

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

Friday, March 22, 2024

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

**Purdue Boilermakers**

**Matt Painter**

**Zach Edey**

**Braden Smith**

Media Conference

Purdue 78, Grambling 50

**MATT PAINTER:** Congratulations to Grambling for having a great year. Really put us in some binds in the first half. I thought with their playmaking and I thought our ball screen defense had to make some improvements in the second half. But just a well-coached team.

Obviously it's hard to play a game on Wednesday and then turn around and play a game on Friday. But I just have a lot of respect for what they were doing, just their organization and the stuff they run and what they do.

But I thought our guys were really good in the second half defensively. We did some good things, stayed under the ball better. Zach got some blocks, dominated the glass. He had 21 rebounds and they had 23, so it's pretty big stat line for him. Really wanted to get him established.

Braden really helped us to start the game making those three threes, and obviously having 10 assists and no turnovers is a pretty good stat line for us. It was just good for us to kind of get kind of the jitters out, a little bit of experience of playing.

I think we have three guys that that was their first NCAA game, Miles, Lance and Cam, so it was really good for those guys. I thought they did a really good job for us.

Just excited. Obviously no matter who we play in the next game, it's going to be a really good opponent that we're going to have to play well to beat. So just looking forward to watching this game and getting ready for the second round.



**Q. Zach, after the way you saw Grambling defeated Montana State by attacking their bigs, was there something you were expecting offensively out of Grambling during the first half to open things up?**

**ZACH EDEY:** Yeah, we knew they had some bigs that liked to post-up. Jalen Johnson liked to post-up. You saw him trying to make some shots.

We kind of knew their game plan might be to get me in foul trouble. I was doing my best to stay legal, keep my hands up and stay out of those predicaments they were trying to put me in.

**Q. Zach, talk about that guy to your left (Smith), about how he just makes this team go.**

**ZACH EDEY:** I mean, 10 assists, no turnovers, that's an insane stat. I don't think people realize that. People don't realize how much that helps a team. He's under control all the time. He's ready. We ask him to do a lot, and he steps up and delivers every time.

**Q. Matt, I thought you did a great job of attacking Grambling in the middle from the start. I think you wanted to dictate the game that way, correct? Talk a little bit about Kaufmann-Renn and the job Heide did?**

**MATT PAINTER:** Yeah, I thought Cam gave us some really good minutes on both ends. Used his athleticism, got out on the break. Braden made that one pass to him for a lob, but I thought he did some good things defensively more than anything.

I didn't think Trey had a very good first half. I thought he was touching and hitting a lot of basketballs but not getting them. I thought in the second half he was just more sure of himself and just played the game strong and got rebounds. Really helped us. Really helped us get off to that start.

He's a threat down there. We need him to be a threat on the block, especially when they're giving so much attention to Zach.

**Q. You guys were super aggressive in the second half defensively. How does that build confidence for you guys going into the rest of the tournament?**

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, I didn't think our attention to detail was great in the first half. They got away from us a little bit, got some space. We wanted to keep them off the side to kind of open up. We wanted to try to box them in as much as possible. They were doing a good job when we did that of getting that separation. In the second half I thought we did a much better job with that.

For us, we play a lot of position defense, and we're trying to keep the ball out of the paint. If you're going to play position defense, you've got to keep the ball out of the paint because that's the whole purpose of it. Our guys did a really good job in that second half.

If we can't get stops, we can't run, and right as we had that start of the second half where we got stops eight out of nine possessions, it really allowed us to push the basketball and then be able to flow into motion if we didn't get something in transition.

**Q. Braden, you started the game very hot. You had three three-pointers in the first eight minutes of the game and then with 12 minutes to go in the second half, I sent out a tweet that you hadn't scored since and you immediately scored right after that of course. Did you consciously switch into the assist mode instead of the scoring mode?**

BRADEN SMITH: I just think I had some threes there in the second half and they didn't fall. I was like 0-for-6 right there in the second half. I think just trying to get the other guys the ball -- I mean, we pushed it in transition and we had probably six or seven possessions in a row where we just kept going. I found Cam on a couple of them, just shooters running.

Just being able to have that makes it easier for me, and I just tried to get them the ball.

**Q. Braden, you were pounding the ball to Zach early on all game long, but they were singling him. That's obviously the method, if they're singling Zach, you're going to throw it to him until they stop?**

BRADEN SMITH: For sure. Personally I'd send two or three guys. We just try to get him the ball and then he makes really good decisions, whether that's him scoring or him kicking it out to us, and we'll make the play.

**Q. 30 and 20, something like that, whatever you did, to do it on this stage, you've done a lot of things, but 30**

**and 20 is pretty rare anywhere, but can you expound on when you look at the box score, what do you think when you see those numbers?**

ZACH EDEY: You say it's like a big stage, but it's just basketball at the end of the day. I kind of came out, tried to set the tone, tried to play as hard as I can, trying to send a message to the team, we're here, we're ready, we're good. Send a message to the country like we're good. That's kind of how it played out.

**Q. Zach, y'all waited a year to kind of get this moment back, to be the 1 seed again. What was it like to be able to have the kind of win you did and to have the performance you did, given all of the waiting to get back here?**

ZACH EDEY: We just did what we were supposed to do. I don't think anybody on this team wants any praise for it. We don't expect any praise for it. We did what we were supposed to do and we're on to the next game now.

