

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

Friday, March 18, 2022

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA

Fiserv Forum

Purdue Boilermakers

Coach Matt Painter

Stefanovic Sasha

Ivey Jaden

Edey Zach

Media Conference

Purdue - 78, Yale - 56

MODERATOR: Coach Painter?

COACH MATT PAINTER: Yeah, obviously I thought our guys did a good job start of the second half getting off to a good start. Any time you have a significant lead in this tournament, things can turn pretty sour pretty quickly, and they made some plays to start the second half. We were able to answer and be able to push it out. I thought that was the key to the game right there, just keeping things simple, taking care of the basketball and getting quality shots each time down. Then as the second half progressed, thought our guys did a much better job of challenging them at the rim and the paint when the ball got in there in the first half. They scored in and around the basketball a couple times and I think we did a great job challenging. And I just thought it was a good team within for our guys.

We had the opportunity to play a lot of people and get out there and get some experience and getting into this tournament. Yale is a very good team. Obviously they struggled shooting the basketball, and we wanted to give a lot of time and effort into Swain because we knew that he was dangerous and a guy that could get 30. I thought Eric Hunter did a good job on him, but I thought our whole team did a good job on him. Pleased with our effort and we'll see who we play here next game.

MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes, please.

Q. For Sasha, given all the upsets yesterday and also your own experience last year, did that play into your readiness for today?

SASHA STEFANOVIC: Yeah, absolutely. I think we make a point, everybody's earned the right to be in this tournament, everybody's really talented and tough and they're hard to play against. Like Coach said, we really prepared. We had a lot of respect for those guys. They have a lot of great individual players and I thought we did a good job just being ready to go from the jump and I thought we had a good start. Jaden played really well. We got some good contribution from everybody and it propelled us forward. Overall, I thought it was a great team win.

Q. Sasha, first for you, you enjoyed those two threes you hit. How badly did you want that, did you need that?

SASHA STEFANOVIC: Yeah, definitely. It's probably the biggest job on my team, is to make and take open shots and open threes. Obviously I've been in a little bit of a slump lately with my shooting, but yeah, I'm going to continue to shoot. If I go over a hundred, I'm still going to shoot them up. It's good to see them finally go in, but I wish some of them also went in there early in the first half as well. It is what it is. You've just got to move forward.

Q. Jaden, in the first half, I think you had 18 points in like five shots or something, you had some free throws in there. How good -- how much were you feeling it? How good was that half for you?

JADEN IVEY: I felt good just going out there. You know, all of our guys, we feel like we all had energy. I feel like we all felt the feeling of losing last year first round, so I felt like all our guys were motivated and so was I.

Q. Zach, just to close the first half, how important was that to play pretty well in the first half, but also for you personally to play pretty well and make sure you guys had a pretty robust lead at halftime?

ZACH EDEY: It was important. Obviously you want to have the momentum going into halftime, you want to feel good going into the locker room and you want to extend the lead as much as possible to get your breath fully. But it was good. I feel like last year I really struggled in my -- in the tournament game, so to come out this year and kind of prove it to myself that I can still do it in the tournament was big for me.

Q. You particularly played well with Sasha as a two-man game, three-man lineups. What does he do well when he isn't shooting the ball well?

ZACH EDEY: He gives me the ball. (Laughs.) It's pretty simple, but he gives me the ball, he allows me to play, he gives me my ball in my spots. They can't double off him because he can shoot it, obviously. so it gives me some more space. He's just really good at post feeds.

Q. For any of you guys, Azar had his structure early in the game when he made his first field goals. Talk about the adjustments you were able to make in wearing him down in the waning portions of the game.

SASHA STEFANOVIC: We drew more attention to him. I thought we did a good job of jumping to the ball whenever somebody passed to him and we did a good job of corralling him and ball screens and dribble handoffs and everything like that. He's a great player, so he's going to make and take tough shots. But I thought Eric did a great job of just taking up his space and making the whole game difficult on him and trying to make him make difficult shots. He got off a little bit early, but I thought we adjusted and did well.

Q. Zach, you feel like you had a little bit more room to move inside today and how much did that kind of make you feel comfortable down there?

ZACH EDEY: Yeah, they obviously sent a double early. They were pretty good at that. But one thing Coach Painter always talks about is like a lot of times when you don't work on a double, you're not really good in rotation, so they gave up some easy looks like Caleb's dunk, a few open entry passes to get the double. So it wasn't like I had a lot of space down there.

On the rebounds, I felt like I kind of did it over them, make sure they keep it off the glass physically. But yeah, it wasn't anything like revolutionary, just rebound the ball, square the ball when I'm open, pass it when I'm doubled.

Q. Sasha, when your offense is humming like it was for most of the afternoon and frankly most of the season, what are some of the qualities, the things that you guys are doing well that allow that?

