Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 14, 2026

Chicago, Illinois, USA

United Center

Purdue Boilermakers

Oscar Cluff

Trey Kaufman-Renn

Matt Painter

Postgame Press Conference

Purdue - 73, UCLA - 66

THE MODERATOR: We're now joined by head coach Matt Painter along with student-athletes Oscar Cluff and Trey Kaufman-Renn.

MATT PAINTER: Obviously it was a different prep for us because a lot of what we prepared for was with Donovan Dent being in the game. That's a big piece of what they do. It's what they run. It's how they spread you out. They play high ball screen. They play pick-and-roll. They space it and attack you, and a lot of that is predicated on his ability to break people down.

So the fact that he got hurt and he was out of the game, that changed the game. I know it was a close game. We never really separated from them. You have to give them credit. It really shows the resiliency and the toughness of UCLA to not have their best two guys in Bilodeau and Donovan Dent and to go out there and compete.

I think they've got a chance to really make a good run in the NCAA Tournament. They have really good pieces if they can get Bilodeau and Dent back, that really helps.

These two guys here, they dominated the glass. They had 24 rebounds between them, and UCLA had 26. That's a big statement. One of them got all the offensive rebounds, and one of them got all the defensive rebounds. It's a good balance between the two of them.

Obviously when you get to the conference tournament, a lot of people don't realize that don't experience it that we don't play three games in a row. You never play three games in a row. That's why you see the exempt tournaments going to just two games, and very few of them now have three games because when do you do that?

You get in the NCAA Tournament, you play Thursday, Saturday, you play Friday, Sunday. You try to win a weekend. You try to win two weekends. If you win three weekends, you're all by yourself. It's a little bit different, but it's not the same, and it's just something you've got to be able to work through and just go out there and compete and just take one game at a time. I know it's a cliche, but you have to do it. You can't look ahead.

Proud of our guys because we hung in there and we were able to pull it out.

Q. Oscar, you come off of a little bit of a stretch where you were maybe struggling a little bit. You come into Chicago, and you've been like a silent assassin just coming in, getting rebounds at the right time, getting points. Can you talk about what maybe you've done a little bit differently coming into this?

OSCAR CLUFF: I wouldn't say anything different. I would just say just from what I've learnt over the season and just being able to put it all together and understand everything about it which helps me play as hard as I can.

Q. Trey, the game's tied. They've come all the way back. The crowd's going nuts. The ball goes into you in the post. There are back to back possessions. You score once and then put it up on the rim, and Oscar scores. What does it mean to you to get the ball in those moments, and what were you trying to execute on those plays?

TREY KAUFMAN-RENN: I'm just trying to get the best shot for Purdue. Obviously Coach Thompson, P.J., has a lot of faith in me and my scoring abilities. When it's crunch time, as a competitor, you want the ball. I'm happy that I scored one of them, and then obviously having this guy to be able to get the rebound and putback is big time.

Q. Trey, talk about when you and Fletch and Braden were sitting on the bench and the confidence that you guys have in the other players besides you three

leaders.

TREY KAUFMAN-RENN: We've seen it all year. We saw it in the summer. It's really nothing new. Even the lowest points of the season through struggles, individual struggles, whatever it may be, we remain positive and confident because it's just the truth. We have a really good team. We have really good players. We have confidence in these guys.

Q. This is for Trey and Oscar. You last faced Michigan at Mackey on February 17. How has this team evolved from the time you last faced them till now in which you're now on the brink of getting to a Big Ten tournament conference championship.

TREY KAUFMAN-RENN: I think hopefully our communication is much better, our defense is much better. Really it's just about us doing our jobs. That's what we've talked about, whether it be Michigan, Wisconsin, UCLA, whoever it is. We can live with it if we do our job.

I think our mindset is kind of making sure, when we go back and watch the film of the game, to make sure we don't mess up.

OSCAR CLUFF: Obviously that wasn't a great game for us, and we've had a few bad ones since then. It's about learning from our mistakes and making sure we don't do it again. It's just growing as a team and getting stronger over time.

Q. We talked about it last night and the night before about how you usually don't play back to back to back nights. Today it seemed like you were spacing out your minutes a little with rest. Is that where we're at? With the third day in a row, you kind of wanted to give more rest to everybody and space those minutes out to everybody?