**Q. Zach, obviously were you anticipating something Grambling was doing defensively in order for you to get into the groove you were able to get into?**

ZACH EDEY: Yeah, we knew they were a team that didn't liked to double. We weren't sure if they were going to try throw in a double on a two-day scout. They tried to stay one-on-one, and you saw it, we got the ball to me a lot.

**Q. Matt, Grambling was doing a nice job of hitting that mid-range game. What goes into making that shot difficult on the other team?**

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, I thought they were getting us a little bit too much space for us in the first half. They don't shoot a high volume of threes, and that's what we wanted. We want tough twos. Analytically it just makes sense, if you can't stop their lay-ups, dunks and rhythm threes, trying to get as many contested tough twos as possible.

One thing about it is if you're staying out of rotations and they're getting tough twos, you've got good rebound balance. So it just trickles into your transition offense.

You just can't get frustrated. Sometimes guys they'll get frustrated offensively when they take good shots and they miss them and they shouldn't because it's a good shot and they'll make a good number of them, but when guys take tough shots, especially when they're twos and they're from 17 feet that's contested, you shouldn't get frustrated about it. Just keep doing it, keep making them shoot them, because the law of averages is going to say that they're going to miss their fair share.

**Q. Matt, you talked all year about working to get back to this exact spot. How did you think your team handled it now that you got back here?**

MATT PAINTER: I think they were fine. The hardest thing is just being asked questions more than anything. I know you're just doing your job because it happened, but for us, we just want to practice and watch film and have a good time and get ready for the games. But it's part of it, and it's part of going through it.

I think anytime you have adversity, it can make you stronger, and I think it's made us more mentally tough as a team, but you've got to play to your strengths, and the one thing that happens is different opponents are going to try different things and try to keep you away from your strengths, and it's just kind of part of it.

But we'll see here in this next game. But no, just the handling everything throughout the year, for us, we played one of the best schedules in the country, we're in one of the best leagues in the country. So we've been challenged, we've been playing, but we know this is what we get judged on. But you can't forget to have fun and you can't forget to go out there and compete and lay it on the line.

Like Zach said, it's a basketball game. Go out there and have some fun with it. We've worked real hard to be here, but keep everything in perspective.

**Q. Talk about having fun, Carson, local kid, comes in off the bench, and even knocks down a three. Some of your thoughts on a special thing like that happening in a stage like this?**

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, it's really hard especially when you sub in with guys that are cold. I told him don't do anything stupid when you get out there because you don't have a guy like Braden who's been out there for two hours running around to help you. You've got five guys that are cold. Move the basketball, pass the basketball, get it going a little bit.

You try to do too much and you've been sitting there -- they've been sitting there like you guys have. Think about if you just got thrown into a game and you had to go do something and it's a hard thing. But anytime those guys get to play, they're great. They help us so much in practice. They do a lot of things.

But for Carson obviously being from Lafayette, it's pretty cool. I played with his dad in college, and for him to come here and be able to play at Purdue and be able to go there

-- he'll do anything to help our program. So for him to get rewarded and knock down a three in an NCAA Tournament game is pretty cool.

**Q. Matt, as far as Braden's play from last year to this year, what's been his biggest improvement?**

MATT PAINTER: I think more than anything, not really an improvement as much as just kind of an approach to try to score the basketball. We need him to score the basketball. He gets frustrated when he misses. He's had some games where he's missed 10 shots in a game, and it frustrates the s--- out of him, and we're constantly telling him, you've got to shoot the basketball, you've got to shoot the basketball.

Depends on what people do. If we can get him more in transition, sometimes if people want to hedge high, getting outside of it or getting people in drops to get to his pull-up. So you're going to have more opportunities depending on how they want to defend him and they want to defend us. But just trying to keep him aggressive, I think that's the No. 1 thing more than anything, kind of treating it like high school.

There's a lot of guys you coach you don't want to say that to, like don't treat it like high school. But for him, that's part of his superpower is really trying to be aggressive in those moments.

**Q. Have you had a chance to look ahead at all at Utah State or TCU, and if you have, what are the main differences between those two?**

MATT PAINTER: I have not. I mean, I watched TCU during the season a couple times just randomly, but I wouldn't know. I keep it one game at a time.

Now, those guys go if you want to go interview my assistants, they go ahead and watch, but I don't let them talk to me about a game. We focused on Grambling State.

**Q. Braden and Zach, you've worked incredibly hard to pick your location for this game. How advantageous was it to be in front of this crowd in Indianapolis?**

MATT PAINTER: It was great, especially when they got into the stands. Like you're starting a game and people are filing in, it's kind of surreal. You would think you start a game and everyone is going to be there. It's like a major city crowd, like going to LA to an event or people show up by the fourth inning.

No, I always say that because we've had -- how many sellouts have we had, like 72 sellouts in a row. I don't

know the actual number. But I always talk about it, like we have great fans but we've got to give them something to cheer about. You can be in Indianapolis, you can have all your fans you want, but if you don't give them something to cheer about they can't help you. So you've got to play the right way and you've got to be tough on defense, and that's our goal, to go out there and we've put ourselves in a good position, but you've still got to do the little things and execute and help that out.

Now you have an advantage when you play the right way and you do things the right way.

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