's the biggest jump, especially for guys that play a lot as freshmen. You think you're 100 percent ready, and you're just not.

I think learning from some of those moments, tough losses, going into tough venues, now you're just a little bit more prepared to face elite competition, even though in non-conference the previous year we were undefeated just like we were this year, but we played a really tough schedule.

I think Braden has done a fabulous job of running our team. I think Fletcher has really embraced stepping up and doing a lot of little things for our team, making shots when they come his way.

But more than anything, just being better at doing little things to help our team win.

Q. Coach, what are you doing to prepare your team X's and O's-wise, and what are you doing to prepare them mentally?

MATT PAINTER: Well, X's and O's, just trying to be functional from a basketball standpoint. Like sticking to your roles defensively, whether that's ball screen defense or handling the actions of the other team. A lot of times what happens in competitive sports is people take advantage of when you break down. Don't break down. Do your job.

When you stay consistent with doing what the rules are for us defensively, you don't surprise anybody else out on the court. When you just kind of start doing your own thing, that's where -- you're playing guesswork. You're not understanding what's going on.

I think for us, that's so important that we stick to our rules.

Then offensively we're one of the best offensive teams in the country. We're a great offensive rebounding team. We're a great three-point shooting team. We've got a horse in Zach Edey down low that people have to do some things differently than they do against regular opponents. So you'll go and watch teams and they won't double the post at all, and they might stay that way. If they stay that way we're going to throw him the ball every time and go right at them. If they double, a lot of times they're not experienced in those doubles.

We've spent a lot of time playing through that, but play a lot more ball screen action this year and people can defend that switching or hedging or drop coverage and the coverage coverage can be higher or lower. When you get into that, whatever they give you, you take. As long as that's yours. Each guy is a little bit different in terms of what their strengths and weaknesses are. That's what we really talk about. If they're going to give you the pull-up, take the pull-up. If they're going to give you the lay-up, take the lay-up. If they're going to allow you to throw back and go in, do that. But if not move the basketball, move bodies and just end up taking what they give you and feel good about that and then get on the glass.

That's really been our focus more than anything, to stay process based and to run our stuff.

Q. What do you think it means to you and your team that you're playing your first-round game in Indianapolis, and what do you expect in terms of buzz in the city having you guys here?

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, we really focus just on our play, but it is pretty cool for us to be a 1 seed last year and then

to fight to get back here to be a 1 seed and to be able to play in Indianapolis and to be able to play in front of your fans. But we've got to do our part. I always say when you have a good fan base or you have a full house, you still have to play well for that to be an advantage. If you don't play well, they're not an advantage because they have nothing to cheer about.

We're hoping to do our job and give them a lot to cheer about.

Q. What do you think it would do for you guys mentally to -- let's say check all your boxes and have a convincing win in the first round now that you're back here. Would there be a sense of relief, do you think?

MATT PAINTER: I don't think it's a sense of relief more than it is of just playing well and feeling good about that. I think anytime -- you have an awful practice, and as a coach I think all coaches would understand this, you walk away and you wonder if you can beat anybody when you have an awful practice. Then you'll just have a great practice and wonder, I don't know if we can get beat. Those are natural feelings that you have. You know you're normally somewhere in the middle there.

But when you play games and you win, especially on neutral courts, and we've done this in exempt tournaments, we did it with when we went to Elite 8 in 2019, you just feel a little bit better about yourself and you build that confidence. The problem is the team you're playing did the same thing, also.

But I think that's more than anything of just getting that first win and getting some confidence and trying to keep go in the same direction.

Q. We had a chance to talk to Steve Lutz this morning, and just wanted to get your thoughts on him being here and in the NCAA Tournament his first year and both of you winding up being in the same building.

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, a little short of amazing for what he's been able to do. He took a job at a low major school, Corpus Christi, and they went to the NCAA Tournament his only two years there and to take the Western Kentucky job and to be able to go to the tournament right away.

He's a good guy and worked really hard for us, and he's helped us get here. He's the one that recruited Zach Edey, so he should probably get all the camp money. But he worked really hard. Very relentless worker. And a guy that's put a lot into his craft, and just very deserving. He's one of those assistants that worked to get that opportunity, now he's made the most of it at two different places.



Happy for him and happy for Brandon Newman. Brandon has really worked hard, and now he's at their place, but Brandon has been in college for five years and been to five NCAA tournaments. Happy for him.

Q. You've mentioned those defensive rules especially. Seems like you really instilled that in the program. How confident are you in your guys with what you've seen this year and their growth in the past year that they will be able to follow those rules?

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, we're not perfect. Great teams and great players will get you off your rules. But they challenge you more schematically than anything of just sticking with your rules.

So when I say sticking with your rules, everybody has -- like post defense rules, everybody has ball screen defense rules, and especially in relationship to the basketball how you handle screens away from the ball.

So can you stick with those -- some people will mix things up coming out of time-outs. We'll do a little bit of that. We deal with the post differently, and we deal with the ball screen differently, and Zach kind of is -- because of him and his elite size, we like to funnel some things to him. But we also like to protect him because we love to see him stay on the court.

So it goes back and forth for us as a staff in terms of how we set the guidelines for each game. 80 percent is about probably the same, and then the 20 percent changes on how we feel in terms of the opponent.