MATT PAINTER: Yeah, we obviously gave more minutes, but it's one of those things, it's your team, right? We were just trying to give a little bit. We kind of stayed with the same rotations but just a little bit longer. Obviously Braden didn't play as much at that time.

Yeah, you just try to do what's best, but also you're trying to win the game. So I thought our bench was good in spurts, and then at other times it kind of comes and goes there in the second half. We had some breakdowns there, and then we got those guys back in there.

It's something where you don't like to do it, but when you look at the big picture, if you can advance, that's the -- it seems like an intelligent move, but if you lose, you're a fool.

Q. What are you trying to sure up in your team, either between your team and Michigan's last meeting or your games over the last couple of days before you face them in that championship tomorrow?

MATT PAINTER: When you say sure up, what do you mean?

Q. Anything that went wrong over these last two days with your team or in Mackey.

MATT PAINTER: Just trying to -- really it's the end of the season for us because we didn't finish the season great. You're going to have consistencies in terms of how you play, but you're going to have those inconsistencies also and just trying to be better at that.

At times we've been really good as a rebounding team, and then we've had some moments where like we haven't, but for the most part, we've been a good rebounding team.

I think no matter who you're playing, you're just trying to win that possession war to where you have fewer turnovers and you have more rebounds. That's very hard to do against a team like Michigan because they're a great rebounding team, they're a great defensive team, they're a great offensive team.

They're one of the best teams that I've seen in the Big Ten in 21 years, probably a top five team, like Greg Oden and Mike Conley's Ohio State team, Deron Williams and Dee Brown, Luther Head's Illinois teams, a couple of Tom Izzo's teams. Indiana had a team with Oladipo and Cody Zeller, they had two of the top four picks in the Draft. That was a really, really good team.

They're in a good category. If you want to beat them, you have to be special, and you have to be special at both ends. But you have to take care of the basketball, and you got to rebound against anybody, and you really have to do it against a special team like Michigan.

Q. We heard Oscar talk about how he hasn't really done anything differently, just kind of using what he's learned over the course of the season, but he's averaging 16 and 11 in this tournament. That's more than he was doing during the regular season. What have you seen from him that's different, or is there anything different as he goes into the postseason?

MATT PAINTER: I would say just a nose for the basketball. This isn't his most offensive rebounds. He had 10 offensive rebounds at Nebraska. He's had games. He

had a lot of double-doubles nonconference, and then he went through a period of time where he didn't. So just kind of getting recharged and going after the basketball.

If he's done anything better, it's really been the details to put himself in a better position, whether that's a short roll or he dives all the way to the basket for a post. But the main improvement is just something he's done throughout the year. He just wasn't as good for about a month stretch in terms of just going after the basketball.

He's got a great nose for the ball. He does a great job of tipping it to himself. He's a fantastic rebounder, especially offensively.

Q. When they lose Dent, and they're already without Bilodeau, obviously two of their biggest scorers. How does that change what UCLA was able to do, and how did that affect what you guys were doing going forward?

MATT PAINTER: They just went high ball screen, and they didn't do as much spread. I don't know what he calls it or whatever, but a lot of what they do with Donovan Dent, they run ball screen with him, they run a lot of different actions with him, but when he gets it rolling, they like having the ball in his hands, especially late clock. He's just breaking people down, creating for himself, creating for his teammates. That's when they're at their best, in my opinion.

Then they put Bilodeau in there, and they really cause problems because now Bilodeau can get the pick and pop. They'll run action to post Bilodeau like they do a little bit for Dailey. Now they're mixing in some of that usage there for Bilodeau and Dent's a heavy usage guy. It doesn't mean Skyy Clark and Trent Perry aren't good players, because they are, but now they get more into creating and not playing off the basketball. I think that's probably the biggest difference.

Then we outrebound them by 11. I think Tyler would have had a hand in that. He's had some monster games for them this year. Great player, all conference player. Hopefully both those guys can play. That would be awful if they couldn't play. Hopefully both of those guys can get back and get ready for their first game of the tournament.

Q. Matt, you've got a senior team. What does this mean to your team, your seniors playing in the Big Ten Championship tournament game?

MATT PAINTER: I think more than anything, it's an honor just to be in the tournament, to win three games and get to the championship. But for us, it was more of playing well and stringing some wins together. You have to be able to show that consistency.

