

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal - Purdue vs Houston

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Lucas Oil Stadium

Purdue Boilermakers

Coach Matt Painter

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference

Q. I know there's more than one way to skin a cat and get to the Sweet 16, but I saw a graphic posted where Purdue is the only school where all five starters are at their original school. Do you take any pride in that? What do you think about that?

MATT PAINTER: Well, first of all, we're somewhere where there's good high school coaches and there's good players. I think that's probably the number one thing for us is that there's a lot of guys here in the state of Indiana for us to recruit. If you have a good job, that's normally the case, right?

But we've just stayed the same path as we have before. Like we've taken transfers before. Even though we've taken two people out of the portal in four years, probably the fewest amount in the country, but we still took someone out of the portal that was a big piece for us last year going to the Final Four in Lance Jones.

We're going to get a guy or two here in the portal in the spring.

It's just kind of the way in terms of how you recruit and how you go about things. Probably the fact that we've been able to keep guys sometimes kind of blows your mind because it's hard, right, if you have 13 guys on scholarship, to keep everybody happy.

But education has as been a part of our equation. So I think when guys maybe don't play as much or don't start or get their minutes or whatever, you really gotta think, I'm going to transfer and go somewhere else and not get a degree at Purdue.

So the two guys that left us last year, I made them a year before tell me if they wanted another year. I wasn't going to wait till the spring to be in limbo. I gave them a couple



weeks and said, hey, just let us know. But Mason got two degrees from Purdue. Ethan had already graduated and was working on a Master's.

Both of those guys then had a change of heart after the season but they wanted to play another. But I had already used those scholarships. Makes more sense to do the work in the fall than the spring because now you see so many guys out here getting recruited with crazy money being thrown their way.

It will be interesting to see where we go from here, though, because there's no doubt that we're going to use the portal. We're probably just not going to use it as much as everybody else.

Q. This will be, if I'm not mistaken, the first time you've coached against Kelvin since his time at IU. I'm curious what you remember maybe about those games. I think you maybe played against each other three times. But just that time in the state and the rivalry, you both kind of arrived around the same time, I think you a year before him, but what you remember about the rivalry.

MATT PAINTER: They won two out of three. They manhandled us at their place one time. The other time we played at their place they won again, but the game was closer. We missed some free throws down the stretch. Eric Gordon played well in the game. That's what I remember about that.

The other game we won at home, David Teague had 32. Got a lot of baseline action for David Teague. He made a lot of tough shots in that game. Carl Landry had a good game. Those were our two best players then.

That's what I remember just from that, just from the rivalry and everything that kind of goes into those games.

Q. At times this season guys like Camden and Myles, for lack of a better term, maybe were a little gun shy when they had open looks. But they didn't seem to have that issue in the first two rounds. How important is that when you play a team that plays so well defensively like Houston?

MATT PAINTER: Houston is a fabulous all-around team, No. 1 team in the country in defense but also 3-point percentage. And they have players coming off the bench for them that are great players.

It's one of those things that they're so good defensively, if you don't take that shot, it's kind of like facing a real pitcher in the Major Leagues and you get that first good pitch, you take it, you're probably not getting another good pitch. That was a mistake.

So, when you get shots you gotta take them because when you don't take them you'll end up with shot-clock violations and pick-six turnovers. They're so active and they do such a good job disrupting the basketball, whether that's their post defense and their doubles or it's their aggressive ball-screen defense or just playing passing lanes and their overall pressure.

I could go on and on about it there. They're an elite defensive team.

It's going to be important for us to let it rip. But it's important for us to do that no matter who we're playing. You're referencing real stuff there.

When the coaching staff and everybody on the team is telling those guys, hey, you've got to take your shots, and then they're pausing or passing them up, that doesn't help our offense whatsoever. We don't have five guys out there creating for us. We have a couple of guys creating for us. So it's important to take the ones that come your way.

Q. How do you explain TKR's growth this season? And you saw this coming a couple of years ago when he was under Edey's shadow?

MATT PAINTER: I would say his work, the time he puts in individually more than anything. Like, who are you when the coaches aren't around? You know, who are you in the offseason? And Trey's put a lot of time into it just working on his own.

He's worked on his body. He's a guy that is very unique. He's physical but yet he's skilled. I think the number one thing for him, anytime you're a good player and can score, it normally teaches you how to pass because you're getting a lot of attention. You should be a good passer. He's become a really good passer, a really good decision-maker. That's going to be really important in this game.

Just proud of him for his work. But anytime you put that purposeful work into it and you know what you're doing and you know how to apply it, you're going to make a big jump.

But it's also the opportunity. With Zach leaving it was a big opportunity for him to step in there.

Q. One year ago you guys were the hunted at this point of the season. You made it all the way to the championship. This year, obviously very different. Does it feel different? Does it affect things differently with this year's team as opposed to when --

MATT PAINTER: Not really. It's one of those things where you know every game is tough. Like, we were sitting here last year, we had to play Gonzaga in this game. And then we ended up playing Tennessee. Now being able to play Houston, who had just now this year just played Gonzaga in a very close game.

So everybody's great. Nobody messed around that ended up in the Sweet 16. They had to earn their way here. If you look at Houston, you could argue that they're the best team in the country, especially after their first five games. They lost three of their four games early.

One thing that's so impressive about them is they've had some injuries and they've had some foul trouble and they don't skip a beat. They keep going.

It's a great program. He's a great coach.

