



IN THE PAINT



Gearlds: ‘We’re still finding our identity’

With plenty of fresh faces, women’s hoops squad adjusts

BY MARCO RIVERO LUNA
Editor-in-chief

Just two games into the season, Purdue is trying to find its identity.

The Purdue Women’s Basketball team will take to Mackey Arena yet again on Thursday, hoping to maintain its form from a home win last Sunday over Southern. Head coach Katie Gearlds’ focus is on shoring up the weak spots her squad showed last game.

Riding up from the Lone Star State are the Texas A&M Aggies (2-0), who will fight to keep their winning streak rolling.

The last time the Boilers took on the Aggies? The Boilers eked out a six-point win after leading for most of the game. But a year makes a difference, and both squads have drastically changed.

“I think last year we played, they were down seven players with injuries,” Gearlds said.

She said she shook A&M head coach Joni Taylor’s hand before the game, saying the first team to sixty points would probably win. The Boilers won 59-53.

Texas A&M is following up back-to-back wins at home and is hoping to prove it’s more than just hometown luck. The Aggies beat both A&M-Corpus Christi and the University of North Texas, 73-50 and 74-55, respectively.

The Boilers came back from their one-sided 92-49 loss to No. 3 UCLA last week to win

their home opener against the Southern Jaguars 67-50. Purdue’s old masters made the game, with fifth-year Madison Layden and senior Abbey Ellis scoring 14 and 7 points, respectively.

The Boilers were set to have a dominant win, running 7-1 to start the second quarter, before Southern called a timeout halfway through. The run of form didn’t last. In the final quarter, Southern pressed the Boilers, whittling down their lead to 10 points with only four minutes left in the game.

Ultimately the Boilers’ defense came through and the team won. But Purdue’s offense struggled down the stretch, and Gearlds says they need to find their identity.

“We want to be tough-nosed and physical. We want to make sure we’re winning 50/50 balls,” Gearlds said. “I think we’re still trying to find our identity on the offensive end, but if we can just stay blue collar on defense we’ll give ourselves a chance to win ball games.”

Diving deeper into A&M’s play paints a rosier picture for the Boilers, revealing some cracks in the Aggies’ sterling start.

At the end of the first half, A&M dominated North Texas 49-22. But it didn’t last. North Texas outscored A&M for the rest of the game.

In fact, A&M shot just 27% in the second half, making 10 of its 37 shots. The fourth quarter was even worse for the Aggies, miss-

ing nine of 10 field goals as North Texas went on a 15-2 run early on.

But A&M’s transfers still shined, with junior Lauren Ware dominating the boards with 12 rebounds.

“(We need) to beat her to her spots, not let her get deep positions,” Gearlds said. “We need to put a body on her and push her back.”

The early-season test will be held in Mackey Arena on Thursday. Tipoff is at 7:00 p.m. The game will air on Big Ten Plus.



ARSHON BOZORGI | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Fifth-year guard Abbey Ellis fights through heavy defense on a scoring drive against Southern guard Chloe Fleming. On offense, Ellis was key to the Boilers’ victory scoring 14 points.

Men’s basketball: Crowded or Deep?



KATHLEEN MARTINUS | PHOTOS EDITOR

Sophomore guard Fletcher Loyer reaches with the ball as Xavier sophomore guard Desmond Claude defends.

BY ROCKET HAVERLAND
Staff Reporter

Fresh off its first competitive win of the season against Xavier Monday, this season’s men’s basketball roster looks deeper than most years past. Purdue took production from a host of players and a couple of unique lineups to secure the 83-71 win.

Head coach Matt Painter, has had to make several decisions regarding the distribution of players at three main roles: bigs, wings and ball-handlers.

The hierarchy through three games has been consistent, with the same starting lineup penciled in every time. But some substitution lineups have fared better than others.

This is especially the case when senior center Zach Edey is not on the court, with Purdue losing in the minutes he hasn’t played this season despite two blowout wins.

“It’s really hard playing 10 guys,” Painter said after Monday’s game. “Our front-court has some really good players that sometimes don’t play very much, because (Edey’s) gonna swallow up 30 minutes.”

With sophomore forward Trey Kaufman-Renn starting at power forward in all three games the Boilers have played, junior forward Caleb Furst has taken over the reins at backup center.

Against Morehead State, Furst struggled, netting only two rebounds in 11 minutes alongside three missed open 3-pointers. Even so, Painter remained confident in his abilities going into the Xavier game.

“(Furst) didn’t knock down any of his perimeter shots, but he’s just got to keep taking those good ones,” Painter said after practice before Xavier. “His athleticism is what stands out, we need to let him use his motor.”

In the first half against Xavier, Furst allowed multiple offensive rebounds. The four-point lead the Boilers had when Edey stepped off the court was erased in three minutes with Furst in the game, leading Painter to cut Edey’s typical five-minute break short.

In the second half, Furst grabbed a couple of rebounds and assisted a 3-pointer by freshman guard Myles Colvin.

Read the rest online
www.purdueexponent.org

Komara talks lasting impact of 1999 championship squad

Last weekend, the 1999 National Champion, one-loss Purdue women’s basketball team visited campus. The group of former stars toured athletics events all weekend, including their old stomping grounds at Mackey Arena and a packed Ross-Ade.

Kelly Komara played guard for the team, garnering All-Freshman Honors in her debut season. Komara didn’t have to travel far to celebrate with her teammates. She’s associate head coach of the women’s team, returning this season after spending the previous two on Marquette’s sideline. Komara had a previous stint on the Boilers’ coaching staff from 2014-16.

The Exponent, along with other media, interviewed Komara last week. Below is a transcript of the conversation.