We haven't shot the ball well, and we've been able to win three games. It's not like overall like we're bad. We shoot 46 percent, 36 percent from 3 tonight. They're not great. That's not great numbers. Like our numbers have to be better in my opinion to beat elite people.

UCLA's an elite team, but without their two best guys, obviously you think about the game tonight, if our two best players didn't play, how does that look? Everyone has their own perspective, but when you take a step back and digest everything, like it's a lot different.

It's an honor just to be in the Big Ten, let alone play in the Big Ten tournament. To be in this championship game was great. Most important thing for us is that we've been able to grind some victories here and play well as a team. We want to use that as a positive going into tomorrow and going into the NCAA Tournament.

Q. Jack Benter is a guy who's had some ups and downs in terms of his shooting, for him to come in and go 3 for 3, maybe not even the importance of him going 3 for 3, but for him to have the confidence to pull having the trigger when he gets a good look because you have the ability with Trey and Oscar to get the offensive rebound?

MATT PAINTER: No question, that was great for him. Obviously he's had the wrist injury, and a lot of times you take guys and try to mold them from going from a shooter to a good player. He's a good player, period. When he doesn't make shots, he does good things for us. He rebounded today for us, that 3 he hit at halftime was big time, that layup he made in the second half was a big time play.

He's a guy that can rebound the ball for you. He can distribute the basketball, and he can shoot. He's got a lot more to him. He's going to have a great career at Purdue.

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UCLA Bruins

Mick Cronin

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THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by UCLA head coach Mick Cronin, along with student-athletes Trent Perry and Eric Dailey Jr.

MICK CRONIN: Extremely proud of my team, down two great players, but we've got other great players. They came up with a valiant, valiant effort today. Couldn't be more proud of them.

Obviously Trent played 40, Eric plays 34. We came back, took a lead. Honestly what went through the back of my head was how are we going to play tomorrow? We're running out of bodies.

Before you ask, Donny's got a calf strain. They were going to talk to me at halftime. I said no need to play. Next week's more important.

Like I said, guys stepped up on our team. Valiant, valiant effort by some kids that hadn't played a lot -- Brandon Williams, Steve Jamerson, Eric Freeny. Those three guys in particular off the bench probably didn't play a combined 10 minutes against Purdue last time we played them. Like I said, just really proud of my guys.

Q. I don't know if the word is connectedness, but you guys seem to have found something where no matter who's on the court, you guys are all kind of in rhythm together, playing together, finding a way. How much is that going to help you going forward the rest of the way here?

ERIC DAILEY JR.: Definitely. That's what we've been looking for as a team, just finding that gelling together. We've definitely been coming together as a team late down the stretch of the season. We just need to keep this momentum going into next week.

Q. For either of you guys that want to answer, obviously you guys are competitors, you want to see yourselves win on the court and a loss never feels good, but you've been playing some of your best basketball all season. How in your mind do you separate the two of wanting to get better after a loss but also knowing you're playing your best basketball, what's the mentality there?

TRENT PERRY: Even coming after a loss, as Coach said, we fought hard. Steven Jamerson, Eric Freeny, Williams, all those guys that came off the bench, it's going to be key for them, especially coming into March Madness, with whatever we've got to face. I'm just very proud of our guys at the end of the day.

Q. Trent and Eric, when Donny goes out, obviously he's been such a big part of this team, especially of late, what's the mindset for you guys going forward from that point?

TRENT PERRY: Just next man up. We had Skyy out early in the season, early in Big Ten play, and at the end of the day, it's next man up. We have a lot great players on this team, and everybody's capable, and I feel like a lot of people showed that tonight.

ERIC DAILEY JR.: Like he said, next man up. Everybody's got to play hard and play for their team.

Q. We saw this a couple years ago going into the tournament. Obviously when Jaylen went down. Is communication with the tournament selection people important to help your kind of standing from all that stuff?

MICK CRONIN: Yeah, it's not as complicated with this. Tyler could have played. Donny could have played. They'd have been playing hurt. But there's this -- no point -- I wouldn't have played them in a regular season game. I

just tried to take care of guys.

The experience that Steve and Brandon and Eric Freeny got today -- and Book played a lot more minutes -- can really help us next week when those guys are back. Obviously we didn't achieve victory, and with all due respect to the Big Ten, you can see how hard our guys are trying to win, but our guys are well aware, because they practice under 11 banners that say National Championship every day. They warm up under another banner with 19 Final Fours on it. We don't even have one with conference championships because there's 36 or something or so many.

So next week is what it's about for us.

Q. Are you almost rooting for a Friday game more than anything right now? Just that extra day, and how much would that mean?

MICK CRONIN: Look, I think, if you play on the weekend and you've got to fly back to the West Coast, like we have to, and we can't get out till the morning, so we won't get home until Sunday. You would hope that we don't play till Friday.

No, I'm not going to throw Matt under the bus, but he told me something that makes me confident that we'll play Friday, Coach Painter, who's a very smart guy. So I'm going to hope he's right.

Q. Can you share that?

MICK CRONIN: I don't want to jinx it. Put it this way, he just thought logistically that we would definitely play Friday. I don't know if that's about teams that play on the weekend. I don't know where he got that because at Cincinnati I was always playing on Sunday in the American Conference Championship, and we played on Thursday a lot. But Matt's smart, so I'm hoping he's right.

Q. Purdue obviously out rebounded you guys by 11 in this game. Not having Tyler, I'm sure, made an impact in that. Xavier Booker obviously gave you some size. What did you see out of him in terms of --

MICK CRONIN: He only hit one rebound.

Q. What did you see out of the rest of the guys?

MICK CRONIN: I love Book, but he's got to rebound the ball. I love him. He gave us some good offense today. Defense and rebounding, he's got to improve. Steve Jamerson played -- him and Book played 40 minutes at center, and they had a combined one rebound. Steve had one. I'm sorry, yeah. Steve had one. Book had one. So they had a combined two. That's why we got out.

Their five man had 14, Cluff, and when he was out, Jacobsen was in, but he didn't get any. The 5 spot was 14-2. Everything else was a wash. There lies the issue.

Q. What were you hoping to find out about your team this week, and what did you learn?

MICK CRONIN: Well, you are assuming that I was hoping to find out -- I'm with them every day. I already know. So I wasn't hoping to find anything out. I'm not sure what you're -- you're assuming that I was hoping to find out something with your question. I never said I was hoping to find out anything. I'm hoping to find out what time we're leaving and if I can get into a good restaurant tonight.

Q. Did you learn anything about your team?

MICK CRONIN: Not really, no. No. I was happy with the way they competed. I've been telling you -- have you been with us all year? Halfway. You jumped in, right?

Q. Started March 1st.

MICK CRONIN: Okay. We've got talent. We just haven't always had our mind on defense, which is very rare for teams that I coach, and we got great guys.

Since March 1st or whenever the heck we played Nebraska, it's been pretty -- it's been a noted change in our team. We've just got to keep it up, and we've got to get some rebounds out of the 5 spot. To do what we try to do -- now, you guys are going to think that I'm crazy, but we're at UCLA. No matter who we take the floor against in the NCAA Tournament, we're going to run out there, and we're going to be the ones wearing the baby blue and the four letters. So we believe in ourselves.

Q. Kind of the same question I asked Trent and Eric, it does feel like there's a connectedness with this group right now.

MICK CRONIN: Great word, by the way. Is that a media word?

Q. I got to give credit. I think David Woods might have come up with that. I've got to give him credit. It's a good word.

MICK CRONIN: Connectedness? Is that in the dictionary? I'm going to check that with my sister, another Northwestern grad.

Q. It seems to fit, though. What do you like about the way these guys are kind of fighting for each other because you can kind of feel it out there.

MICK CRONIN: We're playing harder on defense, man. I'm not going to drop any fancy words on you Northwestern people. We're just playing harder on defense.

We don't -- Skyy's an elite -- I'm going to drop one on you, he's an adroit defender, probably our only one. The other ones, it's just trying to -- it's demanded of them at all times and them to demand it of themselves. That's what's changed. That's what you're seeing.

Q. You called on Xavier and Steve to give you more today, and you said a couple days kind of. What did you make of their contributions today?

MICK CRONIN: Again, they had seven baskets, so they got 17 points, but you can't get one rebound out of your center position, especially when you're playing Purdue, who's a great rebounding team, one of the best in the country. That was the difference in the game.

Again, you didn't have to go to Northwestern to know that we lost by seven, and we're minus seven in second chance points.

Q. He does go to Northwestern, by the way?

MICK CRONIN: Really? I don't know what to do with all you guys. My sister's out there somewhere.

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