But it's no different than playing Gonzaga last year in the Sweet 16. You could give all the same superlatives to Mark Few and his team and his program. That was going to be tough. Beating Tennessee was going to be tough. Obviously we were fortunate enough to do that. You're comparing two different types of toughness, right?

Q. Curious about your thoughts, it's well documented that all the teams in the Sweet 16 are from power conferences, first time since '85. Do you think that's an anomaly or do you think going forward this is going to be the norm?

MATT PAINTER: We sit on a lot of committees, and I've put a lot of time into it. That was the one thing, when the portal kept going and they were allowing guys to -- it started with the one-time transfer, right? And now you can transfer whenever you want.

And we really talked about that, why do we want to go against -- everyone's a high school recruit at one point. It's now taking away from the high school recruit and his opportunities. We didn't want that.

Then March Madness, and we've been on the wrong end of this a couple of times. The upsets and how valuable the upsets are to the common fan. It's created March

Madness. Let's not get away from it. It's a big piece of March Madness.

So then we're, like, I grew up on Ball State's campus. But I grew up wanting to go to Indiana. So when kids grow up, they want to go to the elite schools. They want to go to the Power Five schools. Now those other schools are really good basketball schools. But they also have to be able to grow their product.

Now, if we're not going to grow our product as much and we're going to have a different team every single year -- Purdue is still going to have players. I don't care who the coach is and what the situation is. You sell out every single one of your games. Our fans are unbelievable. We have the most Big Ten championships. We've had success for a long, long time.

You're always going to have players. But now these guys are just getting cherry picked from the D-IIs and the low majors and the mid-majors and cherry picked from high major to high major.

Now when you look at that, one of the things we talked about in those committees, is this going to take away from the value of a low-to-mid-major program. Because if it's not fair to anybody, it's not fair to them. That's not fair to them. They get a good player. They develop a good player. They lose a good player. Right?

That piece of it, we talked about taking away from high school recruiting, which it has, and we've talked about taking away from the low-to-mid-major programs. Now, time's going to tell, like, how true that is, right? Obviously it looks like it's trending that way, but we'll see through data.

And the other thing we talked about was, what you want in life is opportunity more than anything. And 99 percent of all college basketball players are not pros. Like digest that and understand that.

These opportunities for these young men and women to take is not just like getting an all-conference plaque on the wall. It's allowing them a better opportunity to have a successful life and have their family.

Not for everybody. Some people are going to be successful. Their dad went to college. Their grandfather went to college. Their great-grandfather went to college. You could go on and on and on.

Some people come from a single-parent home, some didn't go to college, whatever. If we're just chasing basketball and we're devaluing education, what are we really doing here, right?

From a basketball standpoint, I think there's some things that you've got to look at and there's also some things from an educational standpoint. And to make sure we're doing everything in our power to help them out because a lot gets talked about, okay, these guys haven't been paid in the past. But education has also put us in some great positions there.

I understand that. I don't think there's any coaches that want to get away from that. But I don't like when you have 200, 300, 400, 500 kids put their name in the portal and they had a scholarship and now they don't. What about them?

You're saying that kid should be able to do what he wants. People that are successful don't always do what they want; they do what's best for them. And we get away from that. But that's what we're here for. We're here to help them and fight them but also be an advocate for them in that fight.

That piece of it has got to get fixed. Now, if some kid was only going to get an education because he was good in basketball, that's a good thing. Now he has a better chance to be successful in life.

Now, if he just jumps schools and he thinks I'm going to go into the portal and get money and get a better situation, and now he doesn't get a scholarship when he had one, and now he never gets a degree -- which we all know a lot of people out there have been very, very successful without a degree -- but we all know it helps from a percentage standpoint. There's no doubt that it helps young people.

So I think those are the type of things that we've got to make sure we keep in perspective, not just, hey, this kid should be able to go where he wants. Coaches leave their schools and go other places and do that.

I understand that. That's a valid argument. It's a very valid argument. But there's a big cohort of young people in there with a lot of different examples in there, and it's always been our responsibility to try to set the framework of that so everybody has the best chance to be successful. And that has much -- not a lot to do with basketball, but basketball really being a vehicle for life.

Q. When you have a point guard like Braden who's seen all different kind of defenses, individual match-ups in his career, does that make the preparation a bit easier on you when you get ready to play a team with a defense like Houston?

MATT PAINTER: It makes it easier on me, but it's still difficult. The best thing I can do for him is go play teams non-conference that is like Houston. We didn't play Houston. But playing Auburn, playing Texas Tech -- excuse me -- Texas A&M, playing Ole Miss, playing Marquette. Those are some of the people -- he's played against some really good programs, some really good coaches.

But this might be the biggest challenge he's had. This is the No. 1 defense in the country. This is a big challenge for our team. He does a lot for us. We're hoping through our experiences that we've put him in the best position to be successful.

I know he's looking forward to it and he's very competitive and he's had a great year. But that's the one thing from our standpoint that we try to do. Some people think we overscheduled this year. But anybody would be a fool right now to think that the teams that beat us in non-conference didn't help us to get to this point because they were so good.

Auburn's so good. Texas A&M is so good. Shaka Smart and what they do. Chris Beard and how they operate. That's difficult to go against. He's had those experiences. He's been in the Final Four. He's won two Big Ten championships. He's had a lot of different experiences.

But with all that being said, Houston's defense could be the best out of all those people I've mentioned.

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