SASHA STEFANOVIC: Yeah. I think from an execution standpoint, we do everything that we want to do. We really cut hard, we can set screens, start our plays in the right spots, and we don't turn the ball over I think is kind of the main thing that when we're doing all those things, our offense is as efficient as they come. Obviously we're one of the best in the nation at that, but just all those little things that go into an offense and the details of it, I think we're really good at and we just need to make sure that that's a focus for us moving forward.

Q. Jaden, where did your shooting rhythm come from to start the game? And also, those balls look different. Do they feel the same?

JADEN IVEY: Well, it's just my confidence for real. I'm willing to take any shot if it's the right shot for me and for my team, and yet I think the balls are kind of weird, but you've got to shoot it.

MODERATOR: We're going to try to take a question from zoom.

Q. On the broadcast they showed your mom in the crowd. I was just wondering how nice it is to have your mom there for games this week.

ZACH EDEY: Yeah, it's huge. She's obviously been supporting all season. She came down, she rented an AirBNB since Christmas. She came down from Indiana. Always there to cheer me on, sending me texts before the game, sending me texts after. Probably go see her pretty soon. It's cool to have a slice of home even when I'm out here in America still.

MODERATOR: Questions for Coach Painter?

Q. When you get Sasha's threes going and then what you got from Caleb Furst tonight, how important was it maybe to get a couple of those guys going as you start to make your run here in the tournament?

COACH MATT PAINTER: I thought Sasha had some really good looks in the first half that didn't go down. It was good to see him knock a couple of those shots down just to build his confidence. He mentioned that he's been struggling a little bit and that happens with guys that can shoot. You're going to have a period of time during the season where you go through a little bit of struggles and you've just got to keep working your way through it and keep taking good shots and that's what he did.

It was good to see Caleb. Caleb hasn't played in some games because of matchups and we'll continue to go down that road just trying to -- when you have 10 guys you feel good about, sometimes later in the year you get to an 8 or 9-man rotation and it leaves a guy out. A lot of times each individual guy looks at it like what did I do wrong, when in reality you're just playing somebody else because they match up better against that particular opponent. I thought Caleb was active, he was around the basketball, made his free throws and That's what we need. When he comes in there, he's got to play off of those guys and be able to make plays and rebound, and I thought he did that tonight.

Q. I think they went scoreless for almost nine minutes in the second half. What went into the defensive effort today overall and how important was it to have that in your first game in the tournament?

COACH MATT PAINTER: Well, we wanted to really make it hard for Swain. That was our No. 1 thing is not to let him get threes, to take up his space. He got going early in the game and then after that we did a much better job on him. Then they were finishing around the rim and caught a couple runners in that first half. In the second half I thought we did a much better job. Even the ball was still getting in there, it just seemed like they were missing a lot of runners, post-ups, in between, those intermediate shots. I thought our guys did a good job of just contesting and staying with it and not allowing them to get second chance opportunities.

Q. You have two of the more interesting players in the tournament in terms of matchup problems with Zach and Jaden, Zach's size and Jaden's speed. How much of advantage do you think that is with a relatively short turnaround for preparing for those guys which are obviously really difficult to prepare for in general?

COACH MATT PAINTER: I think it's an advantage, but I think other teams have advantages, too. The short prep, I think, can help you, but it also can hurt you, depending on who we play here. I think both teams can have an advantage against us, but we also have an advantage. We always talk about that, like if you kind of attack us a certain way, we've got to do everything on our power to stop you from attacking us in that way, but then we can also flip it. Like don't get down on ourselves, like this is over, flip it on the other end. so If they're putting quicker, smaller guys on Zach and they're driving him, they still have to defend him at the other end. So you don't want to trade baskets obviously, but if you're getting into the bonus and you're getting a lot of fouls, you'll give up a basket here and there against that, especially when you got a guy like Jaden Ivey who's getting by people. Both of those guys, they got fouled seven times, both of them, today and so that's great. That's what we want. We want to create space for both of those guys so they can play, but when people take up that, you've got to get the ball out of your hands to get people in rotation. That's so important for us. When we do that, we're pretty efficient. When we don't, that's how we bog down.

Q. How much time, if any, did you spend addressing last year as in the lead-up to this game?

COACH MATT PAINTER: We talked about it. Obviously we talked about it at the beginning of the season, just the little things and the mistakes we made in that game and how things come down to whether you're considered a winner or loser over one possession or one play. You see that in this tournament a lot. But leading up to it, when we found out who we're playing, just how they've -- they've earned their way here. Like everybody in this tournament have earned their way here and they can beat anybody and you've got to be ready.

But we talked about North Texas and we talked how North Texas outplayed us more than anything. They have good players, they have a good coach and you have to be prepared. I thought we did some good things against them also. Sometimes when you lose, you look at it like it's a total negative and it wasn't. We got into overtime in that game and they played better than us.

But yeah, we used it, we talked about it, but when we played North Texas, we talked about getting beat by Arkansas Little Rock six years before that and that didn't help. All those guys that I just mentioned right there, Grant McCasland, Chris Beard, they're all great coaches, they have great players and it's what March Madness is about. You've got to go out there and play better than the people in front of you, and today we were able to do that.

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