I talked to Stephanie White-McCarthy right before I came here and she said the season that you won the national championship was fun, but it was more fun for the memories off the court. When you sit back and aren’t thinking about basketball, is that when the stories really

come out, and you reflect on how you were just a great group of friends that were having a great season?

“Yeah, I think so. And I think Steph hit it on the head. If you don’t even remember, it’s Katie Douglas throwing the ball in the air, and the celebration, and then the fun we had after and throughout the season. If you try and pass on those stories to the players now, I don’t know if they fully understand. It’s not always the points or the wins. It’s the memories that you make with your teammates, and those things last forever.”

Going back to a game, was there ever a talk of ‘we were one bucket away from having a perfect season?’

“I don’t know. I don’t think we thought we were really that good. I remember beating Tennessee in the home opener, and I remember Carolyn (Peck) saying, ‘if you play like that, we’ll do what we want to do.’ I don’t know if there was ever talk of national championships. I think it was just, ‘Let’s play the best we can play and see where that lands us.’

“As we started to multiply wins and wins, there wasn’t social me-

dia to create a buzz of undefeated seasons. So for us, it was just about one game at a time, and it just ended up kind of snowballing into wins, and then it took us all the way.”

How often do you think about your introduction to Purdue women’s basketball in that Tennessee game?

“I’ll tell you, it’s a great recruiting tool. It is one of my favorite stories, and it’s a metaphor to me. ‘Don’t wait to get ready, be ready.’ Little did I know that (starting guard Ukari Figgs) was going to pick up two fouls, and I’d be inserted into the game so quickly.

“But the other piece of that story is, don’t be afraid. I was a freshman, we’re playing the No. 1 team and there’s Pat Summitt standing over there. I’m in the game for seven seconds and I let it fly, like who does that? It was a credit to the coaches having me prepared, and then a little bit of swagger of thinking you might go in. And the rest is history.”

Did you know the impact you were making back then would be something talked about 25 years later?

“I don’t think that we ever knew



PHOTO PROVIDED

Kelly Komara’s 2023-24 roster photo.

how far this would reach and how long it would stay. But, I will say this: Purdue fans are different. There’s very few fans like Purdue fans that understand and appreciate success on the women’s side like we have.”

“I’ll be at Meijer, and I’ll get somebody to stop me and say, ‘We were there when you won the national championship,’ and I’m going, ‘Holy smokes, this is unbelievable.’ It is a testament to the fans in the community here at Purdue; they appreciated what we did in ‘99.”

- Compiled by Arman Hyder, staff reporter

Volleyball

A volleyball clinic with a mission

BY ISRAEL SCHUMAN
Sports Editor

Lila Schwartz is 7 years old. She’s been playing volleyball since COVID-19 restrictions eased up a couple of years ago, just like her older sisters, ages 9 and 11. She’s into gymnastics too, but volleyball has her heart right now.

“She loves volleyball. She will tell us ‘Lila volleyball,’” her mom, Tamara, said.

“She is very happy to meet people, to say ‘hi’ to people,” Tamara says. “She very much likes to be everybody’s friend. She also likes to make sure that everybody’s doing what they’re supposed to be doing.”

This includes the Boiler Juniors Volleyball Club in Lafayette, a volleyball clinic for special needs children hosted by the Therapy Solutions Foundation. Lila has Down syndrome, and she participated in the program last Saturday morning while the rest of her family watched from the bleachers.

Lila is helping the other kids, a dozen or so, stay on track in the myriad of drills the coaches are running them through. Most look about 6 or 7 years old, but there is one 13-year-old girl.

“It’s really important to be able to break it down and make kind of smaller drills, but make it interactive, which is really cool,” says Cody Drattlo, a volleyball coach for The Academy in Indianapolis.

The Academy operates three clubs in central Indiana, Boiler Juniors being one.

“Hitting over the net, aiming for under the net too, just kind of finding different ways to interact (with) them, to make it adaptive,” he said, referring to the skills the clinic focused on teaching.

Drattlo said he helps out at Boiler Juniors all the time, but he’s there on Saturday because of a personal connection: His nephew, Cohen, has cerebral palsy. Cohen is usually in a wheelchair, but is able to get around on his knees on the hard plastic court.

“I’ve brought him into The Academy before to just have some fun little, like, play time,” Drattlo says. “But obviously, since he has special needs, there aren’t a lot of programs for him to do. He does adaptive baseball, but nothing volleyball I knew of, so when I saw this, I thought this would be a really cool opportunity to have him play.”

The clinic is organized by Mindy Hibbert and Trent Terry, owners of the Therapy Solutions Foundation, which they started about a year-and-a-half ago. Hibbert and Terry started the foundation as a way to make therapy more accessible for children with disabilities.

“We started the foundation to help do these kinds of events,” Terry says. “And all the money that’s raised today goes back into scholarships for kids that can’t afford therapy. So they can apply to the foundation, and potentially get their therapy paid for.”

Hibbert and Terry’s foundation ties directly with their day jobs as co-owners of Therapy Solutions, a 7-year-old organization in Lafayette.



TODD MCKECHNIE | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Cohen (right) hits the ball to his uncle, Cody Drattlo, the Boiler Juniors’ associate tournament director, during an adaptive volleyball clinic Saturday morning.

“We have speech, orthopedic and physical,” Hibbert says. “We have a lot of kids who have autism. We have kids with cerebral palsy. We have kids that have speech and swallowing disorders. So there’s lots of disabilities, disorders that kids come in and get our services for.”

The pair has been planning the clinic for five months, deciding on Boiler Juniors as host because of a business relationship Terry has with the club.

“They were very interested in helping,” Terry says. “And their coaches were super excited about it. So it was just kind of a natural fit.”