But there's days I feel like great about it, we're a top 20 defense, and then there's other days where you've got some river boat gamblers that get off the rules a little bit. That's what's cool about having a deep team. Sometimes you're stuck and you feel really good. You play nine, you probably should play eight and you probably should trust six in those scenarios. Because that's what it gets down to, it's trust level with them. But that's what's cool about a deep team, if somebody wants to get away from some of the things that we do, you can just go with somebody else.

Q. Do you feel like more casual college fans should be more aware of Zach given how good he's been for you nationally over the last couple years?

MATT PAINTER: Well, I think more than anything, he's different, so it's hard for them to relate and understand just how good he is and how tough he is and how physical he is. Like the people that complain about him getting fouls or whatever aren't the people that are guarding him because

they know they can't guard him. Like the people in our league that complain the most are the ones that can't guard him.

So it gets down to the coaches and the players complaining all the time, and it's just really reverse psychology, that's all it is, to try to get them to say look at the fouls, look at the fouls. It's one of the dumbest things that coaches say, the fouls are 7 to 2. Well, one team fouled seven times and one team fouled twice. It's not dumb. But through 100 years of basketball, somehow you've all sat in games and said it's 7 to 2, I bet you this evens up real quick, and it evens up, and you're like, see, I'm a prophet, I know what I'm saying.

Why it evens up is really not officiating, it's really not basketball. It shouldn't even up or it should even up, if that's what happens. So you shouldn't have predetermined thoughts as officials it has to even up. He's getting fouled every single play.

I think people don't like that piece of it, but he's elite and he's different, and so I think that's why he gets a lot of push-back.

Q. Secondly, you referenced y'all have been waiting for this opportunity since last year. What's the hardest part about having to wait so long to get back here?

MATT PAINTER: It's hard to wait for a night game, to be honest with you. Like when you wake up, you just want to play the game and let's get it over with. We're ready, they're ready, let's compete. You've got to wait all day to play a game. For us when we obviously lost that game last year and the year before, even though we lost it in the Sweet 16, it was still a difficult loss for us because we just felt with our turnovers we did ourselves in.

When we take care of the basketball, we put ourselves in such a good position, we're a good shooting team, we're a good offensive rebounding team. Obviously we have Zach. We play a lot through Braden.

That's probably been the hardest thing for us, but I think we've improved. I know we've improved. We're a better basketball team. We're a more skilled basketball team.

But from a competitive standpoint, like this is what you want. You want to get back to where you are. It's hard to get back in the position that we were, but we've been able to accomplish that, and now we're excited about playing.

Q. You talked about Zach and how no one can guard him, no one can prepare for him. Is that an edge for you guys in a tournament like this?



MATT PAINTER: We'll see. Obviously that's always been -- if you can win, you're fortunate enough to win your first game to move to that second one, who has the advantage with the one-day prep? Do they do some things differently that cause you problems or do you do things differently that's going to cause them problems? Obviously I can't speak on it because we haven't won that game and you don't know who your opponent is going to be.

But from a coaching standpoint, coaches talk about that a lot. Like it's really going to be difficult for this particular team to prepare for in that second day because you don't have enough time.

I think that holds true sometimes and sometimes it's a non-factor.

Q. What would it take for you guys to win a National Championship this year?

MATT PAINTER: We'd have to win six straight games. Taking care of the basketball would be No. 1 in my book. Sorry about being a smartass. Taking care of the basketball, making your free throws, and then just being grimy on defense. They just can't do whatever they want to do, and so just to have that balance of those three things, there's more things to the game, but have those three things.

When we've taken care of the basketball, I used to always talk about this and say you really give us a great chance to win. When we've taken care of the basketball, we've won. It doesn't mean that we can't play and have 10 turnovers and lose the game because we can, but we haven't done that. If we've had 13 turnovers or less, we're 23-0. So I always hang my hat on that.

If you go look at the games we've lost in the NCAA Tournament, you look at the games we've lost this year, which are four, we've had 14 or more turnovers in those games. So don't turn the basketball over and give yourself a chance. Like I say, it's not ironclad, but from a numbers standpoint, it's been that way so far.

Q. Last Friday you talked about the turnovers after the Wisconsin loss. When you had a chance to look at them, was there any sort of common thread to what happens in your games, the games you have more than those 14 turnovers?

MATT PAINTER: Not really. Not really. Like some have been more -- obviously the live ball turnovers hurt you more than anything. But not really. One game against Ohio State, Zach got stripped a lot, and that's something

that's very uncommon. He doesn't get stripped very much at all. He does a good job protecting the ball.

He gets into a different situation because every big guy who's ever played has been told to chin the ball. Well, if he chins the ball and gets his elbows out, and then he turns he's going to elbow you right in the head. So he has to lower his elbows when he turns or he has to arc it over your head, which he does a really good job of doing that when he goes to his post move.

But the live ball ones, if they're going to score off your turnovers, it's going to be hard for you to win. Sometimes you'd rather just see him travel or double dribble or throw the ball, punt the ball in the stands. Now we can go set our defense. When you do that, the score doesn't change and now they've got to attack a set defense.

When you get those live ball turnovers and they've got primary breaks, 4-on-2, 3-on-1, you're going to lose a lot of those. They're going to score or you're going to foul an awful lot.

That's really been our key more than anything is just take what the defense gives you and don't always feel like you've got to hit a home run. Get the ball moving, get the hockey assist. You don't always have to get the direct assist.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports.