

# Future promising for Purdue basketball

## Nathan Baird | Lafayette Journal & Courier | March 19, 2016

When Rapheal Davis spoke of regret in the Pepsi Center locker room on Thursday, it wasn't for the end of his own career.

Instead, the player most integral to Purdue men's basketball's culture change over the past three years felt he'd let coach Matt Painter down. Within that pain, Davis reached for the belief that the returning Boilermakers will push ahead without him and his fellow seniors.

"I feel like I let him down a lot with my four years, but he's a great coach with a great coaching staff, and they'll move on," Davis said.

"They'll get better from this."

It remains to be seen how the Boilermakers will process Thursday's stunning double-overtime loss to Little Rock in an NCAA Midwest Region first-round game. Right now, a reputation for epic NCAA tournament collapses overshadows the success that put Purdue there in the first place.

Perhaps with more experience and maturity, the composure missing in those critical moments will emerge. Time will tell. What we do know is a nucleus of talent returns that, when mixed with those elusive intangibles, could continue the resurgence Davis and A.J. Hammons helped spark.

In the wake of another disappointment, skepticism is understandable. Yet those outgoing seniors don't share it.

"They're going to be good next season," Hammons said after his final game as a Boilermaker. "They're going to correct their mistakes and make a good run."

From a personnel standpoint, based on projected roster construction, Purdue will again work through its frontcourt.

Painter repeatedly said sophomore Isaac Haas was the best backup center in the country. Haas' game clearly grew from his freshman season — more polished post moves, better free-throw shooting, even a little rim protecting throw in.

He'll never be Hammons, whose athleticism on defense often made him the primary concern of opposing game plans. However, with perimeter support, Haas can be even more prolific offensively around the basket.

Next to him will be Caleb "Biggie" Swanigan, who nearly led the Big Ten Conference in rebounding as a freshman. While learning on the job in terms of ball security and shot selection, Swanigan set a high baseline for production. Assuming typical freshmen-to-sophomore growth in skills — and assuming he may need to play longer minutes at center if Haas cannot extend

as deep into games as Hammons — Swanigan could approach a double-double average as a sophomore.

Basil Smotherman returns to active status after redshirting this season. Jacquil Taylor could become a regular contributor for the first time, possibly as an intriguing counter-balance to Haas.

Yet arguably the most important player in the Purdue big man group will be wing Vince Edwards. The Boilermakers need a commanding presence on the floor. Charisma is perhaps the most underrated element in sports, and Edwards hinted that he can be that kind of player for Purdue.

Unarguably, when Edwards played with initiative and confidence, Purdue was better. His 24 points and 13 rebounds against Little Rock could have gone down as a star-making performance if the Boilermakers had stopped the bleeding.

Painter, who has been coaxing that assertive approach out of Edwards for two seasons, began to see the results.

"We had some opportunities for him to be aggressive, and I thought he was," Painter said after Thursday's loss. "I thought he made some good drives, had some nice pull-ups there."

"He had a couple of plays he'd like to have back. That's part of playing a basketball game. I thought he was fabulous."

It's possible Haas, Swanigan and Edwards will take advantage of revised NBA draft rules that give underclassmen more time and opportunity to consider that option. In the case of all three, the feedback should benefit their continued development at Purdue.

Purdue was at its best this season when it was most balanced. Expect the same to be true next season, as well, where the guard group must replace Davis' leadership and Johnny Hill's energy.

Purdue faced questions about point guard a year ago at this time, too. P.J. Thompson helped answer them with one of the most offensively efficient seasons in the nation. In addition to being turnover-averse, especially in the halfcourt, Thompson was an opportunistic shooting threat. His next step will be to take on a greater leadership role in Davis' absence.

Incoming freshman Carsen Edwards projects as a point guard, but has never owned that position full-time in his high school and summer experience. He's flashed elite scoring potential, but as with any freshman, it remains to be seen how he'll adjust to the college game.

Grant Weatherford also redshirted last season. Recruited for his defensive intensity, it's not yet known what impact he can make for Purdue. The offseason may reveal more.

Painter prioritized shooters beginning with the recruitment of Kendall Stephens three years ago. Dakota Mathias and Ryan Cline followed, and all three could again be in the mix for two lineups spots. All three have their share of clutch moments in their career.

While Purdue can have a dead-eye shooter on the floor at all times, it will no longer have Davis' lock-down defensive efforts on the perimeter. No one player will ascend into that role. The Boilermakers need team-wide defensive improvement.

With those pieces, Purdue can again expect to compete in the top half of the Big Ten Conference and return to the NCAA tournament. The Boilermakers, even in the immediate despair of the loss in Denver, could see it themselves.

Yet they also acknowledged it will take more than talent to reach the next step.

"We're a deep team and we have a lot of great pieces," Thompson said. "That's why we feel like we're capable of making a run. We felt like we were capable of making a run in this tournament, but we just didn't finish."

# ***Vince Edwards stood out for Purdue late in the season***

**Brian Neubert | GoldandBlack.com | March 18, 2016**

There's no positive whatsoever in the way Purdue's season ended, but if there was any encouraging sign for the future that came out of the Boilermakers' postseason, it was the play of Vince Edwards.

The sophomore forward's 24-point, 13-rebound NCAA Tournament showing in Purdue's loss to Little Rock certainly wasn't nearly as complete a game as Edwards would have liked, considering some of the opportunities that came his way late in the contest that could have resulted in a more favorable outcome.

But it was still 24 and 13 in the NCAA Tournament and came on the heels of a very good Big Ten Tournament performance in which he averaged 15.3 points in three games and was named to the event's all-tournament team.

Edwards closed the season strong prior, too, averaging 14 points per game during a three-game win streak to close the regular season.

All told, Edwards totaled double-figures in Purdue's last eight games of the season, a marked uptick in both productivity and efficiency; his shooting percentages swung upward during that stretch, especially from three-point range.

Most importantly, though, the versatile forward - Edwards led Purdue in assists for the second time in as many seasons - provided Purdue some offensive balance with his ability to drive from the wing or push the ball in transition.

"I'm just playing my game," Edwards said after the double-overtime loss to Little Rock. "I'm just trying to do what I can do. Coach Paint put me in a position and my teammates put me in a position to make shots or make plays, and I just have to do an overall better job of it. I'm kind of just trying to come out and play my game, that's all I really wanted to do."

Again, opportunities came and went. There was a point-blank putback late in regulation that Edwards makes nine times out of 10 and a potentially game-winning drive later on that missed, not to mention a sequence where Edwards held up pushing the ball up the floor after Little Rock made a long three to tie the game with five seconds left in regulation.

"They were telling me to get into the paint and drive, kick, find, and down the stretch, there were two or three plays I wish I could have back to make a better decision," Edwards said. "But it's all about the process. You have to have failure before you can have success. It sucks it has to be two years in a row.

"It sucks for (seniors A.J. Hammons and Rapheal Davis), two guys who deserve more than this. That's what hurts the most. Of course, losing is never fun, but to top it all off, those guys' careers are over. I don't think people realize when you look at Purdue basketball next year, Rapheal and A.J. Hammons will not be there. It's crazy to think about. It sucks we couldn't let them go out on a better note."

That said, next season, on paper, does appear promising, though Purdue's improbable NCAA Tournament flameouts the past two seasons will cast a shadow over it. After letting slip a seven-point lead with less than a minute to play against Cincinnati last year, Purdue squandered a 13-point lead with 3:33 left against the Trojans. The Boilermakers lost both games in overtime.

But again, Purdue returns a strong corps next year and Edwards will be a central figure in it.

"Vince is a great player," outgoing senior Rapheal Davis said. "He's going to go down as a great player in Purdue history. Maybe one of the best. Good players make good plays. You're going to make some shots, you're going to miss some shots. But Vince played a hell of a ballgame. He's a good player, and you feel comfortable with the underclassmen carrying this team now to next year."

During the postseason, he looked like a budding star, a player leaned on just as much, if not more, than its post players in the final two high-stakes games of the season.

However much he might have done, though, Edwards will again end a season with a bitter feeling, same as he did last season, when he carried the disappointment of missing a difficult buzzer-beater against Cincinnati with him throughout the offseason.

Edwards was asked after the Little Rock game if the season felt "incomplete."

"It does to me. Don't get me wrong, we did a lot of great things. We had a great regular season and a good Big Ten Tournament run but this feels incomplete to me," he said. "Not necessarily all the way incomplete, but our goals, it was Big Ten (championship), if we couldn't get a Big Ten, make a Final Four run. Neither one of them were crossed off. So it sort of speaks for itself. I feel like we had some great accomplishments along our season, but we just left some things unchecked on our checklist."

# Purdue's Isaac Haas mature enough to help Boilers

Nathan Baird | Lafayette Journal & Courier | March 16, 2016

A.J. Hammons knows what he wants to see next from fellow Purdue center Isaac Haas.

He's envisioned it.

"Just turn around and dunk it on people like Shaq," Hammons said, referring to Shaquille O'Neal's backboard-obliterating work at LSU and in the NBA. "I can't wait for him to take it to that level."

Outside of Hammons' family, there may be no bigger fan of the 7-foot, 250-pound Hammons than the 7-2, 285-pound Haas. The Hokes Bluff, Ala., native came to Purdue to push himself and the once-underachieving Hammons to their full potential.

Mission accomplished on the second part. Hammons recently earned first team All-Big Ten honors and was named the league's Defensive Player of the Year. He repeatedly credits Haas' towering physical presence in practice as a catalyst for his coming-of-age over the past two seasons.

Purdue coach Matt Painter said last week that Haas, too, would be first team All-Big Ten if Painter played him 25 minutes a game. Instead, Haas averages 9.9 points and 3.8 rebounds in only 14 minutes a night.

Haas admits to mixed emotions over Painter's praise. He's unquestionably a team-first player, known for exuberant emotional eruptions on the sideline when teammates hit clutch shots or abuse the rims with breakaway dunks.

Haas, however, also came to Purdue to develop into an NBA player. The gentlest giant in the NCAA tournament has taken a leap of faith that he remains on that path while embracing his backup role.

"Obviously as a competitor you want to start all the time and play all the time," Haas said. "You really want to be on the court nonstop. But the team comes first, and as long as we get the win, I'm happy. I just know my time's coming and I want to be ready for it."

Rachel and Danny Haas knew their son would be big. Mom said her son measured 41.5 inches on his second birthday — about 7 inches taller than the average child at that age.

"I thought he'd be about 6-10," Rachel Haas said. "But then he just didn't stop — ever."

Rachel Haas describes raising a son that large with one word: "Expensive." The nearest store with baby clothes that fit him was a Target in Atlanta, two hours away. Pretty soon, the aspiring left tackle started running through football cleats like most people go through toothpaste. New shoes for spring ball were too small for

summer workouts, and the replacements were too small when fall practice began.

After Haas outgrew his extra-long twin bed — he'd started sleeping with his feet on the floor — he began sleeping diagonally on a king. A recent remodel of the family home included extra-high shower heads, and all doorways were raised to 7 feet, 5 inches.

"When it was time for him to get in trouble, I'd have to find a step to stand on to talk to him or make him sit down," Danny Haas said.

Even among college basketball players, Haas' size amazes. Dakota Mathias first met Haas when the Purdue commits visited for the same game at Mackey Arena.

"He put his arm around me, and I was in awe, like 'Wow,'" Mathias said.

That's a common reaction. Even well-known members of the basketball team can occasionally blend into the crowd on campus. Haas has no chance.

In high school, the mob of opposing players, coaches and fans seeking pictures with Haas often held up the bus at road games.

"Every single day I go to class I'm taking a picture somewhere along the way," Haas said. "It's part of it. My peers are fascinated by it and it's kind of cool to see their faces light up like 'Oh my gosh, can I get a picture with you?' and I'm like 'Yeah, it's no big deal.'"

At one time, however, it was a big deal. About 11th grade, his parents remember, Haas grew tired of being inundated with the three questions every time he went out in public.

"How tall are you?"

"What's your shoe size?"

"Do you play basketball?"

The queries grated on Haas, then a teenager who only wanted to fit in.

Rachel and Danny Haas tried to explain that curiosity sometimes gets the better of people. Haas understood what they meant shortly before starting his senior year. He and his grandmother were waiting to board a flight home from a summer tournament in Las Vegas when Haas spotted a man taller than him.

He walked over to the man, and guess what he asked him?

"I said, 'You've got to be kidding me. You asked him how tall he was,'" Rachel Haas said. "He said, 'Mom, I couldn't help it.' I said, 'Well, there you

go. That's exactly how people feel."

Time helped Haas adjust to his role in life. So did his home life.

Danny Haas is a police officer in Gadsden, Ala. He also works a couple of security jobs and does cabinet work "on the side." He interrupted a job building a deck last weekend to watch his son play in the Big Ten tournament championship game.

Rachel Haas, an academic adviser at Jacksonville State University, also does accounting for a construction firm. Those extra jobs go toward travel expenses for Haas' mother and sister Erin to attend his games.

It's from those examples that Haas draws his generosity toward fans, especially the youngest ones. Instagram is littered with photos of Haas towering over a smiling child in Boilermakers apparel.

"His heart's as big as his body," Danny Haas said.

In an interview not long after his arrival on campus, Haas said he was glad to be at Purdue to help back up Hammons. Hammons had the obvious upper hand in practice over the freshman, who had come in with plenty of bulk but lacking in conditioning.

Painter called Haas into his office after the interview and told him that as far as he was concerned, the starting job was up for grabs. Haas distinctly remembers that conversation, and a practice soon after.

"I was beating him in every drill, and he was having to run extra," Haas said. "I won the whole day — everything went my way. I felt like some of it was luck and some of it was hard work. He went over to the side and put his head down, and I think that's when he woke up."

Haas outplayed Hammons early last season, and took over the starting job for a stretch. Not until Big Ten season did Hammons begin showing the consistent motor and production Painter had been looking for. He reclaimed the starting job, and his presence led Purdue back to the NCAA tournament after a two-year absence.

Last fall, the scenario played out again. Painter benched Hammons for not handling unspecified responsibilities. Carrying the full load at center to start the season, Haas thrived. His offensive skills with his back to the basket had expanded, and his free-throw shooting had improved. He cut down on turnovers and began to display rim-protecting skills.

Haas opened the season with a double-double in 22 minutes against North Carolina A&T. He posted 17 points, 12 rebounds and nine blocks in 19 minutes against Incarnate Word. He scored a career-high 24 points against Lehigh and its star center, Tim Kempton.

Eventually, though, Hammons' talent at both ends of the court prevailed. He took over as the starter two games into the Big Ten season and went on to the best season of his career.

While he often made the most of his playing time, Haas played 10 or fewer minutes in eight of the past 21 games. Earlier this season, Painter said Haas approached him and asked what else he needed to do to play more. The unsatisfying answer: nothing. Purdue simply needed Hammons' defensive prowess and wider offensive skill set on the court as much as possible.

"I feel he can be that guy for us next year," Painter said. "He could be that guy for us now, but it's great to have that competition and that depth.

"Go draw up the minutes. I have a good problem."

The idea of playing behind Hammons gave Haas pause before he committed to Purdue. Danny encouraged him to see a different perspective. How many other players get the opportunity to develop every day against a player some consider the best big man in the country?

When Hammons declared at last April's football spring game that he was returning for a fourth season, no one was happier than Haas.

"By you going at him every day, it not only makes him better but it makes you better, which ultimately helps our team," said Purdue assistant coach Brandon Brantley, who works with the post players. "He's done that and he's taken a big step this year. I know it's hard playing behind a guy like that, but he's going to be so much better in the long run."

Haas said it's not his close friend Hammons' playing time that hurts. It's believing he's as good or better than all of the centers Purdue plays against. For another player, that could have grown into a cancer within the locker room.

"What impresses me most is how much maturity he's handled the situation with A.J.," freshman power forward Caleb "Biggie" Swanigan said. "Coming off the bench, that's not easy for somebody that's as good as he is. He would start for any other team in the country, and that's hard to do. But he's taken that and handled it like a man and I respect him for that."

When he committed, Haas said he chose Purdue because of the program's reputation for developing big men. He wants to follow in the footsteps of Joe Barry Carroll, Brad Miller and others who moved from Purdue to long NBA careers.

That goal hasn't changed. Haas believes his time is coming. The man who can't help but stand out for his size wants to stand out for his play.

The longer Purdue remains in the NCAA tournament, the more chances he'll have to show he's more than just the kid with size 22 shoes.

"Just from last year to this year has been night and day in how much I improved in my opinion, and hopefully the coaches feel the same way," Haas said.

"I can't even wait to see how much better I'm going to get from this year to next year."

# ***Purdue's A.J. Hammons now viewed as elite***

**Teddy Greenstein | Chicago Tribune | March 14, 2016**

There was the time he showed up late for the bus to Northwestern. And the time he appeared ready to depart for Wisconsin ... without his shoes.

"His freshman year he'd walk in late, hair disheveled, things like that," Purdue coach Matt Painter said.

A.J. Hammons arrived in West Lafayette, Ind., as the quintessential man-child. He looked like an adult but acted more like an eighth-grader.

"When I got here," guard Ryan Cline said, "everyone perceived him as lazy."

Now, with No. 5 seed Purdue poised for an NCAA tournament run, they perceive him in a different way.

"He is elite," Michigan coach John Beilein said after Hammons torched the Wolverines for 27 points, 11 rebounds and three blocked shots in a Big Ten tournament semifinal.

The light turned on late for Hammons, who turns 24 in August. It wasn't all that bright even at the start of this season, as he served a two-game suspension for undisclosed reasons and didn't start until three games into the Big Ten schedule.

But the 7-footer flourished into a first-team All-Big Ten player and won the conference's Defensive Player of the Year award.

"I've seen him change from someone who always had his hood up, feeling sorry for himself, to someone who is locked in all the time," backup center Isaac Haas said. "I love being around him, honestly."

Added forward Vince Edwards: "People used to say he didn't care because he doesn't show emotion, but he does care. He's always cared. Now that it's his senior year, it's coming out."

Not outwardly, though.

When Hammons was informed that CBS' Jim Nantz had called him a "poor man's Tim Duncan" during Saturday's broadcast, he replied: "I guess I'll take that as a compliment. We're kind of similar. Great hook shot, great rebounding, about the same expressions on the face. That's just how I am. Always been like that. I'd rather just play than scream and get all riled up."

Hammons never envisioned spending four years in college. No top-80 recruit does.

"But I'm here now and no complaints," he said. "I'm more mature handling my business."

Many Big Ten stars can say that because so many are four-year players. Think about Michigan State's triumvirate of Denzel Valentine, Bryn Forbes and Matt Costello. Or Indiana point guard Yogi Ferrell.

Iowa has four senior starters in Anthony Clemmons, Mike Gesell, Jarrod Uthoff and Adam Woodbury. Wisconsin's Nigel Hayes is a junior — it just seems like he has been cracking jokes in Madison forever.

Hammons' teammates tease him for being goofy and talking so fast, he can be hard to understand.

"If you don't talk to him on a regular basis, you're like, 'What did you just say?'" Edwards said.

Added Cline: "He's always happy, always with a smile on his face."

Hammons credits his coaches, friends and brother Tyrone for motivating him.

"He'd get under my skin and tell me, 'Man, you sucked today,'" Hammons said. "He'd pick out all my flaws."

Painter had more of a balancing act.

"I just tried to hold him accountable, like any of our guys," he said. "As a coach sometimes you're not flying off the handle on certain things, but you make sure there are consequences."

"He has improved in terms of not just being on time, but being ready. You see him up here talking fast, but he's really an intelligent guy. He understands scouting reports and what he's doing up there. He's very poised."

The NCAA tournament scouting report on Purdue will likely be to double-team Hammons, make him kick out to shooters Rapheal Davis, Edwards and Cline and hope they miss.

"We run plays through him," Painter said. "We trust him. Before it was like, they can't stop him, but he can stop himself. Now if you double him, he passes. If you don't, he'll be aggressive."



# **Purdue seniors share bond with Matt Painter**

**Nathan Baird | Lafayette Journal & Courier | March 5, 2016**

Rapheal Davis came to Purdue mature beyond his years and ready to work for basketball success.

He brought along AAU teammate A.J. Hammons, whose 7-foot frame overflowed with talent but lacked discipline and structure.

Both saw the lowest point of coach Matt Painter's tenure — consecutive losing seasons that included a last-place finish in the Big Ten. Both also contributed to the Boilermakers' rise to their current No. 15 ranking. Davis set a tone of accountability and grew into a dynamic player. Hammons established himself as a promising centerpiece before maturing into a consistent force.

Those closest to the Purdue program see the relationship Davis and Hammons shared with Painter as central to that development. Whenever Purdue's season ends, both players will take a special bond with their coach into the next phase of their lives.

"It's like going into practice with your family," Davis said. "He means a lot to me. He's helped me a lot of ways and he's going to continue to help me a lot of ways when I'm done at Purdue, which is huge. He's been one of the most important people in my life."

Davis came to Purdue rich in social structure but lacking basketball structure. He had four high school coaches in four years at Fort Wayne South and LaLumiere School. As a freshman, basic basketball terminology and concepts, especially on the defensive end, sometimes went over his head.

Yet as a freshman, Davis also stepped into the role that would define his career even more than his Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year award.

As the Boilers slumped to a losing season — an unfamiliar position for a program that had played in six straight NCAA tournaments — Davis embraced one of Painter's most familiar mantras: "Winning has to be enough." He spent that first season constantly asking coaches how he could help solve the downturn.

"It means a little bit more to coach because it is Purdue," director of basketball operations Elliot Bloom said. "When he finds out it means that much in another guy, there's a certain common bond there, probably. No doubt it means that much to Ray. Every coach can get behind players like that. That's easy."

"I can remember him saying one time, 'Look, nobody likes losing. This is miserable. What can I do? I'll do anything, just tell me. If you get 15 guys like that, you're in business.'"

Davis didn't become a consistent contributor at both ends of the floor until his junior season. Yet when asked about the guard's role prior to that transformation, Painter always referred back to Davis' work ethic and commitment. He backed up that confidence with authority midway through Davis' sophomore year by naming him a team captain.

"People think coaches don't have favorites," Painter said. "Coaches do have favorites. They just do. My guys are guys who do what they're supposed to. Here's a guy who doesn't get in trouble, does the right things, goes to class, works hard, puts time in on his game."

"It's something players either get or don't get. Sometimes guys have physical skills that are just as good, but you don't trust them. Ray is a guy you trust. That doesn't get handed out at the door."

Trust works both ways. Davis' parents, Richard and Monick, raised him in a strict environment of accountability. He admits he looked for the same thing in a program, and a coach.

Davis was only a freshman in high school when he committed to Purdue. It's more than his eight-year connection to the program that leads Davis to refer to Painter and the rest of the coaching staff as "family."

"He treats me like I'm his nephew or something like that," Davis said. "He always looked out for us, always told us the truth, which is one thing I have 100 percent respect for. He's someone who's never lied to me, never sold me a dream that wasn't true, never tried to place me in a position where he knew I wasn't."

"Coach reminds me a lot of my dad in his honest ways and his toughness."

Davis said he told the coaches they were in for a unique experience with the enigmatic Hammons, who grew up in Gary, went to high school in Carmel and spent a year in prep school at Oak Hill Academy in Virginia. The same could be said for what Hammons was about to experience as a Boilermaker.

Purdue head coach Matt Painter watches A.J. Hammons

Purdue head coach Matt Painter watches A.J. Hammons during practice Oct. 22, 2012, at Mackey Arena. (Photo: Michael Heinz/Journal & Courier)

Hammons said his previous coaches provided the same structure. Yet from eating habits to workout approach to punctuality, Hammons clearly had some growing up to do when he reached Purdue.

Where Davis never stepped out of line, Hammons felt Painter's discipline. He was suspended for the two exhibition games and the season opener as a freshman. He began this season on the bench while fulfilling unspecified obligations, sitting out the controlled scrimmage, exhibition game and first two regular-season contests.

Painter said the coaching staff went in with eyes wide open as to the challenges of Hammons' development.

"A.J. came in as a guy whose habits weren't there," Painter said. "His day-to-day practice habits, working on his game, getting better — those things weren't there. We were tough on him at times. We were going at it every single day because going at it every day made him a better player."

"He would always get up for games. The last year and a half he's done a better job preparing himself through practice. Both have improved immensely and he kept getting better and better through the years."

Since the middle of last season, Hammons has been one of the best post players in the Big Ten, if not the country. He'll likely be a first team All-Big Ten selection on Sunday for the first time as well as a repeat selection to the All-Defensive team.

In each of the past three offseasons, Hammons endured speculation about whether he would declare for the NBA draft. Each time, Painter offered pragmatic advice, showing Hammons and his family where players taken in the range where the center was projected ended up a few years down the road.

Despite his improved play, Hammons' draft ceiling might not rise much this summer due to his age. However, by staying all four years and growing as a player and person, Hammons may have put himself in better position for professional success.

Hammons doesn't discount Painter's role in his maturation, though he said he felt he learned on his own from the various life situations he's encountered in the past four years.

Coaches and teammates see Painter's influence on Hammons, and vice versa.

"They're really dynamic together," sophomore center Isaac Haas said. "They're really fun. They joke around a lot.

"But also, coach is more like a father figure to him and makes sure he's doing the right things on and off the court. "I think it's really helped him develop into a better man."

# ***Carrying the load -- Purdue's A.J. Hammons closes in on potential***

**Pete DiPrimio | Fort Wayne News-Sentinel | March 4, 2016**

The enigma that is A.J. Hammons once figured two-and-done was in his future. He'd come to Purdue, dominate for two years, and sign for NBA riches.

Then reality hit like an Isaac Haas elbow to the chin.

Four years later, Hammons is wrapping up a Boiler career that will leave him with numbers few can match. For instance, he and former Purdue great Joe Barry Carroll are the only Big Ten players to have more than 1,500 points, more than 850 rebounds and more than 330 blocks.

Hammons says he realizes he's better for staying, that leaving early would have been a mistake.

So does his coach.

"He had to be more productive, and that meant Purdue winning," coach Matt Painter says. "If he had come here for two years and we'd have won a couple of Big Ten championships and gone to the Elite Eight and things of that nature, (leaving early) makes a lot of sense because that puts him in a position to be a first-round pick.

"That didn't happen. His habits weren't good enough for us to win. He wasn't ready to carry the weight at our place. He just wasn't. He had the physical ability, but he wasn't ready.

"A lot of people want those responsibilities, but they're not always prepared for them. They have to grow into it. Now he carries a lot weight for us. He's very functional as a player. He does a lot of little things that help us."

The 7-foot Hammons twice tested NBA waters. Twice he was found far from first-round material. Even now, despite a season that will likely earn him first-team All-Big Ten honors, and perhaps All-America recognition, he projects as a second-round pick.

Still, given Purdue's No. 15 ranking, 23-7 record and its shot at a Final Four run entering Sunday night's regular season finale against Wisconsin (20-10), Hammons has a chance to elevate his prospects.

"He listened to rational advice from the NBA," Painter says about Hammons' decision to stay four years. "Not from me. For kids, sometimes it falls on deaf ears. They listen to whoever tells them what they want to hear. The NBA has an advisory board that will let you know the range you'll get drafted at. Where he was going to get drafted the last two years was mid to late second round. That probably wouldn't have placed him on a roster. He could have been on one, but it doesn't guarantee it, and the percentages say you won't.

"That's a hard pill to swallow without a college education when you have the opportunity to get your education and hopefully put yourself in a better spot."

Hammons arrived at Purdue with NBA talent and wandering mindset. When he was engaged, he dominated. When he wasn't, he was a liability. He cost himself. He cost Purdue.

Did this infuriate Painter? You bet it did. But did the coach lose sight of the big picture, that time and experience would teach Hammons what nothing else could?

Not a chance.

"We've been very patient with him," Painter says. "He cost us games early in his career. No question. We didn't have a deep squad and he wasn't ready to play here every day when he got here.

"The No.1 question I always have in recruiting is can this person function in organized basketball? Guys are athletic; they have crossovers; they can jump over the moon; they can do a lot of things, but when they play Wisconsin or Michigan State, can they do the things necessary to help us win? He wasn't ready for all of that.

"We committed to him. We thought that with playing through his mistakes and growing, he could end up being the player that he is today, where he can dominate on both ends.

"It made sense for us to play him. That was a big part of us getting him because he knew he'd have a chance to play right away and play through his mistakes. It worked for him. We are reaping the benefits now."

Hammons started at Carmel High School, then switched to Oak Hill Academy's Virginia-based national powerhouse program. He developed there, becoming a four-star prospect, but concerns remained about the consistency of his effort and concentration.

"Sometimes you don't know somethings about a recruit," Painter says, "but I knew everything coming into it. That's why A.J. went to Oak Hill. To get that structure under Coach (Steve) Smith and their program. That helped him make those steps to get going and to understand what he needs to do to be successful.

"It's been a work in progress. Now he's a guy who functions in structure. He understands things. He's very intelligent. From a scouting report, he didn't have to hang on your every word, or even listen while you were talking. He always banked on that he knew what he was doing, but he had no experience on playing at this level and understanding the details of what you need to do. That's gotten a lot better for him. Now he has some good habits on top of his intelligence and experience. It's not just his physical skills anymore."

Hammons has been at his best down the stretch. In the last 11 games he's averaged 17.0 points and 7.8 rebounds while shooting 56.9 percent. He's scored in double figures in 22 of his last 24 games.

So what is Hammons' NBA potential?

"I'd tell (NBA scouts) that A.J. is as productive as any center in basketball," Painter says. "He has the most low-post baskets of any center in basketball. He affects the game at both ends. He's improved his rebounding and field goal percentage. His free throw percentage has stayed the same.

"He has seen about every double- and triple-team you could see. He doesn't turn the ball over as much, but it's still his Achilles heel. When he is totally engaged, I don't think there's anyone better in college basketball."



If Hammons maintained his current production while playing 40 minutes instead of 22, he'd average 24.7 points, 13.1 rebounds and 4.3 blocks. No other Big Ten player can match that.

"You look at the numbers," Painter says, "and he's the best in the country."

"He has to prove himself. He has to convince somebody in interviews, because he's going to convince them in the workouts. Anybody they want to bring in and work out with him, he's winning those. That's not even a question. You want to shoot with him, put him through a shooting drill, and he'll make 70 percent of 18 footers. He makes 50 percent of them in games. He'll block shots. He'll protect the rim. From a physical ability standpoint, he's the best in the country."

Hammons is not close to a finished product. He missed a couple of games at the start of the season because of failing to meet unspecified off-the-court obligations. Early on, he lost his starting job to Isaac Haas, who just might be the nation's best backup center. Haas still has one more start (15) than Hammons.

And, at times, Hammons still has mental lapses that have to stop if he and the Boilers are to maximize their potential.

"He still has his moments," Painter says. "You don't ever lose that. You've got to keep getting better at things. You never arrive. That's not a knock on him. It's the way you coach a player. If a guy thinks he's arrived, you're going to get beat."

## ***Purdue's Hill bringing energy, more***

### **Nathan Baird | Lafayette Journal & Courier | March 3, 2015**

Johnny Hill's talkative nature made a quick impression on the Purdue men's basketball program after the point guard transferred in last summer.

Tuesday night at Nebraska, Hill was on the receiving end of an inspiring message. As he sat on the bench waiting to sub in for starter P.J. Thompson, Hill said assistant coach Brandon Brantley told him to make sure he had fun when he took the floor.

"It's a small thing, and people tell you that constantly, but I really took it to heart," Hill said. "He said, 'If you're not having fun, then why are you out there?' I just tried to go out there tonight and tried to have fun and bring some positivity to the team."

Hill ended up playing the bulk of the point guard minutes in an 81-62 Boilermaker victory at Pinnacle Bank Arena. He posted Purdue's best plus/minus for the night (plus-21) and affected the game on both ends with his energy and activity.

Purdue coach Matt Painter cited Hill's energy as the reason why the graduate transfer from Texas-Arlington started the second half instead of Thompson, the starter at tip-off. Hill's intangibles keep showing through in the box score.

Hill's assist-to-turnover ratio (1.2 to 1.7) and turnovers per 40 minutes (4.6 to 2.9) have both improved since last season at Texas-Arlington. Purdue is loaded with turnover-averse guards, some of whom are approaching program-best single-season performances, so Hill's numbers don't stand out. Yet he has improved over the course of the season, turning it over only 19 times in 17 Big Ten Conference games.

Tuesday night Hill distributed six assists without a turnover — the second time in four games he's played 25 or more minutes without a giveaway.

Hill also grabbed six rebounds. Only one came on offense, although his 40 offensive boards are more than any two other Purdue guards combined.

"He just kind of floats, waits for those long rebounds to come his way, and attacks them," Painter said. "Tonight he only got one, but he's had some really good nights just keeping balls alive and also being able to get us some extra possessions."

Dakota Mathias also mentioned Hill's energy as his most positive trait after the game. Yet he also rattled off several other attributes — from Hill's willingness to push the ball on the attack to his court vision. The sophomore guard said Hill has also been a great teammate, which isn't necessarily an easy feat for an outsider.

Last season, Jon Octeus transferred in under similar circumstances and adopted a more stoic version of leadership. Hill let Purdue know going in that he could be talkative to a fault on occasion.

"You would think the guy is crazy if you had been to practices or shootarounds or anything," sophomore forward Vince Edwards said. "But it helps us, and if that's what helps us, then keep doing it."

"We look at him like it's crazy, but in the long run, everybody's not really looking at how much he's helping us down the stretch. All the things people are not seeing he's doing for us behind the scenes, it's amazing for this team, and it's really helping us click here at the end of the year."

Hill didn't alter his personality to fit in with Purdue. He did, however, consider how he could augment the leadership already established by four-year Boilermaker seniors Rapheal Davis, A.J. Hammons and Stephen Toyra.

On Sunday he'll be honored alongside those three. It took Hill five seasons and three programs to have his senior night.

Nathan Baird on how Purdue has taken control by letting the game come to it.  
Nathan Baird/Journal & Courier

"It's going to mean the world to me," Hill said.

"Honestly, when I came in here I didn't expect to be a part of team like this that's so close-knit, so family-oriented. It's just a great group of guys. I'm going to miss them so much. It's going to be an emotional one for me as well."

# Scoring or not, Purdue Rapheal Davis makes impact

Pete DiPrimio | Fort Wayne News-Sentinel | February 25, 2015

Rapheal Davis might have lost his offensive way recently, but if you think he's lost his impact, Purdue coach Matt Painter has some news for you:

Get a clue.

While some of the buzz approaching Saturday's key Big Ten home game against No. 10 Maryland centers on the fact the Boilers' senior guard didn't score in last weekend's loss at Indiana, and that he's scored just six total points in his last three games, consider his rock-solid defense has remained ... Rock solid.

Davis, the defending Big Ten defensive player of the year, defended a variety of Hoosiers last Saturday, including standout point guard Yogi Ferrell in the second half. He was a big reason why Ferrell scored just four of his 18 points in the final 20 minutes, and two of those points likely shouldn't have counted.

"The other night at Indiana in the half court, he didn't give up a point," Painter said. "He did a couple of things in transition where he didn't make the right decisions, but he didn't give up a basket. When you play 34 minutes against the guards that Indiana puts out there, that's doing your job on the defensive end."

Davis had a strong offensive start to the season, scoring in double figures in four of his first five games before a knee injury sidelined him for four games.

The former South Side standout came back to score in double figures in his next two games, then had just two points in a loss to Butler at Indianapolis' Bankers Life Fieldhouse.

Since then Davis has struggled to score on the road (often true for many players), which is why his average has dropped to 8.8 points, basically two points less than last season.

"He's been pretty productive offensively at home," Painter said. "Not every game, but when you look at it in general as far as his numbers on the road and at home.

"Any time you have that discrepancy it's trying to get something positive to start the game. I think that's more important

than anything for him, especially on the road. You want to get something positive -- get a layup, make sure you take wide-open shots. Get something solid at the start."

Davis certainly did that in the overtime victory over Michigan State at Mackey Arena earlier this month. He hit his first five three-point attempts, and finished with six while scoring a season-high 24 points.

Davis hasn't made a three-pointer in the three games to follow. Overall he's had 12 games where he's scored in double figures, but only three in his last nine games. He's had nine games of six or fewer points, three where he hasn't scored at all.

Painter said the key for Davis is to keep taking good shots.

"It's decision making. Sometimes it's not there for you. If it's not there, that's not that big of a deal, but you can't be counter-productive by trying to force things."

Painter said they've tried to run plays for Davis as well as create scenarios where Davis can score within the flow of the game.

"That's worked at times. At other times, it hasn't."

As far as assessing Davis's overall season, Painter said, "He's had a good season. He had a setback with his injury. I don't think he's as athletic as he was before, but he's getting better. That affects you more mentally than physically.

"He never talks about it or makes an excuse. He's been a great leader. Whenever things don't go our way, he's part of the solution. He wants Purdue to do well. He's not a frontrunner. When issues come up, he owns his mistakes and corrects his mistakes. That's what winners do. From that standpoint, that helps our culture more than scoring points and stopping people from scoring."

Painter also provided clarification on the goal-tend call on center A.J. Hammons at the end of the Indiana game. The Hoosiers led 75-73 in the closing seconds. IU point guard Yogi Ferrell had the ball with the shot clock winding down. He drove to the basket. Hammons moved over to block the shot. As he did, Hammons' arm brushed

the rim, causing it to vibrate. He then blocked the shot before it hit the backboard, which should have been a good block.

Instead, official Ted Valentine ruled it was goal tending, meaning the basket was good. That gave IU a 77-73 lead with six seconds left. That was the final score.

Painter said the fact Hammons hit the rim had no bearing on the play.

"Any time the net or rim gets hit, the ball must be sitting on the rim or it must be in the cylinder, which is the imaginary halo from the rim to the ceiling."

Neither of those scenarios were true in this case.

"When he hit the rim going to the ball," Painter said, "now it's a regular goal-tending call. Does the ball hit the backboard first? No. Is the ball on the way down? No. "It was one of those judgement calls. It was close, but it definitely was not goal tending. The ball was still on the way up and it hadn't hit the backboard.

"The thing for us, at that time, we had fought back to get it to that possession. Now we needed to get that stop. If we get that stop, we would take it in transition. If the shot clock doesn't go off, either (Purdue guards Dakota Mathias or P.J. Thompson) is getting it.

"Three things are happening -- either Dakota is getting it, PJ is getting it or, the shot clock goes off and we have the ball on the side. If clock doesn't go off, we'd go in transition. That's what you want to be able to do.

"A lot of their guys were buried to the baseline. We had a couple of guys out. I think Rapheal Davis was seeing everything. It would have been an interesting finish, getting the ball to Ray on the run, and just attacking in transition.

"It's unfortunate that we didn't get that call."

"We just kept trying to shoot ourselves to paradise," Painter said, "and we shot ourselves out of the game."

# ***For Purdue big men, size is about balance***

**Nathan Baird | Lafayette Journal & Courier | February 24, 2015**

On most nights, the biggest college basketball frontcourt in America wears Purdue on the front of its jerseys.

A.J. Hammons, Isaac Haas and Caleb Swanigan bring an intimidating presence and sheer physical force to the game. Only one team has outrebounded the Boilermakers this season, and attacking the paint is a hazardous proposition.

Yet each of those players has, at some point in his career, been too big for his own good. Each of them seeks a tricky balance — large enough to hold their ground or move opponents under the basket, but agile enough to run the floor and make athletic moves.

Purdue assistant coach Brandon Brantley said he has “burned that candle at both ends.” The 6-foot-8 power forward routinely gave up 30-50 pounds to opposing big men during his Boilermaker playing career.

As such, he’d rather Purdue’s post players be the ones doing the pushing around. However, the game has changed, and Brantley said assistant sports performance director Josh Bonhotal has helped the big men find that equilibrium.

“When you look at the NBA now, the days of guys like Bob Lanier and Mark Eaton, they’re gone,” Brantley said. “Big guys are mobile and they can move and they can guard guys on the perimeter. Josh understands that, and I think that’s where he’s gotten our guys.”

Bonhotal’s computer files on each player include photos from throughout their careers.

Hammons is easily recognizable from his freshman photo — except maybe for his love handles. The 7-footer weighed 278 pounds back then.

“He was a fat kid,” Bonhotal said.

Hammons and former Purdue forward Jay Simpson were partners in crime in the dining hall. Hammons said they used to “smash out,” loading up multiple plates of food without much thought to nutritional content.

Bonhotal said his former assistant, Gary Christopher, was assigned to go to breakfast, lunch and dinner with the duo, five days a week. It didn’t completely curtail their habits. Hammons admits late-night meals outside of that supervision still occurred. However, it started Hammons on an important trajectory.

The senior returned from a month of workouts in Houston this summer at 248 pounds — too light, by his standards.

“I always wanted to be 260, because 250 is like LeBron (James),” Hammons said. “I feel you get moved a lot, which you do, but it helps with your quickness. I’d rather stay between 255-260. That’s what my ideal weight is.”

As Hammons’ physique improved, so did his consistency. He was a second-team All-Big Ten Conference performer last season and a preseason first-team pick this season. Opposing coaches have consistently noted his increased energy and impact on games at both ends.

Hammons took control of his development in part by taking control of his weight, and his lifestyle.

“When you can step up and eat the right things, eating fish instead of McDonald’s or something like that, it’s great for you,” said senior captain Rapheal Davis, also a former AAU teammate of Hammons. “It shows you’re growing up and shows you want to better yourself and do it for the team.”

“He’s lost a lot of weight and is still in great shape. He’s playing hard. Doing the right things off the court is helping him have energy on the court.”

Haas showed up as a freshman two summers ago believing he needed to get even larger than his already imposing 7-foot-2, 315-pound figure.

Even before struggling to complete the mandatory six-minute mile, Haas began to realize he’d been thinking backward. By the end of a freshman season that included bouts of fatigue-related lapses and diminished stamina, Haas was determined to go in the other direction.

Haas was down to 285 at the start of the season, and said last week gaining muscle had pushed him back to the low 290s.

“You can definitely see on the court how much better I’m running and how I’m not getting near as tired as I was,” Haas said. “I’m being more active on defense and being more vocal and not letting fatigue set in and affect how I play.”

Sophomore guard P.J. Thompson complimented Haas’ self-discipline. He’s seen the Alabama native making good choices when out to eat, or preparing the pasta and vegetables recommended by Bonhotal.

Believe it or not, one of his best examples in that regard turned out to be Hammons, the man who once needed a chaperone for his meals.

“He doesn’t really say anything to me; he knows I know what I need to do,” Haas said. “It’s more about self-accountability in that sense. He does a good job of eating salads, not really loading down on carbs, not really loading down on proteins.”

“It gives you a well-oiled engine almost in that aspect and I would say he’s been a big influence in that just by example of how to eat right and how to get my body feeling good.”

No Purdue player knows the weight battle better than Swanigan, who as a 6-2, 360-pound eighth-grader earned the nickname “Biggie.”

That was before he lived with his now-adoptive father, former Purdue athlete Roosevelt Barnes, whose guidance and discipline helped Swanigan lose more than 100 pounds over the next four years.

During that time, Swanigan blossomed into one of the top basketball recruits in the country. The 6-9 power forward plays at 250 pounds today.

Swanigan routinely shows up to pre-practice interviews already drenched in sweat. He lifts weights but also hits the Stair-Master, an example of his diligence about keeping his weight in check.

"I already do extra cardio and stuff like that," Swanigan said. "When you're on the road it will change your routine a little bit, so you've got to combat that and try to stay down."

Actually, Swanigan wants to drop another 10 pounds in the offseason. However, it has to be the right weight from the right places. He's a rebounding beast, leading the Big Ten Conference with 8.5 per game. In addition to his aggressive disposition in the paint, he's simply difficult to move.

Swanigan said he's still trying to get a feel for a body that's changing every day.

"Even if you lose five pounds, you can be a lot stronger person," Swanigan said. "It's about losing weight in the right spots and having a good base in your legs and your butt. It's about being stronger and cutting unnecessary weight off."

Then there's redshirt freshman Jacquil Taylor, who has the exact opposite challenge as his big-bodied teammates.

Taylor stands 6-10, but it's never been easy to keep weight on that frame. He arrived at Purdue in the summer of 2014 at a skinny 206 pounds. Eventually, he was shut down for the season with a foot injury, which had unintended physical benefits.

Unable to burn as many calories while he healed, Taylor bulked up to 240 by the start of this season. That triggered another adjustment. In the fall, Taylor said he felt like he was wearing a weight vest when he played.

Taylor consulted a nutritionist who recommended eating five to six times per day to maintain his new size.

"You definitely have to find a balance between being somewhat heavy and using your quickness and speed against guys who are a lot bigger," Taylor, currently out with a concussion, said earlier this season.

Just a number?

Scales are only one of Bonhotal's methods for measuring the big men. Electric timing systems, jumping mats — Bonhotal wants to quantify the athlete within the body, not just the body of the athlete.

How high can a player jump, and how quickly can he do it? Can they quickly do it on multiple attempts? What about side-

to-side movements? All of those questions are more important than the number on the scale.

"Where I feel I can give us an advantage is having that background and insight of doing draft evaluations with the Bulls," Bonhotal said. "There, we're breaking down from a physical perspective who these guys are and whether they're going to physically be successful at the NBA level."

"It's not just the weight but within that, how they move."

That's important for Hammons, Haas and Swanigan, all of whom have been mentioned as future NBA prospects.

Apparently, there are other benefits as well. For example, Hammons no longer has to hide those love handles.

"When I get the cuts, I'll show it off," Hammons said. "That's what I always wanted — to take my shirt off and show off."

# ***Purdue's Cline earning Painter's trust***

**Nathan Baird | Lafayette Journal & Courier | February 15, 2016**

What could have been a season-defining shot for Purdue freshman Ryan Cline instead loomed as a source of regret.

Michigan led by one with 30 seconds to play last Saturday. When Wolverines forward Mark Donnal missed a 3-pointer, Purdue's Vince Edwards grabbed his 10th rebound and started the fast break. Cline, with a clear shot at the other end, pulled up in transition for a 3.

The freshman made 3 of his first 5 attempts that day, but not the sixth. Derrick Walton, Jr.'s rebound and free throws helped pad an eventual 61-56 Wolverines victory.

Cline said he was "really down on myself" after the game. But Johnny Hill quickly stepped up with an encouraging word. So did freshman walk-on Grady Eifert and sophomore P.J. Thompson, Cline's longtime friend.

"I just told him to keep his head up," Thompson said. "I have full confidence in Ryan Cline taking that shot."

So does Purdue coach Matt Painter, who said Tuesday he wants Cline taking that open shot in rhythm in crucial moments. While Cline's role remains somewhat limited in terms of minutes, Painter continues to place more trust in the 6-foot-5 shooting guard from Carmel.

Kendall Stephens hasn't fully worked himself back into the rotation since taking a leave for personal reasons. Dakota Mathias battled the flu last week — Painter said Tuesday the sophomore had "thrown up five straight days" — limiting his stamina.

So Painter leaned on Cline in overtime against Michigan State and in the decisive stretch of Saturday's 61-56 loss at Michigan. Cline worked for that reward.

"I feel like I don't make very many mistakes," Cline said. "I don't turn the ball over on the offensive end. I make the right pass, whether that's to an open shooter or to the post and just let those big guys go to work."

"(Painter) having that confidence in me really means a lot of to me as a player."

The numbers back him up. Cline has turned the ball over only eight times in 357 minutes. Only Thompson has a turnover rate that low, or a better assist-to-turnover ratio than Cline's 4.6.

Asked what Cline has done recently to earn his trust, Painter responded, "the same things he's been doing all year." Cline plays only 13.7 minutes per game as a member of that reserve trio behind Rapheal Davis. All three can shoot, so Painter said which one he puts on the floor often comes down to "feel."

Defense and intangibles contribute heavily to that feel.

"You get a guy who doesn't have any defensive breakdowns, who sticks his nose in there and gets loose balls, who has that toughness, that grit," Painter said. "That's what we need. We need guys in there fighting."

Purdue also needs scoring punch off the bench. Purdue went more than 10 minutes into Saturday's game without attempting a 3, until Cline buried an open look to cap a 12-2 run and force a Wolverines timeout. He hit another with about two minutes left in the first half to put the Boilermakers up 30-21.

Painter said before the season Cline might be the best shooter he's ever recruited. Cline's shooting a solid 37.5 percent from 3-point range on 88 attempts, but has only made 1 of 11 inside the arc. (Stephens displayed a similar 3-point heavy approach as a freshman before developing an intermediate game.)

Eventually, Cline says, his game must also evolve. For now, he wants to maximize his impact by playing to his strengths.

"Getting open and looking for the open 3s is my best weapon right now," Cline said. "There are other aspects to my game. Obviously when the opportunity is there, I'm going to take it."



# **Hill's vibes, play lifted Purdue past MSU**

**Nathan Baird | Lafayette Journal & Courier | February 10, 2016**

Purdue men's basketball's narrow loss at Maryland last Saturday could have lingered in a young team's psyche.

Yet by Monday, graduate transfer Johnny Hill had already processed the loss with a veteran's perspective. That loss, and others to Iowa and Illinois, weren't setbacks — they were lessons.

"We've got three seniors, and when you get a team that really hasn't gone through that a lot this year, it's kind of expected a little bit," Hill said. "All of these moments we're going through are preparing us for when we make it to the tournament. We're learning as much from these losses as we have from our wins."

For much of Tuesday's second half, it appeared Hill might be wrong. When Michigan State turned an 18-point deficit into a four-point lead with two minutes left in regulation, it was hard to see what lessons the Boilermakers had applied from similar second-half disappointments.

Purdue, however, had answers in the decisive moments of an eventual 82-81 overtime victory.

In postgame comments, both senior guard Rapheal Davis and sophomore forward Vince Edwards said Hill's attitude helped the Boilermakers turn a potential collapse into a significant win.

"Positive vibes — Johnny preaches that, harps on that, being a leader and a senior on this team," Edwards said. "We knew we had been through this before with Iowa. We wanted to make sure we kept fighting. Our coaches kept telling us we're not going to lose this. We're not going to let this one slip."

Hill played only 15 minutes behind starter P.J. Thompson. Yet his play in the final two minutes of the first half, although overshadowed by the events of the rest of the game, were at the time an important boost.

You might also like: Find out what all Purdue coaches earned in 2015

Coming into the game, Hill ranked third in offensive rebounds among Boilermakers in Big Ten Conference play. He wasn't credited with one Tuesday, but he was fouled as he swooped in for one with 1:58 left in the first half. He made both free throws, before Spartans senior Denzel Valentine scored the game's next five points to cut the Purdue lead to 12.

Bringing the ball up with under a minute to play, Hill saw an opening and took it, driving in for a layup. After Purdue forced a shot clock violation, Hill did it again — though that one was a called play from the bench.

Those were Hill's only six points, but without them, Michigan State's second-half rally may have been too much for Purdue.

A.J. Hammons, Rapheal Davis, and Vince Edwards discuss Purdue's first win over a top-10 team since 2011. Nathan Baird/Journal & Courier

"We always joke about how he never runs the play; he tries to break it down and get a layup," Edwards said. "Coach (Matt) Painter finally drew it up for him to actually go do that, and we were just laughing about it."

"But that's huge for him, being able to get to the hole and being able to attack the glass and rebound the way he does. It's huge for us, especially as a point guard, because you really don't see many point guards doing that nowadays."

# Boilers show they can match toughness

Gregg Doyel | Indianapolis Star | February 9, 2016

This is the Purdue that will keep you up at night. Purdue fan, Purdue opponent, doesn't matter who you are. The Purdue that dominated No. 8 Michigan State for more than 25 minutes Tuesday night, then collapsed, then recovered, then won 82-81 in overtime?

Terrifying. In the best possible way. And maybe in some less flattering ways, too.

But for now, for today, this is a happy story for No. 18 Purdue. Its happiest story of the season. Probably its happiest story in several years, recent victories against Indiana notwithstanding. Those wins against IU — any wins against the Hoosiers — are huge, but in recent years they haven't portended anything as far as the NCAA tournament goes.

This one — this dominating, collapsing, recovering victory against Michigan State — portended all sorts of possible greatness.

The second-half collapse portended some weakness as well — “It would have been a devastating loss for us,” Purdue coach Matt Painter was saying afterward — but that's what coaches do. They hold a diamond and study it for flaws.

Purdue fans, enjoy the gleam of a Purdue team that is so skilled it can beat Michigan State at the Spartans' own game — and so mentally tough it can recover when Michigan State responds. Which is another of the Spartans' own games, come to think of it. Michigan State does several things exceptionally well: It defends the 3-point arc at a 28.2 percent rate, fourth in the country. Its plus-12.8 rebounding margin is best in America. And every night the Spartans are stronger than whoever they're playing, stronger physically and stronger mentally. Above all else, that strength, that toughness, is the hallmark of a Tom Izzo team.

And on Tuesday night, Purdue was better at every facet. Shot 3s. Rebounded. And was the tougher team when the game was there for the taking. Michigan State would have liked to win, but Purdue had to win. So Purdue took it.

“Tonight the better team won,” Izzo said. “I can accept that.”

Purdue was the better team because it had two of the best three players on the floor. Michigan State had Denzel Valentine, on pace to become the first college player since 1996 to average at least 17 points, seven rebounds and six assists, and Tuesday he had 27 points,

eight rebounds and 10 assists. He was the best player on the court, as he has been all season.

But both of the next best players played for Purdue. One of them was no surprise. A.J. Hammons, you know? He's a pro. He'll play in the NBA for a decade. He's been Purdue's best player for years, and on Tuesday night he had 19 points, 13 rebounds and eight blocked shots. He was sensational.

But the other guy, the other Purdue player who dominated this game — gave the Boilermakers a huge lead early, then made the winning play late — was Rapheal Davis.

You know Davis. Senior from Fort Wayne, been around forever, plays great defense. Nice player at the offensive end. Serviceable.

Tuesday, he was unstoppable. Davis scored a career-high 24 points, 19 in the first half when he was outscoring the Spartans by himself for most of the half.

“Give Davis credit,” Izzo said. “The guy's shooting 29 percent (on 3-pointers for the season) and hits 5-of-5 in the first half. That's what tough guys do. They make plays. I've loved that guy his whole career here. He's a tough kid.”

The Spartans didn't pull ahead of Davis until scoring their 20th point late in the first half, and all that did was get them within 34-20 of the Boilermakers. Then it was 48-30.

And then it was Iowa all over again.

Purdue fans remember Iowa. The game here, at Mackey Arena, in January. The night Purdue legend Rick Mount returned from his personal exile. Special night, emotional night, and the Boilermakers rode that emotion to a huge first half and led Iowa by 19 points, then ... fizzled. Iowa pressed Purdue into oblivion in the second half and won going away, 80-73.

That game raised a delicate issue about Purdue: This team is bigger than everybody it plays, but is it tough enough to beat really good teams? Future games suggested: No. Purdue already had lost to Butler. Then came losses to Maryland and Iowa (again) and even a disillusioning loss to Illinois. Purdue has all this size, all those shooters, all that coaching, but when's Purdue going to beat somebody?

Tuesday night.

And Rapheal Davis, after cooling off in the second half — he was 1-for-12 from the floor after the first half — made the game-winning shot. It was a free throw with 4.6 seconds left for the winning margin.

“That was an unbelievable feeling,” Davis said. “I've been telling these guys since the summer I want to beat Michigan State. I've never beaten Michigan State. Playing Michigan State is like playing IU to me. It's more than playing IU to me.”

Why? The Spartans had won seven straight games against Purdue, six by double-figure margins. That's what happens when one team is consistently stronger than another, and Michigan State has been stronger than Purdue for years.

But Tuesday night, after coughing up every bit of an 18-point lead, then finding itself down 72-68 with 1:59 left, Purdue responded. Caleb Swanigan, a former Michigan State recruit whose day was mostly a lost cause — eight points, four rebounds, six turnovers — scored on consecutive possessions to tie the game at 72, and Purdue's defense forced overtime.

There, the Boilermakers were in control. They never trailed; they scored on almost every possession, and when the Spartans tied the game at 81 on a Valentine bucket with 10 seconds left, Rapheal Davis made a play. He forced a foul on Valentine by squeezing him close to a screen by Hammons and hit the first free throw. Hammons rebounded his miss on the second, and the clock ran out.

Purdue beat somebody. And not just somebody, but Michigan State, the team that had tormented the Boilermakers for years.

“It shows we're a tough team,” Davis said. “We don't get quit. We don't wilt.”

A Purdue team with all that size, all those shooters, all that coaching — and all this toughness? Be scared, whoever plays Purdue in the future. Be very scared.

## ***P.J. Thompson dishes to Purdue needs***

### **Pete DiPrimio | Fort Wayne News-Sentinel | January 28, 2016**

Don't blame P.J. Thompson for Purdue's turnover issues.

The sophomore point guard has taken ball security to a ridiculously high level entering Saturday's home game against Nebraska.

Consider Thompson has 59 assists against 11 turnovers, a 5.36 assist-to-turnover ratio that is on pace to smash the school record of 3.12 set by Mack Gadis in 1986. That ranks second nationally to Stephen F. Austin's Trey Pinkney of 5.50 (66-12).

Beyond that, Thompson has just one turnover in his last seven games. In Big Ten play he has 22 assists against four turnovers.

That's heady stuff for a part-time starter in coach Matt Painter's share-the-wealth system who didn't rock the college world when he signed with the Boilers as a three-star prospect, and then again after a low-impact freshman season (2.4 points, 0.9 rebounds, 28.6 percent three-point shooting).

Did Painter see this coming when he recruited Thompson out of Indianapolis Brebeuf?

"I thought he'd be better once he played more. It's hard to do when you get the role he was in last year -- you play some, then he wouldn't play. He wasn't confident. Nobody who plays this game who doesn't know how many minutes he'll get will be confident. You've got to put yourself in a better position. He's done that. He's started some games; he's come off the bench and been ready to play. That's what we need from him."

Thompson has had as many as nine assists (against Howard), 16 points (against Iowa) and five rebounds (against Florida). For the season he averages 6.0 points, 2.2 rebounds and 40.4 percent three-point shooting.

"When you take guys," Painter said, "you see a ceiling they could get. We hoped he'd be a guy who could knock down open threes, run a team and take care of the ball. It's great to see that in his sophomore year." The 5-10 Thompson's difference-making play includes defense.

"He's worked hard defensively in putting pressure on the ball, and guarding his man," Painter said. "He's done a good job of taking care of the ball. He has a low number of turnovers, and is looking to be aggressive. He's taking his open threes."

"We need him to continue to be aggressive and play the game the right way. Sometimes when you're just trying to set the table for people and that's it, now (opposing teams) back off and you can get into that program where this is what I need to do and that's it. That's not the case with us."

"It's very important, when you have low-post people like we do (A.J. Hammons, Isaac Haas, Caleb Swanigan), that you have people aggressive on the perimeter looking to drive, pass the ball, looking in the paint, and also look to get their rhythm threes. When people stay low on us and hover, we do a good job of finding P.J. and he can knock down those shots. He's been very consistent."

The No. 21 Boilers (18-4 overall, 6-3 in the Big Ten) push consistency, particularly with turnovers. Thompson and fellow guards Dakota Mathias and Ryan Cline have all been effective. Mathias has 54 assists against 14 turnovers. Cline has 34 assists against seven turnovers.

However, Hammons, Swanigan and Haas have combined for 125 turnovers against 69 assists.

The Boilers hope that changes against Nebraska (12-9, 4-4), which has won four of its last five games. The Cornhuskers are led by Andrew White (16.9 points, 6.0 rebounds) and Shavon Shields (15.8, 5.2).

A big key, Painter said, is finding the balance between aggression and control.

"We try to get guys to be aggressive, but we put such an emphasis on taking care of the ball that at times they don't know when to be aggressive. You don't want to get taken out of the game by making a mistake."

"You have to push and attack, but when it's not there, back it out."

"The term I talk about is patiently aggressive. You have to have a mature pulse to your game. You have to be on attack and when it's there, take it. Attack with numbers, attack with angles, but you can only get it figured out if you actually attack."

Purdue hopes to have the 6-9 Swanigan back. He missed Wednesday's Minnesota victory because of an ankle injury.

Also uncertain is the return of guard Kendall Stephens. He's missed the past two games for "personal reasons" while dealing with the recent death of a close friend.

Beyond the game, Purdue will honor its Big Ten-title winning group that won three straight conference championships from 1994-96. No Big Ten team has done that since.

All three years the Boilers were picked as preseason also-rans, then played beyond expectations under coach Gene Keady, who won three straight Big Ten coach-of-the-year awards.

No one else has ever done that.

Purdue was 44-10 in Big Ten play during those three seasons, 80-18 overall.

Keady and several players from that team will be recognized at halftime of Saturday's game. The first 1,996 fans will receive 1996 replica championship rings. Fans must show their tickets at the J. Nine Club at Mackey Arena.

# **Purdue's Edwards settling into identity**

## **Nathan Baird | Lafayette Journal & Courier | January 23, 2016**

Purdue sophomore Vince Edwards let it slip in an interview after Monday's win at Rutgers, so nonchalant one almost didn't notice it.

The 6-foot-8, 225-pound Edwards, listed as a forward on the roster, referred to "us guards" in response to a question.

Asked about that answer later, Edwards said he could just as easily say "us forwards" or "us bigs." He wears a lot of hats offensively — slashing and floating into the lane, driving for dunks, popping the occasional 3-pointer. Don't forget: he also shares the team assists lead with point guard P.J. Thompson.

"It sounds like a tough job," Edwards said, "but it's really not that tough of a job when you're going hard and playing hard and having fun."

Edwards recently began bringing a more confident energy to the floor. As a result, things are seemingly coming to him more easily. He's averaging 11 points and more than two offensive rebounds over 23.9 minutes per night in Big Ten Conference play.

Is the versatile Ohio native's production on the verge of catching up to his promise? Iowa coach Fran McCaffery, preparing to face the Boilermakers for the second time, believes so. He said Friday that Edwards is "becoming an elite player in the league."

"He's only a sophomore, but he's playing like a veteran," McCaffery said. "What he's figured out is there are a lot of great aspects to that team. He is a valuable piece of it, and he's a different piece than some of the other guys, and I think that makes him even more valuable."

Purdue's sophomore guard on how the Boilermakers must be better in Sunday's rematch with Iowa. Nathan Baird/Journal & Courier

Edwards was one of many Boilermakers disappointed in himself after an 84-70 loss at Illinois on Jan. 10. In foul trouble for the second straight game, he made 3 of 8 shots from the field in a season-low 16 minutes.

In retrospect, that night might have been a catalyst.

"When you have games like the one we had against Illinois, guys kind of look themselves in the mirror," point guard Johnny Hill said. "I think he probably did that. He looked himself in the mirror and said, 'I need to help my team out a little bit more.'"

"He's been starting off games for us tremendous. I think it will just continue to keep going as his confidence continues to build."

Edwards responded by setting an assertive tone early against Penn State en route to a season-high 19 points. He kept it going five days later at Rutgers, leading in transition from the wing and taking confident angles to the rim for 12 points and eight rebounds before halftime.

Edwards couldn't hit even wide-open perimeter looks against Ohio State on Thursday. Yet he kept taking them, more evidence for Purdue coach Matt Painter that his message is getting across.

"He's starting to figure out about picking his spots, but also picking his spots after he misses two or three," Painter said. "When you take good shots and you miss them, you've got to stick with it."

"Sometimes when guys miss two or three shots and they're not high-volume shooters, they back up a little bit and they won't be quite as aggressive. I try to encourage with his skill set. I still want him to be aggressive."

Purdue's senior guard looks ahead to Sunday's rematch with Iowa. Nathan Baird/Journal & Courier

Edwards was, if not a non-factor, certainly a diminished one in some of Purdue's biggest games earlier this season. A two-point performance against Old Dominion. The 2-for-11 shooting and six turnovers against New Mexico. Four quiet points against Vanderbilt.

It's fair to consider the first half of the season a period of adjustment for Edwards. After playing Purdue's 4 spot as a freshman largely out of necessity, the natural wing bumped over one spot to the 3. As much as he looked forward to the height and reach advantage over his defensive matchups, he was giving up the speed and agility advantage he'd used before.

Opportunities to "take one rip and get by," as Edwards describes it, are scarcer.

Then there's the other adjustment. How does one walk the fine line between staying aggressive and finding his shot while also following the mandate to first and foremost get the ball to big men A.J. Hammons, Isaac Haas and Caleb Swanigan?

Painter acknowledges it's his voice in the back of his players' minds, harping on them to get the ball inside. Edwards (an excellent and unselfish passer) says it's not an either-or proposition. It's a matter of being ready to capitalize on an opening and keeping the ball moving if one doesn't materialize.

And occasionally, when an opportunity doesn't naturally emerge, Painter will draw one up for his not-that-small forward — or whatever Edwards wants to call himself.

"I'm learning how to mix it all together, and it's slowly but surely coming to me," Edwards said.

# On team of giants, look close for Purdue's X-factor

Gregg Doyel | Indy Star | January 22, 2016

One after another, Purdue teammates gave P.J. Thompson love. He's a little guy, tiny on a team of giants, so this is how they showed the little guy their affection after Purdue's 75-64 victory Thursday night against Ohio State:

Vince Edwards palmed the 5-10 Thompson's head and pulled it into his sternum. Johnny Hill draped an arm around Thompson's shoulders, leaned down to speak into his ear, and hooted something unintelligibly happy. Seven-foot A.J. Hammons bent down, way down, to bump fists.

What happened Thursday night – P.J. Thompson dominating a game – doesn't happen all that often. He's the steadiest player on the Purdue team, steady in a statistical way that, honestly, I've never seen before. More on that in a minute.

Most nights, Thompson does the basic stuff. OK, the boring stuff. He passes the ball to his team, not their team. He moves. He defends. You will not see him on "SportsCenter."

For one night, though, he belonged there. The night was Thursday. The opponent was Ohio State. The love from his teammates, the affection and appreciation, was palpable. As well it should have been.

Because P.J. Thompson won this game for Purdue.

The stat sheet won't say it, not quite, but that's OK. Ohio State coach Thad Matta said it.

"He was probably the difference, honestly," Matta said.

Thompson scored 12 points, and needed just three shots from the field to get them. He had one assist and no turnovers. Three steals. Took six free throws, made six free throws. Those are the statistics, and they tell some of the story. Just not enough of it.

The stats won't show you what happened in the second half, when Ohio State brought 3-point sniper Kam Williams off the bench and Purdue countered with P.J. Thompson. Thompson made the sniper disappear. In the first half, Williams scored 14 points in 10 minutes. He took five 3-pointers and made four of them.

P.J. Thompson didn't guard him in the first half.

Thompson took him in the second, and Kam Williams disappeared. This was no magic trick, just hard work. Thompson managed to climb inside Williams' shirt without actually touching him. Forget shooting the ball. Williams couldn't touch it.

Once Williams had been neutralized, Thompson slid over to Ohio State's freshman star, JaQuan Lyle. That's an interesting thing. Lyle is an Evansville native, and he and Thompson were AAU teammates for a time on the Spiece Indy Heat.

Lyle is the reigning Big Ten Freshman of the Week, fresh off a triple-double against Rutgers. Thompson is the 5-10 bloodhound from Brebeuf Jesuit. He averages 5.8 points per game.

After shutting down Kam Williams, Thompson ate up JaQuan Lyle. The OSU freshman finished with two points, no rebounds, two assists and four turnovers. Thompson didn't do all of that, but he did some of it. And he did all of this one play late in the game, with Purdue clinging to a 64-61 lead and Lyle bringing the ball up the court and Thompson knowing what Lyle was going to do before Lyle did it.

"I know his game pretty well," Thompson said of Lyle. "He was dribbling with his left, spinning, and he didn't bring the ball with him – he left it out. I knew if he spun like that again, I'd be able to get it."

With 2:19 to play and Purdue clinging to a 64-61 lead, Lyle spun like that again.

Thompson got it.

The steal by Thompson resulted in two free throws by Vince Edwards for a 66-61 Purdue lead.

Next time down the floor, Thompson hit a 3-pointer. The score was 69-61. A minute remained. The game was over.

"P.J. stepped up big time for us," Edwards said.

Stepping up isn't what he normally does. Big shots? P.J. Thompson isn't the guy who takes them. Not normally. Before Thursday's game, he was ninth on the team in scoring, and with his 5.4 ppg in 21.2 minutes then, he was last – literally, last – in points per minute. Behind even walk-on Stephen Toyra, who has six points in 22 minutes all season.

Steady? That's what Thompson normally does. And he does it better than anyone I've ever seen. In 25 years around college basketball, I've never seen a college player with more than five times as many assists as turnovers.

"Two or three (assists per turnover) is really good," Thompson was telling me after the game. "I don't know what I'm at, but it's pretty good."

You're at 5½-to-1, I told him. You have 55 assists and 10 turnovers. You have twice as many steals (20) as turnovers. I've never seen anyone do that.

P.J. Thompson is laughing softly.

"People try to tell me those numbers, but I don't listen," he says. "As long as I do my job and we're winning games, that's all that matters."

Well, on Thursday night they won in part because he didn't do his job. Not on the biggest play of the game. Purdue had trailed most of the night, but with Thompson vaporizing Kam Williams – who didn't score in the second half – and then finding Ryan Cline of Carmel for a 3-pointer and then hitting two free throws of his own, Purdue had its biggest lead of the night at 57-54.

Then Purdue's Rapheal Davis was missing an easy shot and Hammons was rebounding and missing an easier one, and Hammons had the ball again and was passing it to Thompson behind the 3-point arc.

On the left elbow, two Ohio State defenders were converging on Thompson. In the left corner, Ryan Cline was alone. On the bench, Purdue coach Matt Painter was yelling at Thompson to pass the ball to his left, to Cline.

Thompson looked to his right. Someone for Purdue was there.

"I don't know who it was," Thompson was saying after the game, sharing a podium with Caleb Swanigan (10 points, 10 rebounds) and Vince Edwards (12 points, seven rebounds).

"It was me," Edwards said.

"Was it you? OK, Vino was to my right," Thompson said. "I kind of ball-faked to my right and (both defenders) went to him. I just stepped into it and knocked (the shot) down."

Purdue led by six, its biggest lead of the night until Thompson hit his other 3-pointer, opening the lead to eight. This game was over, and P.J. Thompson had done it, and teammates flooded the floor to find the smallest player on the court and lean down, way down, to tap him affectionately on his head.



# ***Rapheal Davis leads the Boiler way***

**Pete DiPrimio | Fort Wayne News-Sentinel | Jan. 8, 2016**

Purdue's Rapheal Davis took the heat for the Iowa disaster, because that's what a senior leader does.

And then he made Michigan pay.

The result -- Thursday night's bounce-back performance for Davis and the No. 20 Boilers.

Boy, did both need it.

"It was a must win for us for the season we want to have," Davis said in the aftermath of the 87-70 win at Mackey Arena. "We want to win the Big Ten. We want to get a No. 1 seed (in the NCAA Tournament). We proved, even after a home loss, that we're still able to play hard.

"You've got to have a short memory. We took their punches and came back with our own. We didn't let the loss linger."

The result -- Purdue improved to 14-2 overall, 2-1 in the Big Ten. It prevented Michigan (12-4, 2-1) from joining Maryland, Iowa, Ohio State and Indiana atop the Big Ten standings with 3-0 records.

Davis led the way, which is what you'd expect from a guy who coach Matt Painter has called as good a leader as he's ever had.

"Ray helps your program," Painter said. "Most young people when they struggle, they have built-in excuses. We're all that way. He's not that way. He's like an old soul. He's accountable for what he does. When you're like that, it's easier to make improvements. You've owned it. It's like, I need to be a leader. That's where it starts.

"It helps our program because our younger players know what leadership looks like. He's been a great model for our program."

Davis, the former South Side standout, blamed himself for last Saturday's Iowa meltdown (blowing an 18-point, second-half lead) given he was just 1-for-7 from the field for four points (seven below his average) with no assists and four turnovers. So he did something about it Thursday night.

He delivered on both ends of the court. Offensively, he had 16 points, five rebounds and six assists (and only one turnover).

Defensively, in the second half, with Michigan's Muhammad-Ali Abdur-Rahkman keeping the visitors in the game, Davis did what you'd expect the Big Ten defensive player of the year to do:

He made Abdur-Rahkman irrelevant -- just three of his game-high 25 points came in the final eight minutes, and that was a meaningless three-pointer in the final 30 seconds..

"I let the team down against Iowa," Davis said. "I felt I had to go back into the gym that night, go back to the gym the next day, and keep working.

"I watched a lot of film on Michigan. Just focus on playing harder. That was my message to the team -- play as hard as you can and things will work out. I had a good game, but my teammates also had good games."

In perhaps his most impressive sequence, Davis blocked a Michigan shot, then came down to drain a corner three-pointer to push Purdue ahead 61-52 with eight minutes left.

Along the way Davis also helped limit Michigan sharpshooter Duncan Robinson to 3-for-8 shooting.

"You'd like for him to guard everybody," Painter said. "It's true. You'd like to have him on Robinson and Abdur-Rahkman, but he can only go on one guy. In a way they stayed away from him.

"Ray impacted the game by taking care of the ball, not trying to do too much, take opportunities when they were there. He was willing us to victory. We were plus-22 (points) when he was in."

The result was a much-needed boost entering Sunday's game at Illinois.

"Anytime you struggle like we did against Iowa, you want to get that bad taste out of your mouth," Painter said. "We had some guys who cracked. Nobody wants to get that way. Tonight we were able to bounce back from that. It's really important.

"Sometimes you learn some hard lessons and will be better because of it. It's tough to swallow to lose like that, but you go and fix it."

With Davis leading the way, the Boilers did.



# After bumps along the way, Purdue's Hammons is figuring it out

Bob Kravitz | WTHR.com | Jan. 8, 2016

Let's make one thing clear: A.J. Hammons didn't kidnap the Lindbergh baby. He's been suspended one time in four years at Purdue, been benched for disciplinary reasons as recently as the start of this season for reasons Hammons will not share, but he's a long way from being a bad person or a negative influence on his team.

Let's make this clear, too: He's 7-feet tall and he's got crazy skills, not just for someone his size, but for someone of any size. He's got a sweet touch around the basket. He can hit the mid-range shot. He's an improving passer. He's a terrific rim protector and rebounder.

Which is why, during a recent conversation with an NBA scout, I heard the following words: "If Hammons can get his head straight and keep it straight, he's a top 15 pick (in this summer's NBA Draft). No question about it. There aren't a lot of guys his size who can do the things he does. But people worry about the kid. You have to be. We can't babysit him in the pros. What's he going to do when he gets the money and he's on his own? Those are questions people are asking."

After No. 20 Purdue's 87-70 victory Thursday over short-handed Michigan, I shared that scout's quote with Purdue coach Matt Painter. He nodded his head as he sat in a hallway outside the media room.

"Totally fair," Painter said. "He's got to prove that to them. It's like a stock; if you want to invest a million dollars in a stock, you're going to do a research. They're right on. But that doesn't mean he can't be productive in that environment, because I think he can be."

Read more from Bob Kravitz

You know what Hammons thinks? He thinks it's fair, too. Told him what the scout said, and he nodded as well. He knows what NBA people are saying. He knows he's got the reputation as a high-risk, high-reward prospect. He spoke to the NBA's Undergraduate Advisory Committee after his junior season, and while he doesn't exactly remember what he heard, he knows there are questions about him, especially "my motor."

"It's a business; you know what I'm saying?" Hammons said. "You (the NBA) can be worried but it doesn't apply anymore. I've matured. I'm a new man. They don't have to worry about anything, but I've got to show them, so I've got to keep playing and doing the right things."

A couple of years ago, Hammons said he lacked a true "love" for the game of basketball, and at times, it showed. Even still, there are moments when the motor idles, the passion disappears. But those times are fewer and further between as he heads into the Big Ten season in his senior year. People see that 7-foot frame, those silky moves, that ability to protect the rim, and they

just assume he was built to play basketball. And yet, he was telling me he didn't always feel like a basketball player. He was just a young kid who looked like he should be playing basketball, like he was held captive in this basketball player's body. It wasn't until he reached high school in Gary, that he said he started to truly enjoy the game the way everybody else believed he should enjoy the game.

Undeniably, he has been a challenge for Painter, and Painter has been a challenge for Hammons.

"We've butted heads two, three times; that's it," Hammons said.

"Yeah, that's about right: Two, three times," Painter said.

Painter is a hard-charging, no-nonsense guy who made a college basketball career out of working harder than the opponent. Hammons, who is blessed with size and skills Painter never could have imagined for himself, arrived in West Lafayette with what Painter called "bad habits" and a decidedly laissez-faire approach to the game.

"It's got to be an everyday thing for him," Painter said of Hammons. "Every other day his freshman year, it was tough for him to practice hard. Then his next year, every three or four days. Then last year, once a week. Now he'll have a day like that once a month or every three weeks. We're trying to get a 'game' effort from him in practice every day, and that's what I think NBA people want to see."

Hammons absolutely took over Thursday night's game, a victory Purdue desperately needed after blowing an 18-point lead at home to Iowa on Rick Mount Night. Hammons owned the interior, scoring when he wanted to score, blocking four shots on the defensive end. Coming into the game, Hammons was leading the Boilers with 13.9 points per game (on 63 percent shooting), 8.0 rebounds per game and 35 blocks – and until he got his first start of the season last night, he was coming off the bench as Painter's sixth man. Thursday night, Hammons again had his way on a night when he should have had his way, scoring 17 points (on 7-of-10 shooting), five rebounds, three assists and four blocks.

"We had the old Kareem Abdul-Jabbar sticks out all week (at practice)..." Michigan coach John Beilein said. "He (Hammons) just affects the game. It's very rare you see a great shot-blocker right now like he is. You can run some cute stuff and get right to the rim, and you have somebody sending it back. It really deflates you."

Everybody around here – shoot, everybody in the NBA – knows what Hammons can do. When his head is right, and it's been right most of the time since the start of last year's Big Ten season,

he's one of the country's best big men.

But... There's the big but.

"He'd have to show me a little more on and off the court before I would think about him as a lottery pick, but for a team that needs a big, I'd give it a lot of thought," the scout said. "He can be that good."

I asked Hammons if he thinks about the NBA.

He smiled broadly.

"Oh yeah," he said. "Dream about it sometimes, too."

"Have you thought what you might do with that first nice paycheck?" I wondered.

"Buy myself a car," he answered quickly. No, he doesn't own a car. Apparently, Purdue does not pay well. "Then I think I'd pay my mom's rent for the rest of the year, get her stabilized."

That's it?

"That's it," he said. "I'd sit on most of it. I don't spend money like that."

"You're a college kid," I said. "You don't have money to spend."

"Yeah, that's true," he said.

Slowly, inexorably, painfully, Hammons is getting it, both on and off the court. He is dead set on getting his degree in Organizational Leadership and Supervision, with a minor in communications. And after taking Purdue as far as it can go – and it's going to need better guard play if it's going to go deep into the NCAA Tournament – he's looking forward to the NBA Draft and everything that comes with it.

He knows what the NBA people are saying and thinking.

Now it's time to prove to them, to show them, that he's worth the huge investment.

# Purdue's Davis takes on big assignments

Nathan Baird | Lafayette Journal & Courier | January 1, 2016

When you look for the genesis of Purdue guard Rapheal Davis' defensive excellence, you arrive in July 2008.

Davis' Spiece AAU team was about to play Virginia-based Boo Williams, led by future North Carolina star and current Golden State Warrior James McAdoo. Spiece had its own future pro, Marquis Teague, and the gym was packed.

Spiece coach Jared Quarles remembers having no one who could match up with McAdoo, already pushing 6-foot-9 and athletically gifted. Davis, barely 6-4 at the time, got the call, and ended up holding the one-day NBA power forward to around 10 points.

"After the game, we told him, 'Hey man, if you keep working at this, you could be one of the best defenders in the country,'" Quarles said. "Rapheal looked at us and said, 'Defense? We don't even talk about defense.'

"I bring that story up to him all the time. He's just a tough kid. He's not afraid of anything."

Quarles' words proved prophetic. Davis is the reigning Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year in part because of his ability to frustrate opponents of all shape and size. In a recent one-week span, his assignments varied from Riley LaChance, Vanderbilt's 6-2, 182-pound shooting guard, to Nigel Hayes, Wisconsin's 6-8, 235 forward.

Davis gets another big matchup Saturday when 6-9, 221-pound forward Jarrod Uthoff and Iowa visit Mackey Arena. Davis' own 6-6, 217-pound frame helps him physically match up against larger opponents.

So does his relentless mindset, and it all began that summer day in Georgia eight years ago.

"I told myself I had to either be tougher than him, or he's going to punk you out and embarrass you," Davis said of facing McAdoo. "I couldn't call my mom and dad and say I just got embarrassed in front of most of the country.

"I just tried to battle him, make him uncomfortable. I tried to do things I knew any big person wouldn't like. When I'm on bigger people like that, I just try to make it as hard as possible."

Davis went into Tuesday's game at Wisconsin with a goal of limiting Hayes' points to the number of shots he attempted. He was close — Hayes scored 17 points on 6 of 14 field goal shooting. Hayes made 4 of 10 with Davis in the game, but attempted only four field goals in 18 second-half minutes.

Davis said he's always been strong for his size. That's one reason why he played a lot at the '4' spot when Purdue was thin there his freshman and sophomore seasons.

However, Davis' teammates say brains may be more important than brawn. Graduate transfer Johnny Hill said he's never seen a player who watches as much film as Davis. In shootaround prior to Tuesday's win at Wisconsin, according to Hill, Davis could call out the full details of the Badgers' motion before the Purdue coaches broke it down.

"It's what he does off the court," sophomore point guard P.J. Thompson said. "He knows their tendencies, what they like to do. Whether it's a bigger guard or a smaller guard, Ray knows he likes to go right and shoot, he likes to go left and get to the basket and finish. Once you know those things, you can take away what they like to do."

Purdue coach Matt Painter said, while Uthoff is long and athletic, putting a bigger player on him plays into Iowa's strategy. Davis can't be broken down as easily off the dribble and moves better laterally. If an opponent takes Davis into the post, Purdue's own tall frontcourt can help.

When Davis returned from a four-game absence due to a sprained left knee ligament, the return of that defensive agility was Painter's main concern. Davis said the injury is behind him (he no longer wears a brace).

It appears he's telling the truth. Two recent assignments — Butler's Kellen Dunham and LaChance — didn't manage a field goal.

Unlike last season, Davis enters Big Ten Conference play with a reputation. Davis said he's ready for the challenge, just as he was that day against McAdoo.

"If we get in film and someone's telling me this guy who's going to be guarding me is the defensive player of the year, I'm going to try to give him 20," Davis said. "I understand that. I see it more, actually. Guys go at me more in one-on-one situations.

"It's one of those things you accept. You've got a target on your back. That's just the joy of competing."

# Hammons Carrying Purdue into the Big Ten

Brian Neubert | GoldandBlack.com | December 27, 2015

Since his first day on Purdue's campus - from before that, actually - A.J. Hammons has been followed around by projections of his potential NBA future.

Though the days of him having difficult decisions to make about just when to pursue that future are over for the Boilermaker senior center, his biggest opportunity to prove himself in that context still lies ahead.

If the results from Purdue's non-conference games are any indication, he might be on the verge of making the most of that final opportunity.

He seems different.

You see it when the 7-footer attacks the rim, trying to dunk balls he'd have laid up or faded away on in the past. You see it when he attacks rebounds, violently and decisively securing them as if they're his and his alone. You see it when he almost single-handedly takes control of games in situations where in past years he might have been more inclined to shy away from such burdens.

You're seeing a killer instinct, an edge in a player who lacked it when he was younger.

"It's just a mind set, man," Hammons said. "I'm trying to make this money."

No. 14 Purdue opens Big Ten play Tuesday night at Wisconsin, being carried, really, by Hammons, who has picked up this season where he left off last season, and then some.

That's been crucial to the Boilermakers' success thus far. Maybe just as much so to Hammons' standing in the eyes of those he needs to win over en route to a lucrative career after Purdue.

Through Hammons' first 11 games - he sat out Purdue's first two for undisclosed reasons - he has been dominant in his half of a time share with fellow center Isaac Haas.

He's averaging a team-best 13.3 points, a career-best-to-this-point 8.2 rebounds and a Big Ten-co-best 2.9 blocked shots. He's doing it in an average of just 21.3 minutes per outing.

Those numbers per 40 minutes are staggering: 25 points, 15.4 rebounds and 5.5 blocks.

Hammons is shooting 61.6 percent from the floor - up 7.6 percent from his whole-season clip last season - and 72.4 percent from the foul line. As a novelty of sorts, he's made all three of the three-pointers he's tried this season.

Against Vanderbilt in Purdue's non-conference finale, he put on a show in his biggest showcase opportunity to this point.

Nineteen credentialed NBA scouts looked on as Hammons scored 21 points, grabbed 10 rebounds and blocked seven shots, dominating the second half as Purdue separated itself and rolled to a 68-55 win in a game it trailed early in the season half. In an exhibition of four potential NBA draft-pick bigs - Haas and Caleb Swanigan and Vandy's Damian Jones being the others - Hammons stood tallest.

It was the third game this season in which he put a stranglehold on the second half of a closely contested, high-profile game.

At Pittsburgh - probably Purdue's best win of the season thus far, all things considered - he scored 24 points and grabbed 12 rebounds, much of it after halftime as the Boilermakers repelled the Panthers on their home floor.

Against New Mexico, Hammons needed just 19 minutes to get 16 points and 11 boards and help Purdue win a game it trailed after halftime.

Hammons was named preseason All-Big Ten coming into the year.

Now, it's to the point he's generating Player-of-the-Year buzz.

National Player-of-the-Year buzz.

That might be a bit of a stretch at this point, but it's an indicator that Hammons' play has not gone unnoticed nationally, which it easily could given Purdue's relatively balanced complexion and the fact that Hammons doesn't even start (or at least hasn't to this point).

"He's putting a lot of things together and continuing to build on things, very similar to what we saw with JaJuan (Johnson) his senior year, where each and every game he was doing something a little bit better," Boilermaker associate head coach Jack Owens said. "If he can play the way he did against Vandy throughout the Big Ten season, he will improve things for himself, and for us, we'll win, because he's the best player in the Big Ten when he performs the way he did at both ends in that game (against Vanderbilt)."

Hammons was outstanding for Purdue last season during Big Ten play, probably the biggest reason for the Boilermakers' mid-season turnaround, which led ultimately to its return to the NCAA Tournament.

The dynamics have changed now. When taken in context, just making the NCAA Tournament this season would be considered a disappointment for Purdue.

As the Boilermakers enter conference play now, they do so with credible championship hopes and all the makings - it would seem, at least - of a team that not only should make the NCAA Tournament but could have a say in how it unfolds.

Purdue is led by its size.

In a roundabout sort of way, all that Purdue is right now has been born from Hammons' career arc.

Had he left school early after his sophomore or junior year, Purdue wouldn't have what Matt Painter credibly touts as the best 40 minutes of center play in college basketball, between Hammons and Haas. It also might not have Swanigan, the former McDonald's All-America recruit who recently called Hammons' return for his senior season the "biggest" piece of his decision to attend Purdue.

Purdue has this uncommon collection of outstanding big men largely because of Hammons, because he's still in college whereas very few years ago would have projected him to be, because he wasn't ready after his freshman, sophomore or junior seasons.

Ready might be the term most fitting to describe Hammons' current form. Not in an NBA-related sense, but rather in the improved habits, preparation work and alertness that have made him such a better - not just productive, better - player.

And ready as in ready to lead with his play.

Earlier in Hammons' career, he wasn't yet that player ready to carry a team when needed. He could have used some help.

Now, Hammons has that help he needed years ago. But he also seems to have grown into that player.

"He wants the ball, wants to make plays," teammate Rapheal Davis said. "He watches film more than he has before, works on his game more.

"It's all coming together and we're starting to see the beginning stages of what he can become."

Hammons found consistency in time for the home stretch of Purdue's Big Ten season last year. This year, for his team and his own professional prospects, he needed to play a full season at that level. He's done it.

"When he's hooked up and ready to go, I don't think there's a team in the country that can stop him," Davis said. "... I don't think there's a team or individual who can stop him when he's hooked up."

Sunday night after Purdue's practice, Hammons was asked simply: "Why are you playing so well?"

He laughed, as if he was told a joke, then came back with, "It's my job."

Come next year, it literally will be.

With that in mind, Hammons appears to be helping himself right now as much as he's helping his team.

# Edwards follows successful path from Middletown to Purdue

Rick Cassano | Journal-News (Ohio) | December 27, 2015

Ultimately, it's a juggling act.

It's school and basketball and fatherhood and anything else that comes with being a 19-year-old, and Vince Edwards isn't complaining. The journey is his. He owns it.

The 2014 Middletown High School graduate is a sophomore on the Purdue University men's basketball team, ranked 14th nationally in the latest Associated Press poll. Edwards has started every game this season and all but four games since he arrived here.

"College basketball is everything I imagined it would be," Edwards said. "You really have to dedicate yourself to school and ball because you can get lost sometimes. You've got to keep your priorities straight. You have to know it's God, family, school and basketball.

"You always question things when times get tough. You're not always going to understand it at that time, but you can always push and get through it."

This is a Purdue team that was expected to be loaded this season under 11th-year coach Matt Painter. The Boilermakers lost just one starter and brought in a senior and four talented freshmen, including Indiana Mr. Basketball Caleb Swanigan.

The 6-foot-9, 250-pound Swanigan and the 6-8, 225-pound Edwards were invited to try out for the Under-19 Team USA unit that was headed for the FIBA World Championship event in Greece last summer. Edwards didn't make the final cut and Swanigan did, and he helped the Americans go 7-0 and capture the gold medal with a 79-71 win over Croatia.

"I took a lot out of it," Edwards said. "It was nice just being with my actual age for once. As your own biggest critic, you always feel like you can do everything better. But me and Coach Painter talked about it, and we all felt like I did what I could do. We both felt I should've made that team, but it is what it is. They kept the team they wanted, it was a good coaching staff, and they did a good job of winning the gold medal."

Once the Boilermakers came together later in the summer, it was clear to everyone that Purdue could be something special in

2015-16.

The team got off to an 11-0 start before losing to Butler last weekend. The Boilermakers rebounded with a 68-55 victory over Vanderbilt, and they'll begin Big Ten Conference play at Wisconsin on Tuesday night.

"We've got athleticism. We've got shooters. We've got slashers. We've got guys that can do it all," Edwards said. "We know we can make a Final Four run if we put our minds to it."

His role on the team has changed a bit this season. Edwards was the No. 4 last year, manning a power forward position that was familiar to him. He played it at Middletown.

Now he's the No. 3, a small forward/wing with a dual inside/outside role.

"Having the guys we have this year has allowed me to move out to the wing, which is more comfortable for me," Edwards said. "I'm the guy that can help do a little bit of everything. Coach Painter always likes to describe me as a Swiss Army knife, and I like when he says that about me."

Edwards is averaging 8.9 points per game, ranking fifth on the squad. Purdue is marked by balance. There are 10 players who average 14 minutes or more per contest, and they're averaging between 13.3 and 4.4 points a game.

"Our balance gets created because the two 7-footers (senior A.J. Hammons and sophomore Isaac Haas) have really shot the ball well," Painter said. "From a scouting report standpoint, I think it's hard on the opposition because I think we've got a handful of guys that can get 20 points on a given night."

He likes his Swiss Army knife and the matchup problems he can create.

"Probably the thing that jumps out for Vince is his versatility," Painter said. "He's got the ability to rebound. He can post up some. He can make threes. He can play off the bounce. He can really pass the basketball. And he's a good decision maker."

Edwards feels he's a better player this year,

a more confident, well-rounded player. But he admitted some lapses in focus have hurt him.

"I feel like I've floated in and out of some games this year," Edwards said. "The No. 1 thing I need to work on is staying engaged and putting energy into every little thing on the court. I have rare times when everything clicks together, and it shows in the stats."

Practices are daily wars with the stable of talent Purdue possesses.

"Teams are matched up evenly in practice, and I think that helps us the most," Edwards said. "It's physical. It's tough. It's gritty. It's dirty. It's great practice. You can kind of take it out on each other."

He loves playing in Mackey Arena, a venue he calls one of the best in the country. He also appreciates Painter's coaching style and up-front personality.

Edwards remains a Middie at heart and thinks often about his prep days. He regularly watches videos of himself playing at Wade E. Miller Gym.

"To see that time fly by, it's unreal," Edwards said. "I reminisce a lot. I'm always proud to be a Middie."

He played for Bob Ronai, Josh Andrews and Mark Baker at Middletown. All three made a lasting impact on him.

"Coach Ronai, the one thing I really liked about him was that he really taught you how to value every possession," Edwards said. "When Coach Andrews came in, he was a real humble guy, a religious guy, and tried to do everything the right way. He wanted us to do everything right. He did a good job of keeping us together.

"Coach Baker was more of an up-tempo, get-up-and-down type of coach. When you're playing for Coach Baker, it's really fun because all he wants to do is play."

Edwards — who lives with senior Johnny Hill, along with juniors Basil Smotherman and Kendall Stephens — is majoring in organizational leadership and supervision, though he's not locked in to a certain career path beyond wanting to play basket-

ball at the next level.

He said the academic load isn't easy, but noted that athletes get plenty of help and guidance.

"As an athlete, you literally have to fail yourself out of college," Edwards said. "With your coaches and staff and academic advisers, they do everything in their power to make sure that you're tutored if you need it. You're either meeting with your coach and your academic adviser every week. They make sure you have all the resources."

He's had to grow up quickly off the court. Edwards has a son, Trace, who turned 1 on July 31.

Some might view that kind of responsibility as a burden at his age, but Edwards doesn't see it that way.

"Of course it's something that you didn't plan for at this stage of life, but it happened and he's here, and I wake up and just thank God that I have him," he said. "He's been such an influence and blessing in my life. He's a happy kid. Having him smiling and healthy, that's all I can ask for. When I have tough times, I just think about him, and it helps me push through."

Edwards likes to keep up with what's going on back home in Middletown, and he knows people are paying attention to what he's doing at Purdue. They're both special places to him.

"I'm not just representing Middletown anymore. I'm representing Purdue as well," Edwards said. "Carrying that around is a good feeling, and knowing that I'm making everybody back at home proud is an even better feeling."



# How Painter and Purdue crawled out of the cellar

Mike LoPresti | Indianapolis Business-Journal | December 17, 2015

Welcome to Crisis Management 101. Today's lecturer is Matt Painter, coach of Purdue basketball. Revitalized, restored and on-a-roll Purdue basketball.

The low times of just two years ago are ancient history. The lasting image of those days is Painter standing in a hallway after the Boilermakers were summarily dismissed from the Big Ten Tournament, expressing concerns about his program, his players' commitment, his ability to reach them. He was a grim man standing in a cellar. Last place in the conference. No. 12 in a 12-team league. And you think Tom Crean has had trouble?

mike lopresti sportsFlash forward to this weekend. With the Crossroads Classic game against Butler yet to play, the 11-0 Boilermakers were starting to be noticed nationally as the contenders they are. A change in culture, they are calling it around here. A transformation in mood, karma, horizons.

"We got Purdue back on the map," is the way senior Rapheal Davis put it.

How did that happen? Professor Painter, the floor is yours.

"Normally, when you get into that predicament as coach in today's society, you lose your job. So we were very fortunate we were able to reshuffle the deck."

Underline that, class. Coaches have been guillotined for less. But back to Painter.

"It was my fault. Anytime you struggle as a coach, you've got to admit that to your fans, you have to admit that to your players. That's the start of getting better. Then you've got to figure out who wants to stay on the ship and who doesn't. I think that was the start for us; I think that was the start for me. This isn't a school district. I recruited guys. I did it. That was the No. 1 thing for us, trying to let them know what their commitment needs to be.

"One thing I try to tell people, 'If you don't love basketball, don't come to Purdue. If you don't love it and it's not your passion, don't come, because it's my passion. This is what I do. It's my deal.'"

His deal had been pretty good at Purdue until 2012, when consecutive losing seasons struck. Suddenly, no NCAA tournaments, and red ink on the record. Suddenly, Matt Painter was needing to use a different set of coaching muscles, trying to stem a retreat. One thing he knew he had to do was convince people things weren't as bad as they seemed.

"We had good pieces there. This is always a statement I make, but it's really true: 'You do good things when you lose and bad things when you win. Make sure you're aware of those things.'"

The pieces got put back together. Now here he is, in his 11th year with the Boilermakers, and is probably a stronger coach for having faced the ordeal.

"No question, anytime you can handle adversity and weather a storm, you have to learn from it. This is a very cyclical business, in terms of teams that roll over and coaches that roll over and even presidents who roll over."

Purdue has seen two head coaches in 36 seasons—Painter and Gene Keady. We've had more popes than that since 1980. Indiana has gone through five coaches in the same span; Butler, seven; the Pacers, 12. So Painter figured to have some time, but things had to get better.

They have.

"Now I feel like we have the right guys. I'm not fighting anybody on our team. There's not a lot of coaches in America who can say that."

Here's a trivia question. What's 14 feet, 2 inches of trouble? Anybody?

The answer: Purdue's two-headed T-Rex at center, a real pain in the paint for opponents. Good ol' Isaac A.J. HaasHammons. One minute, he's No. 44, a sophomore from Alabama; the next he's No. 20, a senior from Gary. One minute, a skyhook; the next, a dunk. At last count, HaasHammons was accounting for 25 points and 13 rebounds per game.

It's one part A.J. Hammons, coming off an all-Big-Ten junior season, but landing in the soup for unstated infractions, and missing the first two games. He has sometimes been a handful for Painter to reach.

"A.J. stays on my good side because his heart is in the right spot," Painter said. "A.J.'s an unselfish person. He wants Purdue to win, he'll pass the basketball, he'll do the little things. That part right there makes for a good teammate."

It's another part Isaac Haas, whose legal first name has become Much Improved. So he's started, and Hammons has relieved—the Purdue tag team.

How many coaches can look at the menu and order up a choice of capable 7-footers? Painter said they'll split time as long as both stay efficient, but he reserves the right to go one way or the other if either separates himself. It'll be something to watch as games with Butler and Vanderbilt and Wisconsin really begin to let us know where Purdue might be going.

At some places, Painter's seat would have been microwaved a couple of seasons ago, but he works at a school not known for an itchy trigger finger. Darrell Hazell will be back, and he's 6-30. In the SEC, he would have been vaporized by now, buyout and all. Painter mentioned how long Athletic Director Morgan Burke has been on campus, how long Joe Tiller and Keady were there.

"Purdue's been pretty special in that. We have a place that has some old-school values. I think that's pretty cool. I'm going to think it's cool, because I want to be one of those guys."

With that, our speaker needs to get back to the revival. Class dismissed. •

# **Purdue culture change leads to current success**

**Nathan Baird | Lafayette Journal & Courier | Dec. 18, 2015**

Purdue coach Matt Painter sat in the Mackey Arena press room on March 9, 2014, and took the blame.

The Boilermakers had just lost their sixth straight game, to Northwestern on senior night. A seventh straight loss four days later, to Ohio State in the Big Ten tournament, would end their season and cement a last-place finish in the conference.

Painter said it was his fault and his alone that he hadn't brought the right players to Purdue. However, he wasn't talking about their basketball skills.

"I didn't think we were as far away as it looked," Painter said. "Sure, we got last place and won five games in the Big Ten, but our talent level wasn't last-place.

"We lost close games because we weren't a close-knit group. We separated when tough times happened."

Painter recently gave that answer as the coach of an undefeated team rising in the polls and turning heads nationally. Purdue's current No. 9 ranking is its highest since 2011, and the Boilermakers have won all 11 games by at least a dozen points.

It seems like an overnight turnaround, considering Purdue was 8-5 coming out of non-conference play last season. Yet the roots of this success were planted earlier, when Painter decided to change the kind of person he was bringing into the program, not just the kind of player.

"He didn't just go recruit talent – he went and recruited the guys he wanted that he knew could play," sophomore forward Vince Edwards said.

"Don't get me wrong – we've got guys with talent on the team. But he didn't go recruit a guy with really good talent but a bad attitude. He wanted a guy who can play the game the right way, play smart, have talent and be coachable."

It's not as if Purdue's approach hadn't been working. The succession plan that brought Painter in as Gene Keady's head-coach-in-waiting for one season led to the "Baby Boilers" class featuring Robbie Hummel, E'Twaun Moore and JaJuan Johnson.

Purdue went to six straight NCAA tournaments, won a Big Ten championship

and built a reputation for toughness and success.

Then came the stumble to 16-18 in 2012-13 and the fall to last place the following season. Purdue hadn't finished last since Painter's first season. According to Painter, the difference was that 2005-06 team didn't have the talent to win more than three Big Ten games. In 2013-14, the Boilermakers had no excuse.

Associated head coach Jack Owens admits talent may have blinded the staff from problem areas in a couple of cases. He didn't feel Purdue had brought in bad people -- just ones whose approach or personality didn't fit Painter's vision.

"It was hard on everyone," associate head coach Jack Owens said. "When you go through that you re-evaluate every aspect of your program.

"One thing we came up with was, we want to take the right guys. If you go down that way, you go down swinging. We're definitely confident in what we do; we just want to continue getting the right pieces."

One piece was already in place. Painter made then-sophomore Rapheal Davis a captain midway through that 2013-14 season, and his work ethic set the tone for improvements to come.

Edwards and Dakota Mathias had already committed prior to the start of practice in 2013. Jacquil Taylor and Isaac Haas followed in the fall – adding size to a program that needed it. Purdue also grabbed P.J. Thompson in the spring to fill out the recruiting class.

When starting point guard Ronnie Johnson transferred in April 2014, it opened the door for graduate transfer Jon Octeus to eventually join the program. His veteran presence and the respect he earned from teammates helped the culture change build momentum.

Johnny Hill played at Illinois State and Texas-Arlington before arriving at Purdue as a graduate transfer over the summer. He said a higher attention to detail is apparent from scouting reports to defensive philosophies. The personnel fits that expectation.

"It's more business-like," Hill said. "Even though these guys are young, you really

can't tell. They're very mature; very about their business.

"... It looks like (Painter) got players that are really good, but their character is very high. You can tell that immediately just by sitting at dinner with these guys."

By the time freshmen Ryan Cline, Caleb Swanigan and Grant Weatherford joined the program, a new problem – "a good one," Painter said -- would test the Boilermakers' chemistry.

Painter said togetherness remained his biggest concern on the eve of the season. He knew an abundance of talent would mean short minutes for players used to bigger roles.

Yet that's where players and coaches say the culture change is most evident in Purdue's 11-0 start. Ten players average between 15 and 27 minutes. A.J. Hammons, a second team All-Big Ten selection last season, comes off the bench behind Haas. Kendall Stephens, who started 32 games in his first two seasons, plays a reserve role as well.

Painter said the best example may be Cline. After playing sparingly in two games at the Naismith Hall of Fame Tip-Off in Connecticut, Cline seized an opportunity in the second half at Pittsburgh and helped win the game with his 3-point shooting.

"People aren't worried about paying time or shots or little petty things like that," Swanigan said. "They're more worried about being the best player you can be while you're out there and just cheering on your teammates."

Haas said he's noticed in the pre-game weightlifting sessions, where attendance has grown over the past year. Players have followed the example of Davis, Swanigan and others.

Chemistry and talent are again synching up.

"The locker room has changed so much," Edwards said. "Even last year we were still rebuilding, but I feel like it's here. We're having fun. Guys aren't looking down on each other. Everybody's picking each other up."

# Boilermakers poised for deep tournament run

Mike LoPresti | NCAA.com | Dec. 10, 2015

Fair warning. Beware the Boilermakers.

By now, everyone should see Purdue coming, and not just because two 7-footers are platooning in the post. There is the 10-0 record, with every victory by at least 12 points. There's the 33.1 field-goal percentage defense – second best in the nation, despite Big Ten defender of the year Raphael Davis missing four games with a sprained knee. These are the numbers of dominance. The Boilermakers have trailed 15:36 all season, out of 400. Their biggest deficit has been four points. The Purdue gap in bench points is 371-140, partly because there is a second team all-Big Ten center who hasn't yet been able to crack the starting lineup.

So Purdue's momentum continues to build, with a series of blowouts and one clear message: The hard times are over.

Just two years ago, the Boilermakers had endured their second consecutive losing season and went 5-13 in the Big Ten. That had to stop. So what got their attention?

"I think it was coming in last place in the Big Ten," Davis said. "That's embarrassing. It was tough going to class, knowing you just lost three games in a row, everybody telling you you're not any good."

"Everybody looked in the mirror and changed what they were doing wrong. The guys who didn't want to, they were out of here."

They call it a change in a culture, easy to say, more difficult to pull off.

"It's really hard," coach Matt Painter said. "Normally, when you get into that predicament as a coach in today's society, you lose your job. So we were very fortunate we were able to reshuffle the deck."

Purdue's high command did not waver. The school has had only two coaches – Gene Keady and Painter – in 36 years. But there were some inevitable restless fan questions. Why's a program with six consecutive NCAA Tournament trips suddenly sitting home in March after losing 12 of its last 14 games?

It had Painter -- coaching his alma mater since 2005 -- doing some soul searching. He needed more commitment and more off-season work from his players, and they

had to buy what he was selling. It began to pay off last season when the Boilermakers went 21-13 and returned to the NCAA Tournament. Now they have look of a team intending to storm deep into March.

"We live in a society, not just a basketball culture, where when things go wrong, it's someone else's fault," Painter said. "At times that is true, it is somebody else's fault. But I played for Coach Keady, and I was Bruce Weber's assistant (at Southern Illinois) and when things go wrong, it's your fault. It's a 'we' mentality. It was my fault as the head coach, but each individual guy in your program's got to feel the same way about that. We had some guys step up and stay."

Davis, for instance, now the heart and soul. "He's done the things necessary when the coaches aren't around, being about Purdue winning, and that's it," Painter said.

Or 7-foot A.J. Hammons, a mercurial Boilermaker, who has wandered in and out of Painter's doghouse, but, at the end of the day, is an all-conference force in the middle. Right now, he's coming off the bench for 7-2 sophomore Isaac Haas, who leads the team in scoring.

While Davis healed, Purdue was doing all this damage with a starting lineup of four sophomores, plus prize freshman catch 6-9 recruit Caleb Swanigan, who had four double-doubles in his first 10 college games. "He has an unbelievable ceiling," Painter said. "He could be a special, special player here."

Imagine dealing with Swanigan, and a brace of 7-footers. Purdue doesn't have a front court, it has a skyline. "You feel good you're able to get a rebound or a stop, and next thing you know, there's a sub and here it goes all over again, another fresh big," IUPUI coach Jason Gardner was saying the other night, after those three did a tag team on his Jaguars for 35 points, 20 rebounds, and 12-for-17 shooting.

The Haas-Hammons situation is particularly intriguing. Hammons started 75 games his first three years and is among the most decorated Boilermakers, but was out the first two games this season for some unannounced misdeed. Since he returned, he has been coming off the bench, with Haas playing so well. Hammons was just named Big Ten player of the week, as a reserve.

So it's a platoon, for now. A very productive platoon. For eight games, they've combined to average 25.75 points and shoot 63.3 percent.

"It's hard for him now because he doesn't play quite as much, because Haas has improved so much," Painter said of Hammons. "So as a tandem, it puts us in a tough spot."

"They understand it, and we will continue to split time if they're both really consistent. But if one is clearly better than the other in a particular game, I'll go with that person. It's a great problem to have, but I don't look at it (as a problem). Through the course of battling and fighting, somebody gets injured, somebody gets in foul trouble."

Bottom line, Purdue has a capable 7-footer on the floor all the time. Not many teams can say that. All the better if no one grows testy about playing time.

"They get along as well as anybody on our team," Davis said. "They don't bicker, they're not jealous of each other and the time they get. When those two are getting along, it helps the whole team. They're our horses out there, so we're going to feed them."

Purdue is on a roll, and the last-place finish seems forever ago, even if it has been only 21 months.

"Now I feel like we have the right guys," Painter said. "I'm not fighting anybody on our team. There's not a lot of coaches in America who can say that."

We'll know more about the Boilermakers soon. They close December with Butler, Vanderbilt and Wisconsin. But even the softer portion of the non-conference schedule had a purpose. Painter wanted to see if his team remembered last season, when Purdue blinked at home against North Florida and Gardner-Webb.

"We learned some hard lessons," he said. "Those games probably cost us a seed in March."

No blinking so far this year, just a non-stop surge to date, and Davis could speak for what has gone on.

"We got Purdue back on the map."

# Purdue's Edwards thankful for mother's lessons

Nathan Baird | Lafayette Journal & Courier | November 25, 2015

In the final game of his freshman season, Vince Edwards put on a high-post passing clinic against Cincinnati in the NCAA tournament.

One sometimes wonders if the Purdue forward was born with an instinct to pass up shots and find an open teammate.

"Believe it or not," Edwards said, "I used to be really selfish when I was a kid."

Hard to believe, but there were witnesses. As a self-confessed 4-year-old ball hog, Edwards played on a Cincinnati-based youth team called the Mid-City Panthers. On another team, he might have had his run of the court.

The Panthers, however, were coached by Edwards' mother, Glennetta Patton. She preached team play and sharing the ball. Vincent, as Patton still calls the youngest of her three sons, struggled with that concept.

"I had a teammate wide open down the court — I'll never forget — I dribbled all the way to the hole and laid it up," Edwards said. "My mom called a timeout and sat me on the bench and told us, 'If anybody shoots the ball before four passes, you're coming out.'"

"First play back out of the timeout, I step in, shoot the ball right away. My mom benched me for the rest of the game."

Tough love, indeed. In the Edwards family, however, basketball isn't just a game. It is, in Purdue coach Matt Painter's words, "a way of life."

Vince Edwards' father, Bill, starred at Wright State prior to a 12-year professional career in Europe and elsewhere. Older brothers Bill Jr. (Penn State) and Darius (Miami of Ohio) also played college basketball.

So did Patton, somewhat reluctantly. Not that she didn't love basketball. Patton's father used to take her to the local courts on Saturdays so she could play against the boys.

"He told them, 'No mercy, but don't hurt her,'" Patton said. "That's how I learned to get physical."

Patton starred at Lemon-Monroe High School in Monroe, Ohio, but thought her college career was over when Bill Jr. came along. She attended Sinclair Community College in Dayton, Ohio, where one of the assistant women's basketball coaches recognized her from her high school days.

She talked Patton into coming to a practice, which quickly led to a scholarship offer. Patton played two seasons and helped Sinclair win a conference championship as a freshman.

That background legitimized the high basketball standards she expected of her sons. When Vince and his brothers came home from AAU tournaments, Patton sent them to the backyard to run suicides for every free throw they missed.

Yet mom also could be counted on for tactical advice.

"When he was a freshman, being the new kid on the block, they don't really want to pass you the ball or anything," Patton said of Edwards' Middletown High School days. "I told him all the time, 'Listen, any time the ball hits the rim, get to the opposite side and get the offensive rebound. If you get the offensive rebound, you don't have to worry about anyone passing you the ball.'"

Guess who has quickly established himself as one of the premier offensive rebounders in the Big Ten Conference last season?

Edwards won Big Ten Freshman of the Week honors three times last season, averaging 8.8 points, 4.8 rebounds and setting a Purdue record for a non-guard with 90 assists. (Oh yeah — those early lessons in unselfishness eventually sunk in.)

Those backyard suicides taught Edwards never to be satisfied. So he turned to Boilermakers assistant director of sports performance Josh Bonhotal and spent much of his summer in the weight room or the gym.

"We do get two hours (per week) with them, but that's not enough for them to become an elite player," Purdue assistant coach Greg Gary said. "They have to do it on their own. Without question, it showed right away that he'd put in a lot of work."

Over the summer, Edwards attended USA Basketball's training camp for its FIBA U-19 World Championships team. He didn't make the final cut, but he came back from Colorado more polished and more confident. Through the preseason and Purdue's first three games, Edwards has played with more explosiveness at both ends of the floor while showing off an improved jump shot.

"It's pretty crazy what I've seen," sophomore guard Dakota Mathias, like Edwards an Ohio native, said last month. "His athleticism — I don't think I've ever seen a player the last two or three months, just the way he's jumped."

"The first drill we did in the first practice, he went up and dunked on somebody. He was able to do that last year, but it's how quick he got up and did it. He's consistently done that in every practice."

Consistency is a key word for Edwards this season. He

showed flashes of ability in essentially every facet as a freshman. The goal now is to put them all together on a nightly basis.

Edwards said he covers his locker with reminders and motivational slogans. His brother, Bill, sends suggestions. And then there are the initials "TSE" written on the white athletic tape wrapped around Edwards' right wrist.

They stand for Trace Scott Edwards, his son, born a year ago last July.

Hardly perfect timing for a young man embarking on his college career. Mom certainly had concerns.

"I didn't know how to handle it," Patton said. "Of course, as a parent you're upset. Like, 'What in the world?' You're shocked."

Edwards, however, said fatherhood gave him new purpose.

"It was the greatest day of my life, seeing him, seeing that transition in him being born," Edwards said. "It's not about me anymore. Sometimes you just need a better 'why.' Him coming into my life couldn't have happened at a better time."

Edwards said he's motivated to make sure Trace, who lives with his mother in Ohio, has the best future possible. That means maximizing his own professional basketball potential.

Patton knows that decision will come eventually but wants her son to focus on the season ahead. She's still not shy about coaching her son.

"Notes? Forget notes," Edwards said. "It's phone calls and phone calls and don't let you not answer that phone because it's going to be an even longer call."



# ***Purdue's Isaac Haas displaying his growth***

## **Nathan Baird | Lafayette Journal & Courier | November 20, 2015**

Purdue freshman Jacquil Taylor, tasked with battling Isaac Haas in basketball practice every day, is well acquainted with the behemoth sophomore's improvements.

By dropping 12 pounds, the 7-2, 285-pound Haas can run the floor better and maintain stamina. A year of experience has added confidence and nuance to his game.

And you no longer have to worry about getting cracked in the nose with an elbow, right?

"Nope, still about the same," Taylor said with a smile.

Perhaps that hasn't changed. In many other facets, however, Haas' game is stronger and more refined compared to the end of his freshman season.

Purdue coach Matt Painter called Haas "the best player" in Wednesday's 96-61 victory over Incarnate Word. The Hokes Bluff, Ala., native posted his second career double-double (the first came on opening night) with 17 points, 12 rebounds and four blocks in only 19 minutes.

Haas leads Purdue in scoring with 15 points per game. Even with senior center A.J. Hammons' return to active status, Haas established himself as the Boilermakers' starting center.

"I feel like I am being more aggressive," Haas said. "Part of that came with maturity and having more confidence in my game going out there.

"Last year, I had a problem believing in myself when I was on the block, second-guessing myself before I would make a move. This year, I'm kind of going with the flow and it's helping me out so far."

Haas boosted his offensive efficiency by dribbling less and more assertively taking the ball to the rim. He has converted 14-of-19 field-goal attempts when opponents aren't fouling him in desperation. Haas made 7-of-8 at the free throw line Wednesday and is hitting 70.8 percent early — a big jump from a 54.7 percent performance as a freshman.

Haas turned the ball over six times for every assist last season. So far this season, he's even at four apiece.

"He's finally getting meaner on the block with his rebounds and with his finishes," sophomore forward Vince Edwards said. "He's going up to dunk. He's finishing, and that's one thing we've been begging and just preaching to him."

Haas currently averages 16 rebounds per 40 minutes — an impressive jump even over his pro-rated freshman average. With Hammons on the bench for the first two games, Haas assumed a greater defensive responsibility. Asked after Sunday's victory over Vermont whether Haas also could develop into a rim protector, Painter scoffed.

"That's just a lot of cargo," Painter said. Unlike Hammons and other high-volume shot-blockers, Haas isn't mobile enough to make multiple dynamic moves against a shooter on each possession.

"It's important for him to stay in a stance, stay on his feet, stay in front of the ball, and when he does that, now make them score over him," Painter said. "Use that ultimate size but not be a shot-blocker.

"A lot of times guys can double-jump, triple-jump, keep going. His first one's good, but his second one's not bad — his second one doesn't exist."

Haas blocked 25 shots in 34 games as a freshman. Yet four more blocks Wednesday gave him nine through three games. Just as important: He's been whistled for only three fouls in the process.

To explain that improvement, Painter points to Haas' improved defensive positioning and increased mobility.

Haas explained it by literally pointing to Hammons, the man seated to his left at Wednesday's postgame news conference.

"I learned from that guy," Haas said of the tutelage of the Big Ten's three-time defending blocked shots leader. "I owe a lot of credit to him. But I also put a lot of work in over the summer, losing a lot of weight and being able to jump quicker and make a play on the ball."

Painter saw flashes of this last season, when Haas outplayed Hammons in the first half of the season. He said he'll switch starters again in the coming weeks if it benefits the team.

Performances such as Wednesday's, however, can't be ignored.

"He was great," Painter said. "I really like his effort. I like the way he's rebounding the basketball, trying to block some shots, chasing the ball a little bit, not just staying in his area and being robotic.

"He showed there's an athlete inside him tonight and really made some plays."

# Rapheal Davis: Purdue's heart and soul

Brian Neubert | GoldandBlack.com | November 13, 2015

It was June of 2014 and Purdue was just months removed from finishing in last place in the Big Ten.

The bad news, aside from Purdue having just finished in last place in the Big Ten: It returned only a handful of scholarship players from that team, barely enough to field a starting lineup.

The good news, though: It returned only a handful of scholarship players from that team, the one that crashed and burned late in the season, showing glaring symptoms of erosion at the program's most basic, most important levels.

A new freshman class had just arrived.

They joined the team's few returning veterans for a meeting at the home of Cathy Wright-Eger, the athletic department's leadership adviser.

Purdue's players, new and old, congregated in a circle to discuss their "feelings."

When it was Rapheal Davis' turn to sit in mid-circle, for teammates to assess his strengths and for him to assess his own weaknesses - both out loud - the message was a consistent one.

Teammates, one by one, threw out terms like "leader," "respected," "motivated," "role model," "work ethic" and "discipline."

When it was Davis' turn to self-audit in front of his teammates, he diagnosed himself as needing to assert himself as a leader.

Someone had to.

At that time, Purdue's locker room was a rudderless ship.

Today, Davis runs that locker room.

He is Purdue's alpha, its heart and soul, the one player above all others who can be credited with not only restoring the program's culture, but strengthening it. In that context, he's been one of the most important, most influential players Purdue's had in its modern era.

He is the player Matt Painter is talking about when he says - in the context of his program's mass defections in past years - the program has changed for the better, "because of the guys who have stayed."

Maybe it was that day in June that Davis received the call that he would answer, though his emergence into Purdue's leader came about organically, in correlation with him developing into a consistently productive player.

But it was an important message teammates delivered to Davis that day last June during a meeting that was supposed an hour-and-a-half tops, but went three. Davis was already a captain, but he had to assert himself.

"They told him, 'You're the one we look to, but you have to be vocal,'" Wright-Eger said. "... From that point on, I just don't think he's held anything back. If he thought something, felt it, saw it, he said it out loud. And they listen to him.

"He's one of the few leaders I've ever seen turn a team around that quickly."

Friday, Purdue opens its anticipated 2015-16 season, Davis' senior season. The end of his career remains months off, with some of the most important games of that career yet to be played. With that said, the foundation of his legacy at Purdue is already in place.

He's been one of the finest leaders the program has known, a crucial influence at a critical juncture.

Making his story all the more notable is where he came from, emerging from a roster early in his career largely devoid of leadership in the player ranks.

But not completely, Davis says.

"Having Dru Anthrop as a senior my freshman year, someone who walked on to the team and was a big name in Lafayette and seeing him having the pride in not only the school but also the city, that was big for me," Davis said. "Seeing him earn a scholarship and he played in games. He showed me how hard you have to work, and that once you work, then you can talk. Having him around my freshman year, that was important."

Looking back on it, there were signs early that Davis was going to emerge as a player, and presence, of substance.

Back in 2012, when higher-regarded class-

mates were essentially thrust into leading roles from Day 1 due to urgent needs or gaping voids, Davis was the freshman who willed himself into a role.

Through simple effort and conscientiousness - he was the guy texting coaches after hours for feedback and improvement tips - he forced himself into a role he wouldn't have ordinarily had, maybe shouldn't have had under any other circumstance.

He came to Purdue as a guard; early in his freshman season, Painter inserted him at the 4 - the "power" forward position - simply because the freshman was trying too hard to not play him somewhere.

Davis was limited in those years. He was undersized for his position and his jump shot wasn't good enough to put the "stretch" in "stretch 4." And he was so rough around the edges on defense, one Purdue coach told him, "You're the worst defensive player I've ever seen" coming into college.

That wasn't necessarily Davis' fault. He had four high school coaches in four years and thus very little basketball stability around him.

Yet, despite his limitations, Davis played and played a lot for a team that was young, immature and flawed. That team snapped Purdue's run of six consecutive NCAA Tournament appearances, finishing its season with a half-hearted showing in something called the College Basketball Invitational, which brought with it some measure of embarrassment for a proud program.

But that was nothing compared to the results from a year later, when Purdue was dysfunctional. Its senior night was marred by a home loss to Northwestern that clinched a last-place finish in the conference.

After the season, prominent players bailed.

Only a handful of players returned.

Things looked bleak.

Losing could have perpetuated itself.

Davis, more than any player could, didn't allow it to.



Now, just 17 months or so later, Purdue is tipping off one of its most anticipated seasons ever, largely because of what happened last season.

When Purdue's season was going sideways mid-year, it was Davis who spoke up after crushing December losses.

Isaac Haas remembers the message then.

"We have to come together," the center recalls of Davis' message. "We can't have this. If you want to win a Big Ten championship, want to go to the NCAA Tournament, we can't have these types of losses anymore.

"I'm gonna start calling you out if you're not giving your all because I know I'm going to give it my all."

That, he has.

Davis came to Purdue average athletically.

He worked to the point that when his team's sports performance coach, Josh Bonhotal, presented at the NBA draft combine last year on the topic of long-term athletic development, his slides were full of pictures of Davis, who's become exponentially more athletic, flexible and dynamic from the work he's put into his body.

An offensive-minded player through and through in high school, Davis has morphed from painfully deficient on D to being named the Big Ten's Defensive Player-of-the-Year last season.

"He's kind of fed off seeing his work paying off," said Joey Burton, the Indianapolis-based trainer Davis has worked with in his spare time in recent years. "It's just become more and more addictive: 'I have to keep going, have to keep doing it.' It's been a ripple effect where he started really working, saw the results and it drove him to do it even more."

That work ethic has been one of the biggest components of the leadership that's meant so much to the Boilermakers' about-face as a program.

"Ray always wants to back up what he says," teammate Vince Edwards said. "When he doesn't back it up, he'll let you know after the game: 'I didn't do this or that, my fault, I have to do a better job.' He doesn't just single out his teammates. He singles out himself. He's his own biggest critic at the end of the day."

Davis has worked himself into that position where teammates understand what he's invested.

"I think they follow his lead because deep down they know that he cares," Painter said.

Davis can leverage that respect by demanding the same level of investment from those around him.

"He's not afraid to step on your toes, but he knows not to go too far with it," said former Boilermaker and current staffer Kenneth Lowe, to whom Davis shares so many similarities. "After he steps on your toes, he'll come talk to you and tell you why and for him, it's over with. He doesn't hold grudges. He does a great job putting his foot down and then being great with the guys after he does."

Tough love, you might say.

Fitting, considering Davis' background.

Parents Richard and Monick Davis exercised it.

Rapheal Davis remembers last year calling home after winning Defensive Player-of-the-Year and thinking that neither of his parents believed him. Richard Davis admits that he thought one of Davis' teammates might have been pulling a prank.

"They're tough parents," Davis joked after winning the award.

Years before, there was the time Davis tried to put off a project for school that he was supposed to have completed before he could play in the King James AAU tournament, a big-time event in Akron.

"I was pretty amped up about that," Davis said, "but then the teacher calls home and says I didn't do my project. So I'm getting ready and my dad actually let me get packed, let me get my basketball bag ready and my other bag ready and lets me actually go to the car and sit in the car with my mom.

"Then he comes into the garage and ... I was crushed. I couldn't go to the tournament. I thought I was going to get to play in front of LeBron James. He made me sit at the kitchen table Friday, Saturday, Sunday like I was in school to work on the project.

"And it was the best project I've ever done in my life."

That's how it worked in the Davis household.

"He's our son and it's our duty and responsibility," Richard Davis said. "We're not one of his buddies. We're his parents."

Davis is "buddies" with his teammates. But he's also their captain, has been ever since a month or so into his sophomore season, when the title was unceremoniously stripped from teammates and bestowed upon him.

Purdue couldn't have a more qualified captain.

Lowe, who goes back nearly 20 years now with the Purdue program, tweeted not long ago that Davis is one of his all-time favorite Boilermakers.

"People respect him, because he earned his way to being a captain," Lowe said. "He wasn't given it. He's one of the hardest-working guys on the team, a vocal leader. That combination, people have to respect it.

"I want to see him go out a champion. For me, that would be one of the best experiences for me at Purdue, either as a player or now being on the staff. He deserves it." - See more at: <https://purdue.rivals.com/content.asp?CID=1825363#sthash.rk2iHWom.dpuf>

# Daring or not, Purdue's Isaac Haas set to deliver

Pete DiPrimio | Fort Wayne News-Sentinel | November 12, 2015

When it comes to bigger-than-life Isaac Haas, what you hear is not always what you get.

Or is it?

You be the judge.

Purdue's sophomore center is an outdoor lover at heart because, he says, "I'm from Alabama, man. What do you think? We're a bunch of country boys. We like to do things outside."

One of those things is, "Finding cool places to jump off rocks into really deep water." Seriously? Cliff diving?

"Yeah. That kind of stuff is really fun." Isn't that risky, especially for a college athlete?

"No, not really if you know what you're doing and especially if you know the places you're going, like we do."

That leads to Hawaii. Last year Purdue played in the Maui Invitational and stayed near Kaanapoli Beach, which is famous for its Black Rock cliff jumping. This is a 30-plus-foot-high rock formation where the daring launch themselves into the Pacific Ocean, often during a spectacular twilight ceremony.

For Haas, this was too good to be true, certainly too good to resist.

Until coach Matt Painter and his staff stepped in.

"I tried to jump off," Haas says, "but they didn't let me."

Not exactly, Painter says.

"Isaac likes to have a lot of fun. He also likes to talk a lot of hypotheticals. I think that was a hypothetical."

For the record, cliff diving is not on the Boilers' road trip activity list.

"We like them to stay away from that when we're in Hawaii," Painter says with dry humor.

Starting with Friday night's season opener against North Carolina A&T (9-23 last season), Haas is set to have his fun on the basketball court, either starting or coming off the bench behind senior A.J. Hammons (whose status for the game remains uncertain). Either way, Haas is a 7-2, 285-pound testament to improved power, skill and potential.

"He's been hard to guard," Hammons says. "He's had great practices."

Adds guard Dakota Mathias: "Going against him is like nothing I've ever seen before. He's a beast down there, and he's all strength, too. He's been practicing well. He's been getting on the boards and pushing our big guys. We're excited about him."

Excitement starts with better fitness. Haas lost 25 pounds while improving his strength, quickness and stamina.

"I feel great. I feel in shape. I'm able to run the court more. I post up and am able to play at a higher level for longer."

Painter withholds final judgment until he sees how Haas plays.

"He's done a good job on his condition. We're making sure he's eating right, getting the right rest, getting in the conditioning. I think the season wore on him a little last year.

"He's had really good moments and stretches, but he still reverts back to some habits. He'll hook when he gets the ball or dribbles too much or gets frustrated. People will change defenses on him. It's important for him to not dribble, keep the ball high, and make good decisions.

"He's made strides. He's a good player. We're fortunate to have him."

Haas benefited from last summer's Pan Am Games tryout, even though he didn't make the team.

"It worked out well," he says. "I got to play against some All-Americans and guys from NCAA Tournament teams. It was a great opportunity to showcase my abilities."

Last season, Haas started 11 games, played in all 34 and averaged 7.6 points and 4.1 rebounds. He had season highs of 19 points (against Kansas State), nine rebounds (against Indiana) and four blocks (against Iowa).

Those numbers would have been better if he had fouled less (he had 73), reduced his turnovers (54 against nine assists) and shot better at the free throw line (54.7 percent). He's worked on all those areas, plus on extending his shooting range to 15 feet. In last Sunday's exhibition win over Northwestern Ohio, Haas was 4-for-4 from the line and finished with 18 points and eight rebounds.

"In the off-season I mostly worked on free throws. If you can make them, you can develop any part of your game. I feel I've gotten better. I'm shooting with more arch. My percentage has gone up from last year."

As for the flying elbows that sent opponents and teammates scattering for cover, Haas insists he's moved past that.

"Now it's a habit to keep my elbows in. I've kind of been trained out of throwing them." Most of the time.

"You've still got to watch out for them," Mathias says. "He rebounds and turns, and his elbows are right there."

Adds Hammons: "Here and there they'll pop up, but he's better. Still, you never know, so you have to watch for them." Haas is so big and strong, opponents often resort to fouling him. Many of those fouls are not called, but his response to them often is.

"It's hard," he says about dealing with that, "but life is tough and have to move through it. It's one of the things I had to work on last year and I'm still working on it. You can do it if you really set your mind to it."

Haas and the No. 23 Boilers have their minds set to match the championship aspirations.

"For me, it's about being able to rebound from my area, keeping my composure and not let myself compound mistakes."

# Purdue's Rapheal Davis learned to lead at home

Nathan Baird | Lafayette Journal & Courier | November 12, 2015

The Purdue men's basketball team bus pulled into the Boilermaker Soccer Complex after dark last Dec. 20.

Less than two hours before, the Boilermakers had been run out of Bankers Life Fieldhouse by an explosive Notre Dame team in a 94-63 loss. Teams typically try to quickly put such embarrassments behind them. But a seething Rapheal Davis told his teammates to get in their cars and drive to Mackey Arena.

Back in the locker room, Purdue's captain bluntly and emotionally led a players-only meeting.

"I said, 'If we keep losing and it ends up like my sophomore year, coach is going to get fired, all of our assistants are going to be gone,'" Davis said. "Then what are we going to do next year? Who are we playing for? You have to understand the bigger picture."

An overly dramatic message? Perhaps. But it also didn't take. When Purdue lost at home to Gardner-Webb two days later, Davis called another meeting.

If and when Purdue encounters a similar crisis this season, Davis will again step up. He'll have a receptive audience. To a man, Davis' teammates speak with respect and admiration for their third-year captain and emotional leader.

It's not a job Davis sought. But it's one he accepted, then embraced.

It's also one for which he was raised. Richard and Monick Davis instilled in Rapheal and his siblings the values of responsibility and accountability.

The Boilermakers say Davis does the same for them. The leadership style resonates because he practices what he preaches.

As Purdue prepares for its most promising season in several years, it again looks to Davis for guidance and motivation.

"We reap the benefits," Purdue coach Matt Painter said. "Instead of saying, 'Purdue helped him along in those areas,' I would say his family did those things. We helped from a basketball standpoint, helped academically, helped him understand some things socially. But that foundation was already there."

Rapheal took to sports at a young age, following his brother, Ricky, to football practice as a 3-year-old. Taja Davis, the oldest of the three children, said Rapheal wrote stories for school that typically featured either himself or another central character as a basketball player.

But Davis' parents laid down a no-nonsense policy for staying in the game. Only As and Bs were acceptable. The rule applies to this day.

"That's been since I was in kindergarten," said Davis, who majors in management. "If I brought a 'C' home, not only could I not play that game or that week, I couldn't play that season. I was done for the year. I'd be at the table reading encyclopedias or something."

Although that scenario never played out, the Davis children became accustomed to high standards. When a middle school science project wasn't completed on time, Davis stayed home from an AAU tournament. Curfew was 10 o'clock in high school, maybe 11:30 on the weekends. Davis was to be early to obligations, not on time, and he'd better take a front-row seat in class.

Ricky Davis said all three kids helped in Richard's businesses: busing tables in Joplin's, a soul food buffet, or stocking shelves and working the register at Just For Kids, a clothing store. When they earned money, they were expected to manage it responsibly.

It was the sort of strict upbringing you'd expect from parents who met in the Army, as Richard and Monick did at Fort Benjamin Harrison in Lawrence, Indiana. Davis and his siblings, however, said they never doubted theirs was a loving environment as well. With age came wisdom, and an appreciation for the direction they'd received.

"Once you see people go down that path — once you see the police dogs come through the school, sniff out your friend's locker — you start to appreciate what your parents taught you and understand that what you're doing is bigger than yourself," Davis said.

Davis' family saw a more mature personality developing at an early age. Monick Davis said she didn't have to wake a young Rapheal up to leave for weekend tournaments at 8 a.m. He was dressed and ready to go.

Jared Quarles, Davis' coach in the Speice AAU program, describes an "old soul" who traveled with a shaving kit and large suitcase at age 15. According to Quarles, Davis was particular about who he roomed with and how the room was kept.

Yet from age 12, Quarles said, Davis outworked everyone else on the court. One of the newest Boilermakers, Johnny Hill, noticed the same attributes this summer.

"He's going to be about his business all the time," Hill said. "On the court, off the court, he doesn't mess around. He does have a sense of humor, and he can be goofy. But for the most part, he's about his business."

The captain

Purdue recruited Davis during the height of success under Robbie Hummel, E'Twaun Moore and JaJuan Johnson. Enticed by the Boilermakers' toughness and blue-collar style, Davis verbally committed as a high school freshman. When Davis arrived at Purdue in 2012, he expected to continue that winning tradition.

Instead, the Boilermakers slumped to a losing record. The following season, Purdue lost its final seven games and sank to last place in the Big Ten Conference standings.

Davis said that period involved much self-reflection. He had to acknowledge his part in Purdue's shortcomings.

But he also sensed a leadership void. Davis said there were days he didn't want to come to practice. The Boilermakers needed a culture change.

As usual, good advice wasn't far away.

"He just felt that the leadership needed to be enhanced," Richard Davis said. "I asked him, 'What are you going to do? If guys are leading the team and the program in the wrong direction, what are you doing to get it going in the right direction?'"

In the middle of Davis' sophomore year, Painter bolstered his position to facilitate that change. As the team broke a practice-closing huddle, Painter announced Davis was now a team captain.

That was news to Davis.

"I thought he was joking at first, but then I saw how serious he was on his face," Davis said.

The captaincy didn't fit comfortably at first, in part because Davis wasn't producing at a high level. He started about half of Purdue's games over his first two seasons, averaging fewer than 19 minutes and scoring about six points per game. Painter lauded Davis' unselfishness and work ethic, but that impact wasn't consistently translating to the court.

That changed last season when the formerly defense-averse Davis transformed into a shutdown defender. Throughout Purdue's run to a third-place finish in the Big Ten, Davis routinely locked down opponents' top perimeter players. He also blossomed offensively, leading Purdue in assists and developing a reputation as a clutch shooter.

As his game matured, Davis grew into his role as mentor. The message resonated even more because no one could question Davis' own work ethic and dedication.

"He would do a really good job of checking on me," said sophomore guard P.J. Thompson, who said he grew up watching Davis in the Speice program. "I'd walk into the locker room and he's in there and he'd be like, 'How many times did you get in the gym this week?' I'd tell him and he'd say, 'You've got to get in more. Get more shots up.' He's on you that way."

Leadership legacy

Sophomore forward Vince Edwards said he and Davis had a "heart-to-heart" conversation on the eve of the first practice in October. Part of Davis' message was that someone needs to take over the leadership role when Davis moves on.

Purdue's players know that time is coming. However, they don't need the benefit of time to appreciate their mentor. The Boilermakers say they're motivated to repay him for his help.

One particular reward keeps coming up.

"The only thing he hasn't been through is a great NCAA tournament run," Edwards said. "We want him to get that last chance to go out on a high note, feel great about himself and be the last man standing."

# ***Purdue's Cline ready to help right away***

**Nathan Baird | Lafayette Journal & Courier | November 11, 2015**

Purdue men's basketball freshman Ryan Cline kept an open mind about his redshirt option.

On one hand, Cline could take a year to develop his skills and physique. His father, Michael, felt he benefited from taking a redshirt as an Ohio State freshman.

Cline also saw how good Purdue is today. More importantly, he proved to himself and the Boilermaker coaches he can contribute to that potential.

"When it all came down to it, I felt like it was my decision," Cline said. "I feel I did make the best decision. I really do want to contribute to this year."

Purdue coach Matt Painter confirmed Wednesday that Cline will be part of the guard bench contingent for Friday's season opener against North Carolina A&T. The 6-foot-5, 190-pound guard from Carmel won't take a redshirt this season.

However, Painter also stressed Cline has been promised nothing. Same for the other guards and wings behind starters Rapheal Davis and Vince Edwards on the depth chart.

Painter said he wishes he had redshirted as a Purdue freshman. He's spoken before of having the same regrets about another former Boilermaker shooting guard, Ryne Smith.

Yet Painter also couldn't answer a question. Without Cline, can Purdue improve from the team that ranked 12th in the Big Ten Conference in 3-point shooting last season?

The freshman guard from Carmel on the decision not to redshirt. Nathan Baird/Journal & Courier

"If it's something he really wanted to do, we would have redshirted him, but he wanted to play," Painter said. "He can play a lot. He can play 20-25 minutes, he can play 10-15 minutes, he might not play at all. It depends on how productive he is and how he plays.

"Maybe in a normal situation, where we didn't feel we have the upside we do, we would have forced the issue and told him I think you should redshirt. But he's proven in a short amount of time that he does something better than anyone on our team, and that's move and shoot."

Over the summer, Painter said Cline "might be the best shooter I've ever recruited." Sunday's exhibition win over Northwestern Ohio wasn't an example. All six of Cline's shots were errant 3-pointers. Yet his 21 minutes also included four rebounds, four assists and a steal with no turnovers.

Cline admits the adjustment to Purdue's defensive principles hasn't been easy. However, he also feels he has showcased other skills, such as passing and taking care of the ball, that may have been overlooked.

Senior guard Rapheal Davis says players with Cline's shooting reputation change the game just by being on the floor. Production aside, he's seen enough from Cline over the summer and fall to know he can handle the challenge ahead.

"He's very tough," Davis said. "He's tough-minded and he's not going to take no for an answer. He plays hard, he goes at it, he's not scared of anybody. He won't back down."

Cline displayed an almost giddy anticipation for Friday's first official game and the approaching season. He knows there may be nights when his contribution to that success is small, or even non-existent.

"Maybe it's two minutes a game, 10 minutes a game — you never know," Cline said. "What matters to me is we get all these wins."

# ***Swanigan's Work Ethic Unlike Anything Purdue's Seen***

**Brian Neubert | GoldandBlack.com | November 11, 2015**

Jack Owens recruited Caleb Swanigan for years before Purdue ultimately landed the big man last spring.

The Boilermakers' associate head coach knew Swanigan worked hard, had to to have transformed his body the way he did since he was an obese middle-schooler.

"You knew about his work ethic," Owens said before Wednesday's Purdue practice. "But not like this. This is something I've never been around or seen.

"We've had guys here like Robbie (Hummel), E'Twaun (Moore), JaJuan (Johnson), Lewis (Jackson), Ryne (Smith), I could go right down the line of guys who worked hard here, but not to this extent where he's the first one in the weight room or the gym, comes two or three times a day outside of our practices and games and the things we have him doing. He's still coming in at night and doing more. We knew he had a great work ethic, but not to this extent and what (father Roosevelt Barnes) has done with him has been great."

Saturday, as campus' athletic complex was emptying out after the football game, Swanigan and Barnes were the lone people in Mackey Arena, as the freshman forward shooting around, his adopted father there to rebound for him.

This has been a common sight around Mackey and Cardinal Court, on top of the free time Swanigan's dedicated to the training room, sports performance facilities and other resources.

After most every Purdue practice, Swanigan stays to shoot three-pointers and jumpers.

"Biggie takes working hard to another level," said senior Rapheal Davis, Purdue's gold standard for such things in recent years.

Sometimes, Swanigan doesn't leave at all, as he's spent nights in Purdue's locker room, according to multiple people around him.

Such effort and dedication have been the hallmark of Swanigan's physical transformation over the years and might be the single-strongest impression he's left so far on his college coaches and teammates.

"It's the best we've had," Coach Matt Painter said of Swanigan's work ethic. "He puts in more time in the weight room, more time after (practice). He's a gym rat. Those things get contagious. You just hang your hat on it. Rapheal Davis is that way. Vince Edwards is that way. They work at their game. (Dakota Mathias) works on his game and (Kendall Stephens) does ... but he's taken it to a whole other level in terms of the extra time he puts in."

Why?

Swanigan has always been bigger and stronger than most everyone he's played against, not to mention more talented.

"Preparation-wise I don't want to leave anything to be questioned when I step on the court," Swanigan said. "I want to be the best Caleb Swanigan I can be that day."

That work ethic is inextricably linked to Swanigan's up-bringing with Barnes, a contract adviser for Relativity Sports whose job it is to deal with professional athletes. It's given Barnes, and in turn Swanigan, an intimate look at what has made the best of the best what they are.

It's what the team's sports performance coach, Josh Bonhotal, meant this summer when he said Swanigan has been "raised to be a professional."

"I've been doing it so long I just like what I do is just natural now," Swanigan said. - See more at: <https://purdue.rivals.com/content.asp?CID=1824564#sthash.E3RAJWyC.dpuf>



# ***Purdue's Dakota Mathias set to make a point – as in guard***

**Pete DiPrimio | Fort Wayne News-Sentinel | November 6, 2015**

A funny thing about Purdue's much anticipated point guard battle between Johnny Hill and P.J. Thompson:

Dakota Mathias might win the job.

Well, sort of win it, and it all hinges on zone offense.

Let's explain.

The 6-4 sophomore is one of the Boilers' best passers. He has good vision, a high basketball IQ, nice height and a knack for getting other players involved, especially when facing a zone, which Purdue figures to see a lot this season. He played point guard in high school and in AAU ball. He didn't do much of that last year for Purdue, mostly playing a shooting guard/small forward role, and did that well enough to start the last 15 games.

Sure, Mathias is not ultra quick in the manner of, say, former Boiler Lewis Jackson, and he's probably not the guy you want facing fierce full-court pressure all the time, but don't discount him.

Coach Matt Painter and his staff haven't, and that's fine with him.

"I like point guard, and I'm excited about that opportunity," Mathias said. "When the coaching staff approached me about playing the point a little bit, I was intrigued. I like bringing the ball up, getting other guys the ball, and feeding the post. Whatever the teams needs me to do, I'll do it."

Ultimately, Hill and Thompson figure to get the bulk of the point-guard minutes (it's the reason Purdue got Hill, a senior transfer from Texas Arlington), with Mathias spending much of his time at shooting guard. Last year he made at least one three-point-er in his final nine games while averaging 7.8 points and 39.0 percent shooting beyond the arc during that stretch.

Good outside shooting is fine (it's a big reason why Purdue got him), but Mathias understands the advantages of versatility.

"There are a lot of people out there who can just shoot," he said. "A lot of those guys are easy to guard -- you just stay tight on them and take that away, and there's not much else they can do."

"When you have a guy who can shot fake and hit a pull-up or drive in the lane and finish, those guys are tough to guard. That opens up the offense. We have big guys like Isaac (Haas) and A.J. (Hammons) and Biggie (Caleb Swanigan) down low. If we get them the ball and have guards outside who can break people down on close outs, those are tough matchups."

Mathias spent a lot of off-season time working on his game, with no stipulation on how many shots he'd take each day.

"I never set numbers like that. Each day I do different workouts. Basketball is enjoyable to me, so I never say I'm going to make this many and I'm done. I like to keep going. I spend a lot of time on it."

Mathias is healthier than he was last year, when he battled a series of injuries and illnesses that limited him for the first half of the season.

"Last year it was one thing after the other," he said. "A couple of (medical) procedures in the off-season really helped me, so I'm feeling a lot better."

Regardless of his position, Mathias has a couple of big keys.

"Especially this year it's making shots. With the addition of Biggie and with A.J. coming back, they're going to get double teamed, we have to be able to spread the floor and make those open shots. If I can make some of those shots, that will be huge for us. Then it's just making plays. If guys are closing out hard, if I can get a couple of dribbles and hit some pull-ups, get other guys involved, kick the ball out, just make more plays, it will help the team a lot."

Purdue plays its only public exhibition Sunday night against Northwestern Ohio and the Boilers are ready, Mathias said.

"We've had a good few days of practice. It's been pretty competitive. We've gone at it pretty hard the last few months. We've had a good summer. We have a good group of guys and our chemistry is really building, so we're really excited."

Meanwhile, drama continues with senior center A.J. Hammons. He didn't play in last weekend's closed scrimmage against Dayton (Purdue won while showing some transition defense vulnerability, which Painter made a point of practice emphasis this week) and might not play against Northwestern Ohio, for undisclosed reasons.

Hammons isn't suspended (he continues to practice) and he isn't dealing with eligibility issues. Painter has described it as, "taking care of his business."

During his four years at Purdue, Hammons has occasionally had problems with immaturity and lack of focus (he was suspended for three games as a sophomore for a violation of team rules). The hope was that he would be beyond such things as a senior, but Painter said when dealing with a group of young people, problems arise.

"It's coaching college basketball with 19 to 23 year olds," he said. "You're never going to be beyond it. If you think so, you've lost your mind. You take any group of 15 people who are 19 to 23 years old and things are going to come up."

If Hammons doesn't play, Haas will take over at center (he started 11 games last year) with Swanigan as the backup.

While not having Hammons would be a big blow (he's led the Big Ten in blocked shots for the past three years and is a unanimous preseason all-conference choice), Painter said, "We'll be fine. We play big and small every day in practice. It's not that big of a deal."



# Purdue men's basketball has big ideas

Nathan Baird | Lafayette Journal & Courier | November 6, 2015

The question followed Purdue men's basketball coach Matt Painter all of last season, from press conferences to teleconferences to his weekly call-in show.

Why didn't the Boilermakers put their two giant centers on the floor at the same time?

Each time, Painter patiently explained why 7-foot A.J. Hammons and 7-2 Isaac Haas didn't necessarily fit together side by side. Turnovers already were a problem with only one center in the game. Throw in responsibilities in the Boilermakers' switching defense, offensive limitations away from the basket and a slower transition game, and the pairing just didn't work.

(Those who didn't believe Painter quieted down after Purdue used the two trees approach for two fruitless possessions at Michigan State.)

Then, on May 19, Homestead graduate and reigning Indiana Mr. Basketball Caleb "Biggie" Swanigan committed to Purdue. With the 6-foot-9, 250-pound addition, the Boilermakers had their identity.

"Last year, people wanted us to play big," Painter said. "Now, we can literally play big."

National expectations for Purdue are higher than they've been since Robbie Hummel last wore the old gold and black. The Boilermakers have set sights on Big Ten Conference championship contention and a deep run in the NCAA tournament.

That optimism begins with an imposing front line and the direct and indirect problems it can cause for opponents.

"If you get ultimate size like the size we have, they've got to respect it," said sophomore Vince Edwards, who will contribute to that lengthy frontcourt as a 6-foot-8 wing.

"If they don't respect it, we're just going to let our bigs play one-on-one and let them make decisions. As soon as you double (team), we've got to have guys ready to shoot, guys cutting, guys active and talking and just reacting to the ball. We can do that with our size."

But let's not get ahead of ourselves. It may not be a smooth transition, and there are potential problem areas.

For starters, Hammons and Haas aren't used to playing next to a big, skilled forward like Swanigan. He hinted at his offensive versatility in the scrimmages, dishing assists from the high post, scoring on the block and drifting out to knock down 3-pointers.

"The adjustment for them is playing with a guy like Biggie, where in the past they played with a face-up four," Purdue assistant coach Brandon Brantley said of Hammons and Haas. "They have to kind of learn how to co-exist as far as giving each other space in the post and knowing when to dive and things of that nature."

On top of that, as good as Hammons and Haas were together last season, they need to be better.

Painter said a team that feeds the post as much as Purdue will live with a certain number of turnovers. But Hammons and Haas too often exceeded that comfortable threshold last season. They combined for three turnovers for every one assist, a ratio that must improve. Haas, who went to the free throw line 11 times per 40 minutes as a freshman, must convert better when there.

If the centers improve on last season's performance — 19.5 points, 10.7 rebounds and 60.7 percent free-throw shooting — there may be no team anywhere with better production at the "5" spot.

Expect Purdue to look inside multiple times on every trip down the floor. That approach helped put the Boilermakers back in the top half of the Big Ten and on an NCAA tournament bracket line.

To take the next step, however, Purdue must solve the second half of the equation by reaching its shooting potential.

The Boilermakers think they have the right players. Kendall Stephens is a known perimeter presence. Edwards showed promise there as a freshman and improved his shot in the offseason. Painter believes Dakota Mathias and P.J. Thompson can shoot better than their combined 31.1 percent as freshmen. He's called freshman Ryan Cline "the best shooter I've ever recruited."

That's essentially the same mix of players who shot 32.7 percent from 3-point range last season. Graduate transfer point guard

Johnny Hill, a 27.1 percent career 3-point shooter, likely won't provide a boost. But if the big men do their jobs, the guards believe they'll have an abundance of opportunities to do theirs.

Every time an opponent uses a zone defense to keep the ball out of the paint, Purdue's shooters must make them pay.

"I don't think people realize how many open shots we're going to get, how many open lanes we're going to get, because people are going to post trap and things like that," senior guard Rapheal Davis said. "It's taken more pressure off of us."

Hammons and Haas already provided the backbone to perhaps the Big Ten's best defense. Hammons' imposing left-handed swat has made him the NCAA's active career leader in blocked shots. Haas spreads his wingspan in the lane like the web of some giant spider, intimidating potential drivers and deflecting post feeds.

It's that security gate that allows Purdue's guards to play tight and create pressure on the perimeter. Davis earned Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year honors last season, knowing he could commit to defensive intensity without fear of getting burned. Hill said having those big men behind him already has boosted his defensive confidence.

Yet this team could be even better defensively, thanks to the rebounding potential of that front line. Purdue led Big Ten teams in offensive rebounding percentage last season but ranked only eighth on defense. Any time the Boilermakers put a lineup of Edwards, Swanigan and one of the centers on the floor together, they have the potential to be an elite team on the boards.

On paper, it makes perfect sense. But Purdue's big dreams will eventually encounter big challenges — and adversity.

"With the team we have and the depth we have and the structure of our team, success will be winning a national championship, going to the Final Four, making a deep run in the tournament," Davis said. "... The baseline is not about winning and losing. It's more about every single game, no one can say Purdue didn't play hard."

# Turnaround makes Davis top defender

Jeff Washburn | Fort Wayne Journal Gazette | November 5, 2015

For Purdue senior Rapheal Davis, basketball has been a fascinating journey, packed with learning while always listening.

The Fort Wayne native played three seasons at South Side for three different coaches, focusing on scoring, averaging 28.8 points a game as junior.

With a scholarship to Purdue in hand, the 6-foot-6 guard transferred to La Lumiere School in LaPorte, averaging a team-high 21.5 points.

But when Davis arrived at Purdue, he learned quickly that all of that offensive skill meant little if he was unwilling to play defense the way coach Matt Painter wanted it played.

As a junior, Davis not only earned All-Academic Big Ten honors for a second consecutive time, he was selected the Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year.

Quite an improbable transformation for a player whose offense was his trademark.

Averaging 10.7 points and 4.4 rebounds last season, Davis is eager to have a special senior year while continuing to be known as the Big Ten's best defender.

"In high school, all I knew was scoring the ball," Davis said. "In Fort Wayne, there was DeShaun Thomas, James Blackmon (Jr.) and Bryson Scott – guys that could really score. I think that is all we learned growing up there.

"When you are getting ready to go to college, you don't really understand that you are going to have to play defense. Playing for four different coaches in high school, I never had that background of understanding that defense is what wins games.

"When I got here with coach Painter, it was all about learning how to play defense," Davis said. "For the first time in my life, I understood that there actually are fundamentals to defense. I was more of a guy who just thought there were fundamentals to offense.

"On defense, I thought it was just about sliding around and not letting your man score. Learning where to be and how to be on defense has really helped me a lot."

Painter says Davis' willingness to listen and learn helped him become a lockdown defender.

"You have to give him credit," Painter said. "... It was his willingness to learn how to defend. It's not like we are over here saying something else than what someone else is saying.

"... His lack of defensive background was really good, because sometimes, guys come in and have learned a different way to play. He had no defensive background. ... When he got here, he didn't know what we were talking about when we told him to jump to the ball. Being Defensive Player of the Year in the Big Ten is a great compliment to him. He watched film, studied guys and figured things out."

It is difficult for Davis to fathom that in his third year of college basketball, he would be selected the conference's best defender.

"I would have thought you were crazy had you predicted that for me," Davis said. "The other day, (assistant) coach (Jack) Owens was getting on me about my freshman year. He told me that when I was a freshman, I probably was the worst defender he ever had seen. He saw my defensive struggles. It has been a complete turnaround."

The academic discipline Davis' parents instilled helped him learn to defend. Davis has a 3.2 grade-point average in sales management and communication with a minor in organizational leadership and supervision.

There were hard lessons along the way. In middle school, all students were required to participate in the science fair, but Davis wasn't excited about it.

"I decided that I would put the project under the rug and do it when I got back from the AAU tournament," Davis said. "We were going to the King James Tournament in Akron (Ohio)."

Davis' science teacher called his parents and told them he had not completed his project. Richard Davis let his son pack for the trip, including his basketball bag, and go get into the car with Davis' mother before telling the young basketball standout that there would be no trip to Akron.

"I was crushed," Davis said. "I couldn't go to the tournament and play in front of LeBron James."

Instead of playing basketball that weekend, Davis sat at the kitchen table, finishing the science project.

"When I was finished, it was the best project I ever have done in my life," Davis said.

# No assuming with Purdue's basketball potential

Pete DiPrimio | Fort Wayne News-Sentinel | November 4, 2015

Let's assume, for just a second, that Purdue's shut-down basketball defense is back. Let's also assume that the projected frontcourt dominance of A.J. Hammons, Isaac Haas and Caleb Swanigan comes to pass, which includes making free throws at a near 70-percent clip.

Yes, we're aware of the dangers of assuming and that the free throw point is a big assumption given Hammons and Haas at the line remind no one of, say, ex-Boiler standout Robbie Hummel, who shot 90.2 percent in 2010. Hammons was solid last year at 66.9 percent. Haas was, well, an adventure at 54.7 percent.

Both have worked a lot on their free throws. They should be better. They need to be better.

Anyway, all these things won't need divine intervention to happen. In fact, the odds are that they will happen. That leaves one thing standing in the way of a monster season:

Good outside shooting.

If the Boilers get that along with the other factors, opponents are toast, and all the preseason championship expectations are met.

"We know the main focus will be on the bigs," guard Kendall Stephens says. "Defenses will have a lot of emphasis toward that. Our shooters and guards being able to knock down shots will allow seams (in the defense) and drives, as well as more space for the bigs to work in the post."

And then, in case you think the players don't really understand ...

"We do know the value of staying in the gym, working on your game, and knocking down shots from the perimeter," Stephens says.

Stephens is one of Purdue's top three-point threats. Another is do-it-all forward Vince Edwards.

"If our guys knock down shots here and there ... we were like that some during last season, but we could never get the whole team on the same page," he says. "If we show that shooting now ...

"When you're knocking down shots, they have to respect your shot. If they don't, then you keep taking them. If they do respect your shot (and play tighter defense), then you can take them off the dribble, or with all that space, you make the ball move."

Much of that movement will come inside with the 7-foot Hammons, the 7-2 Haas, the 6-9 Swanigan and perhaps even 6-10 redshirt freshman Jacquil Taylor getting lots of touches.

"If you get into the bigs, you get into ultimate size," Edwards says. "(Opponents) have to respect them. If they don't respect them, we'll get one-on-one matchups there, and that's to our advantage. If you double, we have guys ready to shoot."

Still, coach Matt Painter sees danger everywhere. That's what coaches do. The Nov. 13 season opener against North Carolina A&T is less than a week away (first comes Sunday's exhibition against Northwestern Ohio) and much work remains.

"Offensively we're trying to piece things together," he says. "We're teaching. We have some older guys mixed in with younger guys. We have some guys making strides offensively, but you still have to have good shot selection to get better results. It's getting guys to take good shots and understanding what is a good shot."

As for the defense, which should be strong with senior Rapheal Davis, the Big Ten defensive player of the year, and Hammons (ESPN rates the three-time Big Ten shot-blocking champ as the nation's No. 49 overall player), Painter takes nothing for granted.

"In the off-season you're putting a lot of time into your game, trying to get quicker and stronger," he says, "but how much do you put into playing good team defense? You play pickup games and as far as being away from the ball (on defense) and doing the little things, those are really non-existent. Getting those habits back is what we're working on. We're trying to have good team defense."

Adding to the challenge is Hammons' status. He didn't play in Sunday's closed scrimmage with Dayton, and it's uncertain if he'll play in Sunday night's exhibition. It has nothing to do with an injury. It's apparently not a big deal, but there are certain standards that players have to meet, especially seniors, and Painter isn't going to mess around with even a minor issue from one of his key leaders and players.

Using the bench as a motivator is a long-time coaching tool, and it quickly sends a message to Hammons and the rest of the team that the stakes are too high, and the potential is too great, for players not to be focused on what needs to be done, on and off the court.

Because if the focus is there, well, don't be surprised if Purdue quickly plays past it's A.P. No. 23 preseason ranking.

Yes, that ranking is low for a team with this kind of firepower -- assuming Hammons gets the message.

The Boilers will showcase that firepower against a rigorous schedule that includes a pair of ranked non-conference opponents -- No. 18 Vanderbilt and No. 24 Butler -- plus a brutal Big Ten run that has five other ranked teams -- No. 3 Maryland, No. 13 Michigan State, No. 15 Indiana, No. 17 Wisconsin and No. 25 Michigan. Maryland got 14 first-place votes, four more than No. 2 Kentucky, and 21 less than No. 1 North Carolina.

It would surprise no one if Iowa, Ohio State and even Northwestern played their way into the top-25 by December.

Purdue will have to be at its best to handle that.

That's not an assumption.

It's a fact.

# Purdue's Rapheal Davis a real father figure

Pete DiPrimio | Fort Wayne News-Sentinel | November 5, 2015

Rapheal Davis remembers the phone call. How could he not? You find out you're going to become a father, WAY before you figured you would, and it hits you like an Isaac Haas elbow to the chin.

"I was in the dorm when I got the call. Right away it was panic."

The call came right after his freshman year at Purdue and panic swiftly morphed into resolve. Davis would make it work because that was the way Richard and Monick Davis had raised him. He would do better than that. It would fuel his growth from boy to man, from basketball non-factor to star.

"It changed my life for the better," he says.

A pause.

"I'm not recommending being a father as a teenager, but it helped make me who I am."

Who is Davis?

For many outside of West Lafayette, he remains in the shadows of shot-blocking superstar teammate A.J. Hammons, who made the preseason All-Big Ten team while Davis did not, even though the former South Side standout is a senior guard on a potential Big Ten title team, the defending conference defensive player of the year and a leader who rates among the best coach Matt Painter has ever had.

He is also the father of Kyndal Rae Davis, who will be 2 on Dec. 5.

"Being a father made me a more well-rounded person. It helped me grow up and stop doing the dumb things I used to do. She gave me a reason to improve -- I'm not just doing it for me anymore. When I'm done here, I have to set myself up (financially) so I can set her up. If I wasn't a father, I wouldn't have made that jump from my sophomore to junior year."

That jump saw Davis's scoring average nearly double, to 10.7 points, and his assists to more than double, from

42 to 88. He rebounded better, shot three-pointers better and became a defensive stopper Painter hasn't had on the perimeter since former Huntington North standout Chris Kramer graduated in 2010.

Now Davis wants more, as much for Purdue as for himself, and if his focus ever wanders, he just thinks of his daughter.

"This off-season I worked as hard as I ever have," he says. "It will come out during the season."

"This is my last go around, and I have a daughter. What am I going to do? How am I going to feed her? She'll be going to pre-school. How am I going to pay for that? This year is to help set me up so that next year I can start saving up for a college fund so she can go to a nice school like Princeton or Harvard or a place like that."

Beyond that, it's a chance to help lift Purdue to basketball heights it hasn't seen in a generation. It's a top-25 team with championship aspirations.

"There's a lot of hype, but it means nothing," Davis says. "We have to play hard. We have to give it our all and win a lot of games and make the people who won't buy tickets look silly."

Why does Davis thrive? Because he cares, because he has parents who acted as parents and not as friends, because he has a coach who doesn't coddle and because he has a drive that doesn't take no for an answer.

For basically two and half years Davis was the last person you wanted to take a three-pointer (28.8 percent). He was so bad that for a while Painter forbid him to shoot one. But he continued to put in the extra time, refused to believe lousy shooting was his destiny, and then, during the Big Ten season, became a three-point shooting factor (13-for-34, 38.2 percent).

"He kept working on his game and wasn't being rewarded for it," Painter says. "You know it's going to click, but when? If we told him, 'Hey, you haven't made a perimeter shot in

a month, quit shooting them,' he would. He wouldn't fight you even though he knew deep down he could make those shots. He'd keep missing them in games and every morning he was back in here working."

"And then last year, he didn't make a bunch of perimeter shots, but he made some tough ones. I want him to build off that, but I also want him to keep the same mindset to be a productive player regardless of whether or not the shot goes in."

Adds Davis: "I understood what was going to get me on the floor, and that was playing hard, leading and playing defense. You put in the work, and then you have to trust yourself. I trusted myself toward the end of the season and started making shots." Davis leads the way all coaches want veterans to lead, and woe to the Boiler who does something dumb off the court.

"The coaches don't have to punish you," he says. "I'm coming hard on you. I want my voice in their heads. That's the leader I want to be. I want to be in your head when you're thinking about making a bad decision."

How hard can Davis get? After last season's 94-63 loss to Notre Dame in the Crossroads Classic, the Boilers had a players' only meeting during which Davis did most of the talking. It wasn't a group-hug moment, and it helped ignite the Boilers' Big Ten turnaround.

"He got after us," guard Dakota Mathias said. "He said he was here when it was really bad, and he was tired of it. 'We want to do good things for him. He's always here, always working, always showing us the right way to go about things. That's huge.'"

Davis' leadership doesn't come from instant success. He struggled through his first two seasons even as the Purdue program, which had been to six straight NCAA tournaments, including consecutive Sweet 16 appearances, became a Big Ten also-ran lowlighted by 2014's last-place finish.

"What really helped me was right when I got here, Coach Painter really humbled me. I don't know if he knows it. He didn't play me in the non-conference."

The reason was simple -- Davis wasn't good enough.

He is now.

"For Ray, he's had more adversity than some of the (good leaders) we've had," Painter says. "If you look at (former Boiler standouts Robbie Hummel, E'Twaun Moore and JaJuan Johnson), we were successful. We went to the NCAA tourney every year. Ray didn't come into that. We didn't go to the NCAA Tournament his freshman and sophomore years. Through that, he never wavered where we had some guys who did waver. They gave into things. Ray never did."

You really find someone's true character through tough times. Ray has proven he's a Purdue guy. No matter what we asked of him, he always had a positive attitude. He always tried to do it. Just go out and compete.

"He's had a lot more ammunition, in terms of negative stuff, to battle than other people. He's really shown his leadership through that."

That could make all the difference in a potential senior season to remember.

"Any time you have guys stay in your program and continue to work hard, their senior season should be their best season," Painter says.

"Ray has put in a tremendous amount of time. He's worked hard from Day 1. He worked on his game even during tough times. He made a big jump last year. Hopefully he can build on that."

Mom wasn't messing around. Can you blame her? Monick Davis's military training and tough-part-of-Washington D.C. upbringing left no tolerance for a whining son.

Want to play at Purdue?

Play defense!

"He had to get better," Monick says. "There's no sense sulking in it. Be better at it."

Forget Mother Bear sentiment to tell Painter and his staff to stop being mean to my baby. In fact, Rapheal says, "I would call home and pout about thing, and my parents were on Coach Painter's side. My mom straight told me to suck it up and play defense if you want to play.

"I didn't get babied or coddled by anybody. My mom actually told Coach Painter to yell at me more.

"My mom has some toughness to her. No one realizes how tough she is." That toughness was passed to her son.

"He never gave in to the disappointment," Monick says. "It's not a pity party. He had to suck it up and do what you've got to do to be successful."

And so he has, and you'd better believe mom is proud.

"I knew he had it in him," Monick says. "He just had to put forth the effort. In high school his natural talent got him through it. Now he had to put in the work to make it better. That's what he had to do, and he did."

Dad wasn't messing around. Can you blame him? Richard Davis was a former Indiana State football player and a hard-working man with no use for short cuts. When the teenage Rapheal lost his focus, with academics even more than athletics, there was heck to pay.

For instance, there was the middle school science project Rapheal was supposed to finish before leaving for the prestigious King James basketball tourney in Ohio. That's the event NBA superstar LeBron James has run for years.

Rapheal blew off the project, figuring he'd finish later, if at all.

"I thought I was smarter than my parents and my teacher," he says. "I thought I could put the project under the rug and do it when I came back."

Rapheal's teacher called his parents. The due project wasn't turned in. Richard Davis made his move, starting by letting Rapheal pack for the weekend tourney.

"I was amped about going," Rapheal says. "I got packed. I got in the car with my mom ready to go. Then my dad comes into the garage and tells me I wasn't going. I was crushed. I couldn't play in front of LeBron James. My dad made me sit at the kitchen table that Friday, Saturday and Sunday like I was in school to work on the project."

A pause.

"It was the best project I've ever done."

Then there was another middle school incident. Rapheal had been at school all day and his father was driving him home. It was close to 8 p.m. On the drive, Rapheal told his father he had a B+ in a class. His father told him he needed to get an A on a test to push the overall grade to an A-.

"I was tired and not thinking," Rapheal said, "so I asked him, 'What's the difference between an A- and a B+? We reached the driveway at 8 and I didn't get into the house until midnight. He gave him a four-hour talk about the difference between getting a B+ and an A-."

Grades matter, and the lesson stuck. Davis has a 3.2 grade point average while majoring in sales management.

"My parents always told me education was something nobody can take away from you. I didn't understand it at the time, but now it's one of those things you thank them later."

"Just the other day my dad came up to Coach Painter. Coach probably thought he wanted to talk basketball, but he told Coach I needed to get a 4.0 this semester and the next semester. That probably threw Coach off that I'm 22 years old and my dad still gets on me about grades.

"I see some guys I grew up with, who were good in basketball, who didn't pan out because of their grades. I hear our coaches talk about not recruiting guys if their grades aren't good."

It all matters, you see.

Did you see Big Ten defensive player of the year coming?

Did anyone?

"If you had told me that as a freshman, I would have thought you were crazy," Davis says with a smile. "I think Coach Painter would have thought you were crazy. It's been a complete turnaround."

As a freshman, Davis was, associated head coach Jack Owens insisted, a defensive disaster.

"When I got here Coach Owens would get on me about defense," Davis says. "He told me I was the worst defender he had ever seen coming into college. The worst. He still says that. He still talks about my defense my freshman year. It's unbelievable as a senior he keeps going back four years."

Davis smiles. He's not angry. He knows, better than anyone, how far his defense has come.

"In high school, all I knew was scoring. In Fort Wayne growing up there were guys like Eshaunte Jones, Deshaun Thomas, James Blackmon, Bryson Scott. There were guys who could really score. That's all we learned -- being able to score.

"In AAU I always tried to guard the best players on the opposite team. Sometimes it would work out. Sometimes it wouldn't."

In high school Davis had four different coaches with four different defensive approaches. None of them stuck.

"He'd never had a coach more than a year," Painter says. "That's hard. You don't have that baseline of this is the way we do it. Sometimes you have a habit from four years of high school, and it's tough to break. He didn't have any habit. Each time a guy told him to do it one way, the next guy would switch it. None of them were wrong, but it was hard for him to form good habits."

Or, as Davis puts it, "When it came time to play for Coach Painter, I had to learn how to play defense. I had to learn the fundamentals, which meant understanding there actually are fundamentals to defense. I thought fundamentals was for offense, and on defense you just slide around and try to not let your man score. Learning where to be and how to be there helped a lot."

It helped to the point that last year nearly ever top Big Ten guard suffered a major offensive drop off when Davis guarded him.

"Now you see the benefits," Painter says. "When you work hard, when you're athletic and when you know what you're doing, you're going to be productive."

You don't need to be a father to understand that.



# ***Purdue's Haas may throw elbows and not even know it***

**Nathan Baird | Lafayette Journal & Courier | November 1, 2015**

Genetics blessed Purdue center Isaac Haas with a body other basketball players covet.

At 7-foot-2 and 282 pounds, the Alabama native casts a chiseled, intimidating figure even compared the giants who patrol the lane in college basketball.

But during USA Basketball's Pan-American games camp in Colorado Springs, Colorado, last summer, Maryland coach Mark Turgeon saw how Haas' advantage can also be a liability.

"He's so big and strong, he'll hit a guy and has no idea he hit him," Turgeon said. "He did that at the tryouts. The scrimmage ended and I said, 'You know you hit so-and-so in the face?' He goes, 'Nah, didn't even feel it' — and he clocked him pretty good. That is a disadvantage for him."

Turgeon lauded Haas' attitude and coachability. He knows those elbows aren't intentional. However, Turgeon admits he and every other Big Ten coach will profess otherwise to officials.

Haas averaged 7.6 points and 4.9 rebounds in just 14.3 minutes per game as a freshman. Extrapolate those numbers over 40 minutes and you get 21 points and 11 rebounds. That production came in spite of physical contact from defenders that Purdue coach Matt Painter argued — and Big Ten overseer of officiating Rick Boyages later conceded — were fouls.

Yet Haas committed plenty of fouls of his own, averaging 5.9 per 40 minutes. That adaptation — of Haas to the college game and the college game to Haas — continues this season.

"I still think the officials will struggle with it; I really do," Painter said. "We have to adjust to it. We've got to adjust to their inability to referee him and do a better job on our end, because that's all we control."

Haas encountered a frustratingly simple conundrum last season. When he received a post feed and pressed in on the ball with both hands, his elbows naturally stuck out. ("Chicken wings," as Painter called them.)

Haas needn't swing wildly to encounter a problem. Just turning his upper body might put an elbow in an opponent's nose.

"You just don't see size like that," said Ohio State forward Jae'Sean Tate, who knew Haas from high school camps and the EYBL summer basketball circuit. "Isaac, if you know him off the court, he's definitely not trying to do that on purpose. I think it's just an accident."

A lack of intent still yields a Flagrant 1 foul. Haas committed a handful as a freshman.

Painter is teaching his towering sophomore a new approach. Since Haas can "press the air out of a ball" regardless, Painter has worked with him to keep those elbows in when bringing the ball to his chin with both hands and going up.

"I had a tough time being really strong with it and being able to grip the ball good, when people slapped down on it with my elbows in," Haas said of working on the technique this summer. "You can put more force on the ball (the other) way. Bringing the elbows down was a challenge at first, but now it's getting easier and I'm much quicker transferring the ball and making my post moves."

Plenty of opponents don't feel sorry for Haas. Imagine being the 6-foot-8, 230-pound player who is physically overmatched by Haas in every way. The game must allow some way for those players to defend their position.

Except defenders have gotten away with a lot more.

Boyages said, as with all coaches, he and Painter communicated weekly last season. Sometimes Painter emailed comments on plays, noting the time of the game, so they could be reviewed per the league's usual procedure. Games are broken down within 24 hours, with incorrect or missed calls logged to a play script and edited with video. The referees receive a report with a grade and comments from the league.

Many notes concerned times when Haas or 7-foot center A.J. Hammons would post up only to be dislodged with a shove from behind or, in Boyages' words, "a knee up their rear-end."

One of this season's many rule changes addresses that issue. Defenders in the post are now allowed to place an arm bar in the lower back of an offensive player with the ball. However, defenders are not allowed to "displace" that player, moving them out of legally established post position.

"Sometimes you have to jump out to catch the ball to meet the pass, and in the midst of you jumping to meet the ball, they push you out, so you're an extra five feet away from the rim now," Haas said. There's nothing you can do about it, so you have to pass out, re-post, then get the ball again. It takes eight, 10 seconds off the shot clock.

"(The new rule) is going to change a lot of things and make it easier for me as well."

Haas must also do a better job of capitalizing when he does get those calls. Last season he was second only to Rapheal Davis in free throw attempts despite playing fewer than half as many minutes. But Haas only shot 54.7 percent at the line, and made only 6 of 16 (37.5 percent) in and-one situations.

Hammons says he's still aware of Haas' elbows. But he's seen improvement there, and says it hasn't diminished the force Haas can be around the basket. After the second intrasquad scrimmage, Hammons said "it's been hard to guard him lately" in part because Haas is getting better position.

Boyages says he wants what Purdue wants — a consistently called game in accordance with the rules.

"There isn't a nicer kid, too," Boyages said of Haas. "He's not a thug out there. He doesn't play dirty. He's not a cheap-shot artist."

"He's just a big boy."



# ***All the good problems in West Lafayette***

**Jon Crispin | Big Ten Network | October 30, 2015**

There are many Division I coaches in the country who have a wish list in regards to personnel and pieces on the floor. While we have seen some schools (Duke and Kentucky, in particular) benefit from having the right players at the right time, I'm sure Coach Cal and Coach K would tell you that the one thing they'd add was experience. Experience, on top of talent, is what allows coaches to relax in tight-game situations and gives them confidence and trust that the group on the floor can get the job done.

As I look across the country, there are not a lot of schools in college basketball that have the size, depth, weapons and experience that Matt Painter and the Purdue Boilermakers have in West Lafayette. To quote Voltaire (and Marvels Spiderman, too), "With great power comes great responsibility." In West Lafayette, with great size, depth, talent and experience comes great expectation and some good problems to solve.

I was initially hesitant to write about the Boilermakers as the Caleb Swanigan eligibility situation certainly impacted the initial outlook on the season. Now that he has been cleared, we can talk about the front-court dominance you'll see at Mackey Arena this season. Adding Swanigan to a team that features a pair of "footers," in A.J. Hammons and Isaac Haas, gives Painter and crew a balance in the paint that otherwise may not be present, because Swanigan occupies different space and shows an ability to move and react to create his own scoring and rebounding opportunities.

Watching him in the intra-squad scrimmage, he reminded me of a young Kevin Love. Nothing flashy about his game, and there's a part of you that questions whether he's really that good. But, when you look at the numbers and the impact he has on the outcome of every possession, you quickly realize that he may just be the quietest double-double man in college basketball. His presence allows Hammons and Haas to capitalize on one-on-one situations in the post, and his knack for the ball is tremendous. While his skill and work ethic will make him successful in the Big Ten, his presence alone will help Hammons and Haas reach their true potential.

As a guard myself, I'm surprised at how much I can rave about the big men on campus at Purdue. But the more I think about it, I realize how dominant inside play can bring out the best for perimeter players. Just another case of, "Wish I knew then what I know now."

Offensively, the ability to draw the defense in by dumping it inside creates numerous scoring opportunities for the guards around the 3-point line and for the slashers cutting to the basket. On defense, having multiple rim protectors allows the perimeter players to be more aggressive with switches and taking chances to create turnovers and capitalize on easy transition baskets.

But I don't want to talk about defense right now. That's just not my style. I was thoroughly impressed by the way Purdue executed offensively, which resulted in high-percentage shots at the rim and from deep. A lot of the easy baskets came from the guards, such as Vince Edwards, Rapheal Davis and, even, PJ Thompson, who made cuts to take advantage of a defense that was clearly concerned about giving up baskets to the trees in the post. Additionally, I took particular pleasure in watching Dakota Mathias, Kendall Stephens and the sneaky-good Ryan Cline knock down long, but open, 3-pointers in transition and in the half-court offense.

Just as it should be, the bigs ran the floor well and occupied the post. The guards ran their lanes and the defense was forced to pick their poison. You either give up a layup or dunk or you give up yet another back-breaking 3. Both teams had success in scoring points. In my opinion, good offense beat good defense on this day.

Looking back at what I've written, it would appear as if I've covered (even if just scratching the surface) size, talent and depth. The last would be experience, and for that I value the experience of those who will have the ball in their hands for the majority of the game. Even though senior transfer Johnny Hill was not playing in the scrimmage last Saturday (as he was attending class), the report card on him and PJ Thompson has been very good. Hill comes to West Lafayette with a wealth of collegiate basketball experience and Thompson gained big-game experience down the stretch last season, which will pay dividends in the future for him and

this program. He was the clear difference-maker in the regular-season finale against Illinois and finished the season strong. He looked solid and under control at the helm on Saturday, and I expect those two to be a great 1-2 punch of energy, enthusiasm and poise on the court. Clearly the experience of Davis and Hammons, both seniors, and Stephens, a junior, is key. But Painter has two point guards who will dictate the tempo, make good decisions and distribute to keep all of the weapons involved.

The key for Matt Painter is similar to what most high-level coaches with these types of "good problems" face. It's about finding the right core group and establishing the roles and responsibilities of the rest of the cast. That does not happen overnight. Those questions don't get answered following a preseason intra-squad scrimmage either. For Duke, it took them three quarters of the season to grow into its true potential. To Boilermaker fans, I beg you to be patient. There may be ups and downs early this season as the team comes together, but the potential for this team goes well beyond winning a Big Ten championship. As the season progresses, the rest of the country is going to realize that as well.

# Kendall Stephens shooting for Purdue success

Pete DiPrimio | Fort Wayne News-Sentinel | October 30, 2015

Kendall Stephens understands Purdue's basketball playing time margin for error is thinner than a baby's patience. Talent, depth and logjams are everywhere you look, and if you want to play, let alone start, you'd better be at your best at all times.

That's an every-day, every-practice reality that Stephens, a sharpshooting junior guard with a drive to thrive, embraces.

"It's even more competitive than it was last year, which is impressive," he says. "The biggest thing this year is the guys' response. Each drill is so competitive. It means so much to each player. Each practice you're working for playing time. The way we push ourselves is the biggest improvement from last year."

Fierce competition demands fierce response, and Stephens has paid his shooting dues. Over the summer he averaged 200 to 300 shots a day. Some nights he'd approach 1,000, "depending on what I was trying to work on."

Stephens, and all the Boilers, often work with a shooting machine (called "The Gun"). The machine rebounds shots and fires them back at a designated rate. Stephens prefers every three to four seconds. What kind of accuracy does he shoot for?

"It depends. If I'm going for three-pointers, I want to stay in the 60- to 70-percent range because I know no one is guarding me and those have to be a higher percentage. If it's mid-range shots I want 70 to 80 percent, again because no one is guarding me so I should have a higher percentage. When it comes in games, it will drop below that."

Stephens is the 6-7, 205-pound son of former Purdue great Everette Stephens (two years in the NBA, six as a professional), which means he grew up understanding the demands elite play required. He was once a 3-year-old with a killer Nerf ball shot who evolved into a must-get perimeter threat coach Matt Painter targeted from early on.

His 37.7 percent career three-point shooting, including 137 three-pointers that ranks 11th in school history (only three other juniors nationally have more than him -- UCLA's Bryce Alford with 140, Michigan's Zac Irvin with 139 and Creighton's Marcus Foster with 138) and puts him on pace to

break E'Twaun Moore's school record of 243, suggests how big that threat could be in his final two seasons.

Teammate Dakota Mathias vouches for that.

"The toughest thing about Kendall is his length," he says. "His arms go forever. He has long legs. And he's deceptively athletic."

Don't limit Stephens to just a three-point shooter. He's developing a mid-range game as well as an ability to attack the rim, "to make things happen when my shot isn't falling."

He's not the only Boiler to do so.

"A lot of guys have been expanding their games, and it will show," he says. Stephens is healthy as he wasn't his first two seasons (shoulder, groin, ankle, finger), and if he stays that way, a big year is possible.

He averaged 8.0 points, 1.8 rebounds and 0.8 assists as a freshman; 8.7 points, 2.3 rebounds and 1.6 assists as a sophomore. He wanted more, expected more and his confidence took a hit. Adding to the challenge, he lost his starting job to Mathias.

The off-season restored the confidence while improving his accuracy. He'll need all of that in a crowded shooting guard battle with Mathias and freshman Ryan Cline.

"I take being healthy and confident, and know it's a great opportunity to get better," Stephens says. "Put a lot of effort into practice and value each day."

This is wisdom from the pain. Stephens has battled roller coaster performance. Last season he had 24 points against IUPUI, 21 against Kansas State and, most famously, 22 at Penn State that included a dramatic game-tying three-pointer in the closing seconds that sparked the Boilers to a season-changing overtime victory. He also had five scoreless games, and was just 1-for-8 from three-point range in the gut-wrenching one-point NCAA tourney loss against Cincinnati.

Figure Stephens has grown from that, and again among the Boilers, he is not alone. Two years ago they finished last in Big Ten Ten. Last season they had the conference's worst non-conference record, and seemed destined for a third straight season no NCAA tourney participation.

Instead, Purdue rebounded to finish third in the Big Ten and make the NCAA Tournament. Now, with four returning starters, enough depth to field two conference contenders, and some big-time additions, including McDonald's All-America Caleb Swanigan, a former Homestead standout, excitement builds for a championship run.

"We've seen in practice how well we've been playing," Stephens says. "We have all the pieces. We've all been buying in. Coach Painter has been there before. He knows how to win. If we listen to his philosophy and buy in, he's going to put us in position to win."

A pause.

"I don't think buying in will be a problem." That leads to what Stephens considers the Boilers' biggest key to success.

"It's not taking any game lightly. If we play to how high and hard we know we can play, every game is winnable for us. Every one.

"The only thing holding us back is us getting complacent and taking any section of the game lightly. We need to play 40 minutes of excellent basketball. Especially in the non-conference to set a tone for the Big Ten. Last year we did a great job of bouncing back, but we had a couple of losses in the non-conference we wish we could have had back.

"If we eliminate those bad losses and not have immature mistakes and not have lackadaisical effort, we should be fine."

# ***Purdue's Thompson gaining confidence***

**Nathan Baird | Lafayette Journal & Courier | October 26, 2015**

As Purdue sophomore P.J. Thompson sprinted up the court with the ball during Saturday's Fan Day scrimmage, he made a quick assessment of the situation.

Rapheal Davis, playing opposite Thompson's "Gold" team on the "Black" squad, was the closest defender. But Thompson, sure he could out-run Davis, focused instead on the 7-foot figure of A.J. Hammons, running with his back to the basket.

The 5-10 Thompson darted in to score on a wrap-around layup. Vince Edwards, Thompson's roommate last season, had been waiting for a moment like that. Practically begging for it, actually.

"I would get on him, like, 'You've got to attack. You've got to be aggressive. You can't be a robot,'" Edwards said. "He understood it, but he was just so timid. He wanted to play. He didn't want to mess up.

"You can definitely tell he's more comfortable going to the rim. For his size, he knows how to get the ball up and he knows how to finish."

Thompson's scrimmage efforts over the past two weekends showed growth in two important areas: experience and confidence. Locked in a battle with graduate transfer Johnny Hill for point guard minutes, Thompson looks like a player more sure in himself and ready to make an impact.

In the first open practice for season ticket holders, Thompson hit 4 of 5 from 3-point range. His 18 points and four assists were second among all players, and he was on winning squads in two of three scrimmage sessions.

On Saturday, Thompson missed all three of his 3-pointers and finished with more turnovers (four) than assists (three). His teams also went 0-3 — something Thompson himself mentioned in postgame interviews.

Thompson didn't separate himself from Hill, absent Saturday for a class commitment. But the upside for Purdue at the position overall showed through in Thompson's mature assessment of his performance.

"I shot the right shots, which is important for me, because sometimes if I don't make shots I won't shoot it," Thompson said.

"But I had a few bad turnovers I shouldn't have made. I thought I did a better job of talking. They've been getting on me about talking and communicating and being loud, having a presence."

Purdue coach Matt Painter said playing a lot of minutes, even in a scrimmage format, has been key for Thompson. Consistent play breeds confidence, which tends to breed better results.

Thompson's opportunities shrank last season after Jon Octeus locked down the bulk of the point guard minutes. He shot just 28.6 percent from 3-point range and 33.3 percent overall. Thompson's confidence was, in his words, "shaky."

Maintaining self-assurance is a big goal going into the season.

"You almost have to have confidence better than what you are," Thompson said. "I'm not saying you have to act like that off court, which I don't do that at all. But when you're on the court you have to have swagger about yourself, have confidence about your self and carry yourself that way.

"I hope to do and want too, even though it doesn't always come out like that."

# Scrimmages show Boilermakers' offensive potential

Brian Neubert | GoldandBlack.com | October 24, 2015

Purdue's success this season is bound to be inextricably linked to its defensive identity.

And with Caleb Swanigan joining A.J. Hammons, Isaac Haas and Vince Edwards in the Boilermaker frontcourt, rebounding should be a strength.

But the team seen the past two weekends in preseason scrimmages has looked the part of a much more dynamic one offensively than it's been.

"I feel like we can be really good offensively," point guard P.J. Thompson said. "We have shooters, bigs, guys who can handle the ball, really good passers. I feel like we have everything we need."

"It's just going to come down to wanting it more than the other team, playing hard, taking care of the ball and playing defense. If we do those things, everything else will (fall in place), because we have the talent and the people we need."

Purdue maintains formidable options offensively on the interior and will again look to exploit them, but it's the Boilermaker forwards that give its front line a far more dynamic look.

Edwards now looks like more a guard with forward skills as opposed to a forward with guard skills. His improved athleticism and skill level were on display Saturday when he canned three-pointers and threw down a one-handed transition dunk - he'd never have done that last season - but his tenacity on the offensive glass remains a constant. He grabbed seven offensive rebounds as part of a 25-point, 10-rebound, six-assist day.

"I just think he's better," Coach Matt Painter said. "The No. 1 thing he's been able to do is make threes. When you have to closely guard him, he's such a good passer. Now he's able to move the basketball, pass the basketball and also make shots, but then be able to break people down off the dribble because you have to get up on him on closeouts because his shooting is improved."

Edwards is now playing the 3 because Swanigan assumes the 4, though he may sometimes play the 5 in certain situations. As a center, Swanigan can be a devastating matchup facing the basket, as Hammons and Haas both well know from first-hand

experience. But Swanigan's power can make him an equally lop-sided matchup for the smaller players - and they'll almost all be smaller - he'll match up with as a power forward.

Swanigan went for 22 points and a team-best 13 boards Saturday a week after leading Purdue in both scoring and rebounding in last weekend's scrimmage.

"That kid is big and he's strong and he's so advanced for his age," Edwards said of Swanigan. "People don't realize he should still be in high school, but he's out here in college with grown men, playing like a grown man."

Purdue's frontcourt is loaded with options, including Hammons, who scored 10 points with 10 rebounds Saturday; and Haas, who scored 13 Saturday but more impressively cut his turnovers from seven last weekend to zero this weekend.

But its perimeter corps has options also, options that are delivering based on practice-floor performances.

Purdue needs to shoot better this season, that much is well known.

In last weekend's scrimmage, it made 41 percent of its threes; this weekend, it made 44 percent.

There's a big difference between making shots in practice or in a scrimmage and making them in games, as Purdue well knows, but that can't be viewed as anything but resoundingly encouraging.

Kendall Stephens made 7-of-13 threes; freshman Ryan Cline made all five of his threes in succession during the second scrimmage session, giving the Mackey Arena crowd a thrill.

"It happened in practice probably a week-and-a-half, two weeks ago," Thompson said. "I think Coach (Brandon Brantley) was talking stuff and it made Cline made and I promise you, he probably made eight threes in a row in the drill. It was ridiculous. Cline's one of the best shooters in the country if not the best and with we've got him on our team. With him, Kendall, Dakota, Ray when he's making shots, me when I'm making shots, and Vince, we can be pretty dangerous. It was good to see him play with confidence and do it in front

of fans so they can see what I've been seeing for years."

(Also on the shooting front, Purdue made 81.8 percent of its foul shots for the second consecutive scrimmage.)

Saturday's scrimmage may not have provided much clarity on the point guard front, where Thompson and Johnny Hill are competing for the job.

Hill missed the scrimmage due to a graduate school class, same way Jon Octeus missed a scrimmage a year ago at this time for the same reason.

Thompson may not have taken full advantage of his chance to run unopposed.

"I didn't really shoot that well. I shot the right shots which is important for me because sometimes if I don't make shots, I won't shoot it. But I shot the right shots, which was good, but I had a few bad turnovers I shouldn't have made."

"I thought I did a better job talking. They've been getting on me about talking, being loud and having a presence and I tried to focus on that."

With Hill out, Mathias played significant minutes in a point guard role, and Painter liked his play there, but noted that he wasn't pressed or didn't have different defenses thrown at him.

"We didn't go after him the way some other people might go after him," Painter said.

Purdue now prepares for next Sunday's "secret" scrimmage against Dayton in Indianapolis, a closed-doors affair in which Painter will hope the Flyers' strong guard play and small-ball proficiency will expose some vulnerabilities in his team right out of the chute.

One thing has been evident in Purdue's scrimmages: the Boilermakers have some real offensive potential.

"I like our mix," Painter said.

# ***Purdue's Vince Edwards 'crazy' good early***

**Pete DiPrimio | Fort Wayne News-Sentinel | October 23, 2015**

Are you ready for a new, improved Vince Edwards?

You'd better believe the Purdue Boilermakers are they prepare for a championship-caliber basketball season.

Edwards is the versatile sophomore forward whose improved athleticism has made him a practice highlight show, from his impressive dunks to his improved pull-up jumper, and more.

"It's pretty crazy what I've seen so far," sophomore guard Dakota Mathias said. "I don't think I've ever seen a player, in the last 2 months, the way he's jumped. How quick he gets up and dunks. How much he's improved his jumper and his pull-up. He gets them off a lot quicker. He's improved every aspect of his game."

Credit work with assistant director of sports performance Josh Bonhotal as well as plenty of his own work.

"It's still a process," Edwards said. "I've gotten quicker. I'm getting off the ground better, faster and quicker. Before I finished at the rim. Now I'm able to finish above the rim."

"I've improved my athleticism and my change of direction. Last year I played at the same speed a lot. Now I'm able to change my speed."

That, and more, will be on display at Mackey Arena during Saturday's 12:30 p.m. scrimmage as part of the annual Fan Day event. It's the second public scrimmage and figures to further build expectations for a top-25 team.

"With all the ups and downs we had last year, and everything we went through," Mathias said, "it's something we can build on. We have a lot of expectations this year."

Those expectations include freshman Caleb Swanigan, the Indiana Mr. Basketball and McDonald's All-American from Homestead. He had 23 points and 12 rebounds in last week's first scrimmage.

Saturday also will be another evaluation for junior forward Basil Smotherman, a red-shirt candidate because of all the Boilers' frontcourt depth.



# Officially Challenged

Brian Neubert | GoldandBlack.com | October 22, 2015

Isaac Haas changes basketball games with his physical dimensions, his towering 7-foot-2, nearly 300-pound stature impacting competition every time he set foot on the floor as a freshman last season.

But it wasn't just opponents affected by his presence.

Officials struggled with him, also.

"He's a hard guy to officiate," Iowa coach Fran McCaffery said. "He got fouls called some-times where I didn't think he fouled anybody. It's just where he is physically. He's just so big. If you're in your stance and he just turns, what's he going to do? He should be allowed to turn."

Such were concerns all season long last season for Boilermaker coach Matt Painter, particularly during the non-conference season, when opponents tended to be smaller, thus putting their faces directly level with those WMD elbows of Haas'.

Normally coaches pull punches when discussing officiating. Painter never did, still doesn't.

"He needs to learn how to handle poor officiating," Painter said of Haas now. "It's too bad you have to say it that way, but it's true."

"I could put a tape together of people flopping against Isaac Haas, and Big Ten officials taking the bait. I mean awful, just awful calls."

Painter says that years of coaching have conditioned him to take a skeptical eye to players' pleas of innocence following disputed calls or non-calls. He says more often than not, players will see one thing live, then something entirely different later on film.

Haas, however, is an outlier, same way he is physically.

"With Isaac last year, about 80 percent of the times there was anything in question, the officials blew it," Painter said. "He is a very difficult person to officiate, but it's not his fault. They need to make the adjustment."

That might not be entirely true. Haas was instructed to adjust technically in how he set up in the post to avoid the inadvertent elbow contact that subjected him to the risk of Flagrant 1 fouls under the letter of rules that are in place for player safety.

He did so. Asked today what he learned - about anything - from his freshman season, Haas says now, "Elbows are not cool. Seriously."

But elbows were only one layer to the complications this player of almost unprecedented size brought for referees.

Thad Matta could sympathize with Haas, as opponents pounded on him, and the efforts Painter made to protect him.

Matta coached Greg Oden and Jared Sullinger at Ohio State.

"It's funny because what happened to those guys, I'd never seen in my life the beating they would take on a nightly basis," Matta said of his two former All-Americans. "I remember an official telling me, 'I've never seen anything like him.' I said, 'That's not my fault. A foul's a foul.'"

"I once called Roy Williams and asked him how was it that Tyler Hansbrough shot all those free throws. He said, 'Well, they call the fouls.' Greg and Jared should have shot 15 free throws a game because of what was happening to them."

That was Painter's great frustration last season.

"Matt felt that because he was so big, he got shoved in the back a lot and moved out of legally obtained position," said Rick Boyages, the Big Ten's supervisor of officiating, who maintained regular communication with Painter about the topic last season. "He was absolutely right about that."

"If Haas establishes legal position close to the basket, he shouldn't be pushed away by the time the ball is thrown to him. He earned that spot by hanging out on the weak side and waiting for the ball to get reversed and if (defenders) were sagging off him, helping on the ball side, flooding or zoning that side of the floor, then they gave him that spot."

Opponents had to do something, though.

"If you're not physical with him," Iowa center Adam Woodbury said, "he's just going to put you underneath the hoop and dunk on you."

Boyages said that the rules of the game gave physically overwhelmed post defenders few options beside giving ground and running the risk of being scored on, or flopping, which none of the game's stakeholders want to see more of. The reason: There was no delineation drawn between perimeter ball-handlers and back-to-the-basket post-offense situations when it came to enforcing the recent emphases on hand-checking and restrictive physicality.

That changes now. Beginning this year, post defenders will be permitted to use an arm bar, as is allowed in the NBA.

But there are limits to how the technique is to be used.

"It's not to be pushing or shoving," Boyages said, "just to counter-balance 50-50 contact and give the defensive player some way to hold his ground."

In short, the arm bar cannot be used to dislodge a player from established positioning.

When it is, under the new conditions on the ground, it should be a foul.

You can be certain Painter will try to keep that fresh in officials' minds to make sure Haas gets more calls than he might have a year ago

That said, understand that Haas already drew an inordinate number of calls, an average of 8.2 per 40 minutes, according to KenPom.com. That average would have ranked third nationally had Haas played enough minutes to qualify for the site's rankings.

No reason to think that he won't draw just as many calls this season.

The most important part, though, is obvious.

"He has to make people pay," Painter said.

Haas shot just under 55 percent from the foul line last season.

He'll be better this season, he believes, after spending the summer shooting on his free time and trying to improve the arc on his shot.

"It's getting better, but I sprained a ligament in my wrist a few weeks ago and it's been bothering me ever since," said Haas, who made his only attempt at the line in Saturday's scrimmage. "It's about 60 percent right now and still hurts every time I flick my wrist."

"But once it gets to be 100-percent, I'm shooting so, so much better. Before I hurt it, I was hitting like almost every free throw I was taking in our workouts. I was coming in and shooting 200-300 free throws in my extra time. Every time I was put at the line to make a free throw under pressure, I was hitting it. It was no big deal to me, it was easy."



# ***'Confident' P.J. Thompson shakes off 'shaky' shooting***

**Pete DiPrimio | Fort Wayne News-Sentinel | October 20, 2015**

Purdue's P.J. Thompson, once shaken is ready to stir -- his shooting. Keep that in mind. Last year's offensive misery -- 28.6 percent from three-point range, 33.3 percent overall -- was aberration and not the norm.

At least, that is the hope, and the early Boiler basketball signs are promising.

Take last Saturday's scrimmage, when the 5-10 sophomore point guard was 6-for-9 from the field and 4-for-5 from three-point range for 18 points.

Granted, a scrimmage lacks the high-pressure stakes sure to come, but it's a welcome start for a guy set to have a major role this season.

"Shooting 29 percent from three is not what I'm accustomed to," Thompson says.

In fact, he was a strong offensive factor at Indianapolis Brebeuf High School, never averaging less than 14.2 points as a four-year starter. The scoring continued in travel ball.

But he struggled to adjust to a reserve role as a Boiler freshman. He averaged just 2.4 points, which was partly redeemed by his assist (33) to turnover (19) ratio and 21 steals (third on the team despite limited playing time).

"My confidence was shaky. I would play a good game and then my confidence would be good, and then I'd struggle and my confidence would be ... shaky. It's hard to play that way."

So he has chosen to play another way. "Confidence is huge. When I'm playing confident, I can play at a high level. When I'm not playing confident, I'm an average guard. When your confidence is good, you keep your head up. When you're on the court you have to have a swagger about yourself, a confidence. You carry yourself in a confident manner. That's what I hope to do. That's what I want to do."

If Thompson's exhibition performance is the norm, the starting point guard battle with senior transfer Johnny Hill will be intriguing. The 6-3 Hill -- who signed over the summer with the intent to provide the same instant-impact play Jon Octeus did last year as a senior transfer -- went 10-for-10 from the free throw line in the scrimmage for 10 points, six assists, five rebounds and no turnovers.

Coach Matt Painter calls the point guard competition even so far. Senior guard Rameal Davis says Thompson has stood out as much as any Boiler.

"He wants it," Davis says. "He hears a lot of talk about Johnny Hill. He might act like he doesn't, but it's human nature. He knows people are talking about Johnny, and not him."

"He's a lot tougher this year. He's really getting into the ball. He's really testing himself. He's winning all the sprints. He's jamming the ball (on defense) well. I thought he'd struggle with Johnny being so long and quick, but he's right into him. He's being more vocal. He's more athletic than he has been."

Purdue seems poised to have one of the nation's best frontcourts with A.J. Hammons, Caleb Swanigan, Isaac Haas, Jacquil Taylor and Vince Edwards, and if it gets consistent outside shooting, the lofty preseason expectations could be met if not surpassed. That means a big jump from last year's team three-point shooting (32.7 percent). In the scrimmage the Boilers shot 40.4 percent beyond the arc.

"Our perimeter shooting is definitely improved," Painter says. "If we can shoot like that and establish an inside presence with the guys that we have, we can be really good."

Adds Thompson: "There are a lot questions about our shooting. Our guys have really worked on it. Our shooters hit shots (in the scrimmage). I was able to knock down some myself."

"It will help if we can make shots from the point guard position, but I'm big on making the right play. It's good to hit the shots, but whether I'm missing or making them, as long as I'm making the right play, whether it's taking it or giving to my teammates, that's what I'm big on."

# ***Purdue basketball team expects to rule defensively***

**Nathan Baird | Lafayette Journal & Courier | October 15, 2015**

Purdue senior Rapheal Davis boarded a charter plane to Chicago on Wednesday with a puffy lip and a recently bloodied nose.

The reigning Big Ten Conference Defensive Player of the Year shrugged it off. But how are the Boilermakers toeing the line between physical play and preserving their health?

"We're not," Davis said Thursday during Big Ten Media Day interviews at the Chicago Marriott O'Hare hotel.

OK then.

The Big Ten handed out a sheet at media day — front and back — listing some of the more than 25 rule changes adopted by the NCAA men's basketball rules committee. Many are meant to boost scoring, either by increasing the pace of play or correcting a real or perceived imbalance favoring defenses in the college game.

The shot clock is five seconds shorter, the five-second call is gone and post players with their back to the basket should always expect to feel a forearm just below their uniform number.

Davis said Purdue talked about the rule changes last week, but otherwise it's been business as usual. The Boilermakers returned to the NCAA tournament last season on the strength of physical man-to-man defense. Regardless of rule changes, they expect to be even better there this season.

"Our coaches still yell at you if you're 2 feet off a guy, 1 foot off a guy," Davis said. "We're still going to play Purdue defense. We're going to play tough, get into guys and things like that."

Purdue finished fifth overall among Big Ten teams in field goal percentage defense last season but ranked No. 1 by a significant margin in league play. A.J. Hammons led the league in blocked shots for a third straight season and might be as big of a challenger as anyone to Davis' crown. Adding Caleb "Biggie" Swanigan at power forward should provide a defensive boost due to his rebounding potential alone.

In other words, Purdue thrives in the kind of physical, low-scoring games targeted by the rules changes.

Coaches remained split Thursday on the necessity, and impact, of those changes.

"The problem with our game is not going to be solved by a shot clock," Purdue coach Matt Painter said. "The problem in our game is the efficiency in what we do and the decision-making in what we do."

"... If you're putting in time in all aspects of the game besides the cerebral part of it, man. Did you get a better shot? 'Well, my shot's improving.' But you're not getting a better shot. In coaching you've got to run stuff or do stuff to get better shots."

Defense is about forcing poor decisions, and it's an area in which Purdue excelled last season.

Davis was recently dismayed to learn about a change to Rule 9-14.2 that eliminated the five-second closely guarded count on a dribble. His most memorable five-second stop came against Michigan guard Caris LeVert in a victory at Mackey Arena last season.

"It was a momentum-changer," Davis said. "Our crowd was so loud. Vince (Edwards) was screaming like you would have thought I had just dunked on seven people in the lane."

The same could be said for a 35-second shot clock violation. Purdue, which didn't start playing defense consistently well until January, forced 19 violations last season. Theoretically those could increase in frequency with a 30-second clock.

Penn State coach Patrick Chambers said players who can hit shots late in the clock will be a coveted commodity. Against Purdue, however, the challenge is greater.

Post size — thanks to Hammons, Isaac Haas and Swanigan — is one concern. But Davis, Edwards, Kendall Stephens and others give the Boilermakers several lengthy, athletic bodies to spread around the court.

"There's a little spot where you can kind of maybe get off a pull-up or floater, but otherwise you always kind of feel their presence or pressure," Nebraska senior wing Shavon Shields said. "I think that's what makes them so good defensively."

Some of the rule changes could help defenses. Coaches now also can only call timeouts during dead ball situations. Jump shooters cannot "seek out" a defender who otherwise is not going to make contact and be rewarded with a foul.

Painter said Hammons and Edwards joined Davis as players who ended Wednesday's practice with extra bruises. Purdue doesn't plan on ratcheting down the physicality anytime soon. The rest of the league expects nothing less.

"They just have so many guys with size and they play with toughness," Ohio State forward Jae'Sean Tate said. "You've got to bring it every time you play them."

# Purdue's Vince Edwards embraces basketball 'wars'

Pete DiPrimio | Fort Wayne News-Sentinel | October 9, 2015

Vince Edwards emerges from yet another Purdue basketball practice that suggests combat more than workout.

The sophomore forward wouldn't want it any other way.

"Practice has been a battle. It's been a war. Guys have really been going after each other. It's been hard-nosed and tough. Guys are battling for spots. Guys are battling for minutes. It's been really physical."

Edwards thrives on versatility. He's a 6-8, 225-pound small forward who could be a power forward or even, for select minutes, a center. Given the way he passes and shoots, he also could handle either guard role in small doses.

For now, though, he's set at small forward.

"Coach (Matt) Painter might want me to play some 4, but my primary spot is the 3."

Edwards is part of a deep, versatile roster that will likely force Painter, as never before, to deal with shared playing time. Last season the Boilers hit their stride when he shrunk the playing roster (finally finding guys who could play the necessary level of defense). If everyone buys into that defensive mentality this season, he might have to expand it.

But that's a topic for closer to the start of a season that, in so many ways, radiates optimism given Purdue returns four starters from a 21-win team, plus adds a stellar group of newcomers that includes ex-Homestead standout Caleb Swanigan. Big Ten title and Final Four talk is everywhere in West Lafayette these days.

"Guys are ready to work for it," Edwards says. "We know that's a goal and it's something we want to achieve, but right now we're focused on getting better as a team. We don't want to make the little mistakes we made last year. We want to mature and get better in those areas."

Figure Edwards will help lead the way. Consider his last game, Purdue's gut-wrenching NCAA tourney loss to Cincinnati last March. He had 14 points, eight rebounds and seven assists, and hit a huge crunch-time three-pointer that nearly was the game winner.

He averaged 8.8 points and 4.8 rebounds while shooting 48.2 percent from the field and led the Boilers with 90 assists. All that generated comparisons to former Purdue

great Robbie Hummel, who as a freshman averaged 11.4 points, 6.1 rebounds and 2.5 assists while shooting 50.7 percent from the field.

Sports Illustrated rates Edwards among the nation's top-20 wings, a list that also includes Kentucky's Alex Poythress, Indiana's Troy Williams, Duke's Brandon Ingram and Butler's Kellen Dunham.

So what's the next step for him?

"I have to play with more energy and more consistency. I can't have games like (Cincinnati) and then come back and disappear. I have to stay consistent in the non-conference and in the Big Ten."

Edwards' practice preparation to do that is beyond good. He faces Big Ten defensive player of the year Raphael Davis, along with perhaps the best shot blocker in college basketball in A.J. Hammons, plus imposing 7-2 Isaac Haas and Swanigan, Indiana's Mr. Basketball and a McDonald's All-America.

If Edwards can score against these guys (and he can), he can score against anyone.

"You can't ask for anything better," Edwards says. "You've got all the tools you need to be a good offensive player and work to be able to finish. You've got the leading shot blocker in the country on your team, the Big Ten defensive player of the year on your team and you've got one of the biggest frontlines in the country on your team. You can't ask for anything more than that."

Edwards spent part of June trying out for the USA U19 World Championship team along with Swanigan in Colorado Springs. He didn't make it (Swanigan did and helped the U.S. win a gold medal), but he says he still benefited from the experience.

"Getting around those (players), talking to them, playing with them, helped elevate my game. Being in the Colorado atmosphere, the high altitude, also was very helpful."

Edwards' fast college success isn't a fluke. He grew up in a basketball family. One older brother, Darius, played at Miami of Ohio. Another, Bill Jr., played at Penn State.

And then there's his father, Bill, a high-scoring forward at Wright State who still holds school records for career points (2,303), season points (757) and a single game (45). He went on to play 12 professional seasons, mostly in

Europe, and averaged more than 20 points three times. Although he retired in 2006, he still has game, his son says.

"When I'm home, we sometimes play pickup games. He still has it a little bit. He can still run the court. There's no taking it easy on anything. There's no father-son love on the court. It's all war."

The Edwards family spent time in France, Italy, Greece and Germany before settling in Middletown, Ohio.

"No matter where we were, we'd always go to a gym or a park and play," Vince Edwards says. "Even my mom (Glennetta Patton) would play with us. She'd play H-O-R-S-E or 21, and she could shoot."

"Growing up in a basketball family, having all those tools and all those people to push me. They held me to a high standard and it helped me get where I am now."

All the Boilers face high standards this season, and they'll need it given the Big Ten figures to be the nation's toughest conference. Maryland, Michigan State, Purdue, Indiana, Wisconsin, Michigan and Ohio State all project as preseason top-25 teams.

"The coaches have brought that up to us," Edwards says. "They said rankings don't mean anything if we don't go out and do it. They showed us all the ranked teams, from the Big Ten and the non-conference, that we play."

"The Big Ten will be strong. It's never easy. This year it seems to be back to the top at its highest. It will be great competition."

Then Edwards follows the lead of Raphael Davis, who isn't shy about discussing the team's lofty goals. Purdue will have one of the nation's best frontcourts with Hammons, Haas, Swanigan and Edwards. Don't forget 6-10, 240-pound redshirt freshman Jacquil Taylor, who is noticeably bigger and stronger after an injury marred first season. The backfield is loaded with shooters such as Kendall Stephens, Dakota Mathias and Ryan Cline, with graduate transfer Johnny Hill and sophomore P.J. Thompson handling point guard.

Finally, there's Davis, a do-it-all guard and former South Side standout who rates among the best leaders Painter has ever had. "We're going to try to get an outright (Big Ten title), and win the conference tournament as well," Edwards says. "We know it's going to be tough. We have to put it all together."

# Q-and-A with Strength Coach Josh Bonhotal

Brian Neubert | GoldandBlack.com | September 16, 2015

Right there on his iPad, Josh Bonhotal can pull up everything he needs to know about any member of the Boilermaker men's basketball roster he presides over in his role as its sports performance coach.

In a quick tap of the screen, he can bring up a baseball card-style profile of any Purdue player, anchored by side-by-side, before-and-after images of said player and loaded additionally with a slew of training metrics, notes and whatever other thumb-nail info he and his staff might need to measure players' results and further their action plans moving forward.

That data is critical to Bonhotal's work, as they would be for anybody in his sort of role.

When a player first enrolls at Purdue, it's Bonhotal's initial baseline evaluation that goes a long way toward determining what sort of targeted work he'll be put through in order to attack deficiencies or enhance existing strengths.

The information is culled from a battery of tests that make up the program's initial evaluation, in addition to assessments of a player's body type, movement patterns, etc.

The 20-meter dash is an important metric for Bonhotal, as are various jumping measures and change-of-direction-type tests, in addition to traditional weight-room-type activities.

Once need areas are identified, they're attacked through targeted training plotted out in a way, Bonhotal believes, that gives players the best chance to be in peak form when they most need to be, a nod to the important difference between gains made in training and gains made in training that actually make a difference in games.

So much of what Bonhotal does relies on technology, using a variety of programs to track workout results, including SWIFT technology, an example being the specialized mats used to measure jumping abilities.

Purdue was the first college program to use GPS technology to track players' effort in practice, information Bonhotal uses to tailor players' workout or conditioning plans.

So much of Bonhotal's foundation was developed during his time with the NBA's Chicago Bulls prior to his hiring at Purdue in 2011.

Bonhotal was the Bulls' assistant strength and conditioning coach for four seasons prior to moving to West Lafayette.

"I think my experience with the Bulls gives me an advantage working with these guys," Bonhotal said. "I take the same approach with them that we did when evaluating draft prospects. It's a very extensive process."

Bonhotal uses data, much of it culled electronically, not only to gauge results, but to illustrate those results.

He'll use before-and-after numbers and, perhaps most effectively, pictures to show athletes the dividends their training has brought.

"That's what I try to do. Having all this technology and being able to give instant feedback has taken our program to the next level," Bonhotal said. "It's an entirely different thing for them to see an electric time that is concrete, so they can see improvement and results. And when they see results, they buy in and work that much harder."

GoldandBlack.com recently caught up with Bonhotal to discuss Purdue's off-season.

**GoldandBlack.com:** Which players jump out to you as having made the biggest strides this off-season?

**Bonhotal:** "To be honest I could name every single guy, but Kendall Stephens really stood out. He got stronger, but he got a whole lot faster. His speed is something I am proud of and impressed by. If you compare where he was as a freshman to where he is now, it's night and day. His speed has gone from a definite disadvantage as a freshman, to where now it is a decisive advantage. To give you a frame of reference, we run a 20-meter sprint and this summer he ran a 2.93. To put that in perspective, Ronnie Johnson's fastest time was a 2.90, so he is up there with point guards right now.

"Vince Edwards is another one. He's put on good size, so he can take that contact better than last year. He has gotten a tenth of a second faster, which is a huge differ-

ence. The way he is jumping right now, he touched (11 feet, nine-and-a-half) inches (a few weeks ago).

"Isaac Haas' conditioning has come a long way and he's leaned out. He's moving a lot better, starting to jump quicker. For him, it's about being that much quicker off the ground. If he can just get there first he is already (higher than everybody else).

"P.J. Thompson, he is consistently our fastest guy on the team. His 20-meter time is above average for an NBA point guard, and the way he is jumping right now, it's night and day.

"I am looking around and I could name similar gains across the board. But this is one of the things I pride myself on: It has to translate to performance on the court. It can't just be me saying, 'He squats this much more, or he benches more,' because if it does not improve his speed or athleticism on the court, then I am not doing my job. Maybe I can pat myself on the back for increasing his weight room numbers."

**GoldandBlack.com:** Rapheal Davis' progress last summer has to be your gold standard.

**Bonhotal:** "I presented at the NBA draft combine on long-term athletic development, and I was joking with Ray because (his picture) was in three of my slides. When he first got here, he could not get very low (to defend). One of the others was (showing) perfect sprinting form.

"But here's a guy who comes in as a freshman and is below average athletically that could develop into the Big Ten Defensive Player-of-the-Year. I don't want to come off as taking credit, but to look at how much faster he got, how much more explosive he got, and then to be able to elevate, he has become a guy who is an example of what training can do for your physical development."

**GoldandBlack.com:** Knowing you put emphasis on illustrating before-and-after, how much can you use A.J. Hammons' transformation to motivate other players?

**Bonhotal:** "We joke about it with A.J. and I'll show him the picture of the first day he was here and he was a completely different kid. Training is a process, like investing. You're not going to get a huge return overnight, but you step back a year later, or two, and you really have something.



"So to be able to give them that kind of stuff to show them they should trust in the process, especially when you get in season with ups and downs, when you don't feel like training, it is there to help guide and remind them why we are training and what we are working towards."

**GoldandBlack.com:** This team has uncommon size for the college level. Does your experience with NBA size give you some valuable perspective on what to do with these guys?

**Bonhotal:** "Absolutely. It's helped me from the standpoint of seeing what guys at that level are able to do as big as they are. There are a lot of misconceptions about big guys, about what they can and cannot do. It's about the individual. People group bigs as one category. But it's about the individual. With the Bulls, one of our centers was Omer Asik, who's 7-1, and he was our most mobile guy and he went against what people tell you a big is supposed to do, while we had a 5-10 guy who could not move through his hips. So at the end of the day it is about getting back to the individual."

**GoldandBlack.com:** What's Haas' upside athletically? Obviously, when you're that big, there's probably only so much you can do.

**Bonhotal:** "All the athletes you work with, at some point or another, they become limited as a product of their genetics, and Isaac's not a guy who's going to go out on the track and win a race any time soon. But what you try to do with him is make sure you don't take away his greatest advantage: His size and strength. At the same time, we don't play in the half court, so he has to be able to get up and down the floor. My whole thing with all our athletes, and this applies to Isaac, is to just make them as efficient as possible, to allow them to do the things they need to do in a game to be successful, but to make it easier on them to do those things."

"Isaac came in his freshman summer north of 300 pounds, probably 310 or 315. He wasn't sloppy or anything like that, but at that weight, maybe he's having to work too hard getting up and down the floor. You don't want him to get down to the block and be too fatigued from running the floor to be able to use his advantage."

"Now he's down around 275-280 and incredibly lean and if you start to take him much below that you're maybe starting to chip away at what makes him such an effective player."

**GoldandBlack.com:** What were your impressions of this Caleb Swanigan work ethic we've heard so much about?

**Bonhotal:** "His approach is incredible. Biggie has really been raised to be a professional and has really come up around it. It's really a tribute especially to Roosevelt (Barnes), as well as the very strong support system he has around him in Fort Wayne, but then obviously it has to come from him, too. That's the guy you have to give the biggest nod to, because he's the one doing the work."

"But it really is incredible. He's relentless, a coach's dream. He's going to do anything and everything you tell him to do. Anything where you say, 'This is going to make you better,' he's going to do it, without question. He's going to make whatever sacrifice he needs to and he's just really driven. Him being here, I think some guys feed off his work ethic."

"But I think we've also established a culture here now - and it's really a tribute to Coach (Matt) Painter and everything he's done - to where he can feed off these other guys also. I don't care how much you work, you are always going to have your days where you're down a little bit or sore. That's where I'm so excited about our culture. Speaking more generally and not just about Biggie, any time somebody is having that kind of day, we have enough guys around them that they're going to pull them through that."

**GoldandBlack.com:** Athletically, is Vince Edwards this year's Rapheal Davis?

**Bonhotal:** "There's absolutely (a comparison there). The thing for Ray was he needed to get faster and more explosive in terms of jumping a lot higher. You've seen the same thing with Vince. Before he didn't necessarily play with that change of speed or that burst. You're starting to see it a little more, him doing some things in open gyms or practices now where he's getting a rebound and going coast to coast, just going with it. Last year, I don't know if he necessarily had that physical ability to do that to where he was beating everybody down the court."

"The other thing, similar to Ray, is how he's jumping right now, how explosive he is. He's really able to elevate and easily finish around the rim. That's an element where he has to put the time in during workouts or practice or open gym, though, where he makes that a habit. When he goes to the rim, he needs to learn to finish above the rim. It's not just going to automatically happen. Like we've talked about with Ken-

dall (becoming more athletic, but still playing for layups), if you haven't really been that guy before, just because you have that newfound athleticism it doesn't mean it's automatically going to happen. It has to be a mindset and something you have to add to your game. He has that ability now to add that to his game."

"The last piece is that he's added some good weight and he's stronger, and that'll allow him to go back and forth between the 3 and 4 more effectively and endure the physicality of the Big Ten game. Offensively, he should be able to more effectively take contact and finish through it and not be bumped off. Defensively, especially when he has to guard a bigger guy, hopefully he can be a little more effective."

**GoldandBlack.com:** Who's your best overall athlete?

**Bonhotal:** "To be real honest with you, that's very much a moving target, because of all the things you have through the year, whether it be fatigue, mental stress, physical stress or academic stress ... you're not always at your best all the time, every day. During the season, we really try to make adjustments so that you're at your best on game day."

"But just for fun for the guys, when they came back from their two-week break, their first day back, I had a little mini-combine for the guys. On that day, P.J. was No. 1 overall across all seven categories. Most of it was variations of a vertical jump, then we did a 20-meter sprint."

"When we broke down all seven, P.J., on that day, got the best of everybody and I think he enjoys being able to rub that in the other guys' faces. It's been good for the competitive part of things. They try to out-do each other."

**GoldandBlack.com:** Why yoga?

**Bonhotal:** "Obviously we want to work on flexibility and mobility, but also, everything we do with them is always go, go, go. They never have a chance to decompress, so that was a big piece of it, teaching them how to breathe and how to relax. It was something they believed was working for them. And whether it is or it isn't, the placebo effect is a wonderful thing."



# Purdue's Johnny Hill loves the Boilers' 'hunger'

Pete DiPrimio | Fort Wayne News-Sentinel | August 31, 2015

Johnny Hill didn't find love at first Purdue sight.

But it was close to ensure the Boilers got their man.

"When I came here for my visit," the transfer point guard says, "I knew this was the school for me."

Why?

"It was seeing the hunger. That was my eye-opening thing. Guys will try to sell the program and tell you they work hard, but to see if for yourself, that's eye opening.

"When I came in May, I thought I'd be the only one here, but Kendall Stephens was here, Rapheal Davis was here, John McKeeman was here. These were guys who didn't have to be here in May, but they were working to get better every day. That was eye opening. Seeing the amount of guys coming in and getting extra work. That meant something."

It could mean a season Purdue has waited for since the NCAA tourney first emerged, back when the Wizard of Oz represented state-of-the-art movie technology.

"We really want it," Hill says. "It's not just something we talk about. We really want to do this."

That would be winning a Big Ten championship, and a heck of a lot more. Before Hill's arrival Purdue had a lot of the necessary pieces -- a dominant inside game, good outside shooting, lock-down defense led by the Big Ten's best defender (Davis) and shot blocker (A.J. Hammons) -- but lacked a proven point guard to make it flow, although sophomore P.J. Thompson showed promise.

Enter the 6-3, 180-pound Hill, a fifth-year veteran from Texas-Arlington and Illinois State with career numbers of 520 points, 248 rebounds and 191 assists while shooting 48.1 percent from the field and 72.1 percent from the line.

He saw what happened last season with Jon Octeus, a fifth-year transfer from Colorado State who didn't arrive on campus until October, so late he didn't make Purdue's media guide. Octeus became an honorable mention all-Big Ten player who helped spark the Boilers' Big Ten surge into the NCAA tourney.

"Oh, yeah, that was part of it," Hill says. "You see it. Guys can talk till their blue in the face, but when you see the success at the position, it makes you think you can do it, too, if you put in the work."

Hill spent the summer putting in the work and impressing Davis, the former South Side standout.

"Big, bad Johnny is what I call him. He's a menace on the court and quiet as a mouse off of it. He's brought a lot of energy to us and is doing a lot of good things, especially from a communication standpoint. He's talking on the court, so everybody knows where to be, which is exactly what a point guard should do.

"He's had time to get comfortable with the guys. He just didn't get thrown into things like Jon Octeus did. He's way more comfortable. He's crazy quick on defense and crazy quick on offense, so he brings a lot of the same dimensions Jon did, but he's more comfortable being a communicator."

Hill is coming off his best college season. He averaged 10.1 points, 4.3 rebounds and 3.6 assists in 21 games at Texas-Arlington before suffering a season-ending wrist injury (which is now healed). In one six-game stretch, he averaged 15.0 points, 4.8 rebounds and 4.7 assists. He shot 46.0 percent from the field and 68.6 percent from the line.

He previously played two years at Illinois State, averaging 7.7 points, 3.9 rebounds and 3.1 assists as a sophomore. That included a career-high 24 points against Drake.

Still, Hill wanted a shot at the NCAA tourney, something he'd never experienced as a player. When he visited Purdue, with Davis as his host, he saw that opportunity, and more.

"I'm not too much into individual accolades, but I wanted to go to the tournament. Ray was like, 'That's cool and all, but we're trying to get to the Final Four.' Just hearing that, seeing how real that possibility is, got me even more interested in Purdue. That was why I decided to come here."

Hill was an all-state high school player from the Chicago area, which meant he knew about Boiler tradition although he wasn't recruited by them ("I committed to Illinois State pretty early").

"When you think of Purdue basketball, you think of the work ethic and the way they play," he says. "They've got, 'Play Hard,' on their shorts for a reason. It's a blue-collar school, and I like that."

Unlike Octeus, who had never played much point guard until coming to Purdue, Hill has played the point all his life. The opportunity to play with big men Hammons, Isaac Haas and Caleb Swanigan, along with sharpshooters such as Kendall Stephens, Dakota Mathias and Ryan Cline, plus all-around threats Rapheal Davis and Vince Edwards, has Hill pumped as never before.

"It's amazing. You've got to realize those guys (Hammons, Swanigan and Haas) will demand a lot of attention. Getting the ball in there and playing off them will be great because you have to guard them.

"From an offensive standpoint, I'm definitely throwing the ball inside. I don't think it will be too tough playing off them. I had a few bigs who were talented, but none that demanded the kind of attention these guys will. Being here in the summer helped me with that."

The summer also helped Hill adjust to Purdue's more motion-oriented attack.

"At Texas-Arlington, there was a lot of pick and roll. The same with Illinois State. So I became familiar with that. That was my bread and butter. But here it's a lot more motion, emphasizing moving without the ball. It is an adjustment, but I've been playing basketball for a long time. It won't be anything I can't handle."

Because this is Purdue, Hill's defense will ultimately decide his playing time. He says he's fine with that.

"I like playing defense I like taking challenges on guarding guys who are very good. When I have that opportunity to do so, I want to take advantage of it.

"I think my ability to play will feed off the defense I provide. Being here with the coaches, learning the principles and terminology, helped me a lot. I'll be able to take on the role like Rapheal a little bit as far as being a defensive stopper and trying to shut people down if I can."

But that's just a means to a hoped-for championship end.

"To have this opportunity in my last season is very special," Hill says. "When you realize this is your last year, you have a sense of urgency, but the best thing is, I'm not the only one with that urgency. A.J. is a senior. Ray is a senior. Those guys are just as hungry as I am. Even the younger guys want to do something special.

"I can't wait to get started."

# ***Purdue's Rapheal Davis boosts serious expectations***

**Pete DiPrimio | Fort Wayne News-Sentinel | August 28, 2015**

When it comes to basketball, Rapheal Davis is one serious dude. He's not at Purdue to mess around and blow what looms as the kind of season the Boilers have waited generations for.

"This is what you dream about growing up, to go to a great school, to go to be a big school, to play in the best conference in the country and win a championship, win multiple championships in a year," the senior guard says. "We have the chance to do that. We have the team to do it. We can win as many games as we want to win. We have the work ethic. We have the culture to do it."

Davis, a former South Side standout, doesn't flinch from expectations. He embraces them, encourages them, inflames them because no one finds greatness without daring greatly.

And with four starters back from a NCAA tourney team, plus the addition of some key newcomers -- including former Homestead standout and Indiana Mr. Basketball Caleb Swanigan -- you'd better believe the Boilers dare.

"We're looking forward to winning a lot of games and winning championships," Davis says. "The goal is to win the Big Ten championship, the Big Ten tourney championship, get to the NCAA Tournament, get to the Final Four and win the (national) championship. We have high goals this year. High expectations."

He pauses, recognizing that, in late August, such talk is easy.

"Everybody in the country right now has high expectations. Every team in the Big Ten thinks they can win it. You don't need to talk about it. You need to work and go do it."

Of course, Davis is talking about it, and this doesn't bother coach Matt Painter even though Purdue hasn't reached the Final Four since 1980 because Davis sets a work standard few players can match. He did it his first two seasons, and if on-court reward rarely came, then he just worked harder.

Now, he is the reigning Big Ten defensive player of the year who has willed himself into a double-figure scorer. Perhaps most importantly, he is a difference-making leader, as much by example as by word, and he does not shy away from speaking his mind.

"The guys hear my voice a lot, but you have to lead by work as well. It's not just telling them what to do and not doing things right myself. It's all about setting an example on and off the floor. That's what I've been trying to do. Get guys to be professional on and off the court. You have to take care of your business on and off the court. Off the court will bleed into on the court, and visa versa."

There are a lot of programs around the country, and even a prominent one in the state, that could use this kind of veteran, and it's true even if Davis never scores a point or grabs a rebound.

He'll do plenty of both, of course.

Last season Davis set career highs in scoring (10.7), rebounding (4.4), steals (28) and three-point shooting (18 made) while becoming a defensive game changer. Almost everyone he guarded scored fewer than his average, some dramatically so.

Davis isn't backing off. He wants a second straight Big Ten defensive honor and is fully aware that teammate A.J. Hammons, the conference's best shot blocker, is gearing up to beat him out.

"A.J. told me he came back (for his senior season rather than jump to the NBA) to win that award," Davis says. "You can take that for what it's worth."

"He's a great defender. He helped me a lot last year. We complement each other really well. I know he's going to go for it. I'm going to go for it. It's going to make us one of the best defensive teams in the country." To ensure his defense doesn't slip, Davis says, "I watch a lot of film. I keep working at it."

"You keep working hard and don't get complacent. I don't feel like I'm going to win it again just because I already have or who I am. That's why I've put so much time in the gym getting quicker and stronger."

Davis was one of three Boilers -- the others were Kendall Stephens and Jon McKeeman -- who stayed on campus in May. His focus was improving his all-around skills to make himself a "complete guard." At times he will bring the ball up the court, especially after getting a defensive rebound, and worked on "getting quicker, ball handling, changing direction."

It does not mean he'll play much point guard. Sophomore P.J. Thompson and fifth-year senior transfer Johnny Hill are set to get most of those minutes.

"Between Johnny and P.J.," Davis says, "we're pretty secure at that position."

Purdue is secure at every position, which is why it rates as a Big Ten title contender, and more. It opens its season Nov. 13 against North Carolina A&T, and begins conference play Dec. 29 at defending Big Ten champ Wisconsin. The Boilers player rival Indiana just once -- Feb. 20 at Assembly Hall.

"We have to play hard, play defense and go at people," Davis says. "If we do that, our offense will take care of itself. That's the key to victory right there."

"I tell our guys to worry about ourselves. If we take care of our business, we'll be fine."

# ***Davis goal is simple – put Purdue back on national map***

**Pete DiPrimio | Fort Wayne News-Sentinel | June 24, 2015**

Rapheal Davis could have rested on his accomplishments, but that's not his nature.

He could have talked big and worked small, but that's not the way he operates.

Davis aims for a Purdue basketball season like no other, and if that seems excessive for those who dwell on the fact the Boilers haven't reached the Final Four since 1980, well, the senior guard has no time for those who don't dream big.

"We want to get Purdue's name back on the national market," he says. "We want to get Purdue back to where it should be, where it was when E'twaun (Moore) and Robbie (Hummel) and JaJuan (Johnson) were here, and even before that. Getting people excited about basketball is going to be fun."

It's also going to be work, and few Boilers embrace that as well as this former South Side standout, who is fueled by the memory of 2014's Big Ten last place finish, the consequence of a season-ending six-game losing streak, as well as a loaded roster boosted by the addition of Indiana Mr. Basketball and former Homestead standout Caleb Swanigan.

This past season's third-place Big Ten finish can't dull that hurt.

"We can't go into the season thinking we're going to be good just because we have a good roster," Davis says. "We have to work even harder than when we finished in last place. That has to be our motivation.

"My sophomore year we were last. That's something I'll never forget. I've told the guys, before I leave, I want to win a Big Ten championship and do bigger things than that. We have to take it one step at a time, one day at a time, one workout at a time."

Davis could have gone home to Fort Wayne for a May break after spring semester finals, but instead he stayed at Purdue to work at an internship with the John Purdue Club (his role mainly involves season ticket sales), take classes and, yes, work on his game.

"I get bored when I have time off," he says. "I'd rather stay in the gym and stay in the weight room and get better."

Davis was joined in May training sessions by teammates Kendall Stephens and John McKeeman (the former Carroll standout).

"It was the three of us working out every day," Davis says.

Davis has spent the off-season talking about Purdue's title prospects, which got a big boost when all-conference center A.J. Hammons passed on the NBA draft and returned for his senior season. The potential was part of Davis' sales pitch while helping in the recruitment of Swanigan (who is with the U.S. national U-19 team vying for a world championship in Greece) and senior transfer Johnny Hill.

And if it elevates already soaring expectations, coach Matt Painter is fine with that.

"The people who have spoken on that are the people who are working hard every day. If you have people talking about it, and not putting in the time, that's fool's gold. If you have someone like Rapheal Davis talking about it, even though he's never been able to do it, even though he's never gone to the last week of the season trying to win the Big Ten and never won a NCAA tourney game..."

"He's a guy who will work hard today, and do everything he can to win tomorrow." Davis thrives because he pushes past the competition. He arrived in West Lafayette with good, but not superstar, credentials. He worked and worked and for a couple of seasons, didn't reap the reward.

Then last season, especially once Big Ten play kicked in, Davis played like a star. He was the Big Ten defensive player of the year and shot 38.2 percent from three-point range in conference play, 10 percent higher than his career average. His conference numbers of 12.2 points, 5.3 rebounds and 3.0 assists were by far the best of his career.

He's looking for more in his college finale. So are teammates such as sophomore forward Vince Edwards (who just missed making the U-19 team), Stephens, Dakota Mathias and Isaac Haas.

"I think Ray has done a good job of working on his game and showing that intestinal fortitude about his place in Purdue basketball," Painter says. "He's a good leader. He works on his game. He spends time. He does those things you have to do.

"He'll put in time every day. I don't care if it's May, June, July, whenever, he works. That's what he does.

"If somebody else wants to play a lot, then work harder than he does. If you do, I bet it works out for you."

# Purdue's Painter: Swanigan can make 'immediate impact'

Pete DiPrimio | Fort Wayne News-Sentinel | May 22, 2015

Purdue coach Matt Painter's spring to remember came from a sales pitch few college basketball teams could match:

Difference-making size matters.

It landed Purdue elite power forward Caleb Swanigan and, if you believe the hype and optimism, it will deliver a championship such as the Boilers have never had.

"He profiled as a 4 (power forward) for us," Painter said. "Not everybody has the size we do. We tried to sell that in the recruiting process. A lot of teams don't have two 7-footers."

Purdue already had an imposing frontcourt before Swanigan committed with returning centers A.J. Hammons and Isaac Haas. The 7-foot Hammons ranks among the best shot blockers in Big Ten history. The 7-2 Haas has a huge upside.

Now, with Swanigan, possibilities seem endless.

"Obviously getting Caleb, a guy with his kind of ability and talent, who can make an immediate impact, was huge for us," Painter said.

The veteran coach was in Fort Wayne Thursday as part of Purdue's annual caravan. As sun poured through the windows at the Fort Wayne Country Club, Painter got his first opportunity to detail what landing the 6-8, 260-pound Swanigan, a prep All-America and Indiana Mr. Basketball rated No. 15 nationally in the Class of 2015, could mean.

"I approach it in what he brings to the table. He's a great player. He's physically ready. A lot of times you'll get good players, but they might not be physically ready to do it. He's physically ready to impact from a rebound standpoint, and from an overall production standpoint -- scoring, defending, rebounding.

"He's an intelligent player, an unselfish guy and he has all the qualities to be a special player in the Big Ten."

Swanigan, whose nickname is "Biggie," was a double-double force of nature while leading Homestead to the state Class 4A state championship in March. But his skills go beyond that, Painter said, especially when combined with Hammons and Haas.

"Biggie doesn't get enough credit for his passing and decision making, his ability to make the right decision.

"We'll need him to score. That forces the defense to make decisions and that helps Haas and Hammons.

"His perimeter game has developed. He can knock down shots. He can put the ball on the floor. He can dribble and pass. He has a pull-up. He can face up.

"That's not something that's been used a great deal, nor should it have been because he's so good on the block and in the mid post. You want to make sure he gets his touches there also.

"He'll be able to do a lot of different things, but you can never get away from him getting the ball in the low post, especially against the second-biggest guy on the court."

Swanigan's size and versatility should make life easier for Hammons and Haas, who battled often brutal double and triple teams last season.

"It makes the decision making easier for those guys," Painter said, "because now defenses will have to pay such attention to Biggie. People like to double big to big; they like to use the biggest guy to clog up the lane.

"When you have a power forward who can play on the perimeter, play in the post, play out of the mid and low post, a guy who we can get the ball to in a lot of situations, and he's such a good passer, it's going to make the defense vulnerable."

Landing Swanigan, who has signed a Big Ten tender, but not a national letter of intent, demonstrated Painter can recruit with the best (he beat out Kentucky's John Calipari and Michigan State's Tom Izzo), and could have a major boost in future recruiting. Swanigan is the Boilers' highest-rated recruit since Glenn Robinson signed in the early 1990s.

"You'd like to hope so," Painter said. "When they got Glenn Robinson, they didn't turn around and keep getting (elite players). Now, they got Mike Robinson (in 1996), but they weren't able to get another All-American after that, and they still had some really good teams.

"Some programs have proven you can be really successful and not sign elite guys. If you can get one of them, you can make a huge difference. It should help your exposure and your success, and with that it helps recruiting."

Swanigan had originally committed to Michigan State in early April. By Big Ten rule, conference teams couldn't recruit him anymore, but Painter said he started hearing that the commitment wasn't firm.

"You hear everybody talking that when he didn't sign, that it might not be final. You have to wait it out. If he signs with Michigan State, you've got to compete against him. If he doesn't, you make the call and try to get involved and see where you stand. We were fortunate to get him."

Swanigan's switch to Purdue generated speculation about the role of Roosevelt Barnes. He's Swanigan's mentor and a former Boilermaker standout athlete. Painter downplayed the significance.

"Our opportunity was what sold them. Having both of those 7 footers helped us so he can play the power forward position. That's how we'll play him."

Getting Swanigan and 5th-year senior transfer point guard Johnny Hill out of Texas-Arlington in the last couple of weeks has energized the players even more.

"We're really pumped," guard Rapheal Davis said. "Johnny just came to my house this week. He's really excited to get going. He was excited enough to drive all the way from Chicago on a random day just to hang out.

"I talked to Biggie. He's excited. He's really going to help us.

"Getting two players like that is big for us, but it's bigger than us. It's big for the university and the fans."

Vegas odds makers now have Purdue, which returns four starters from a NCAA tourney team, as a 33 to 1 shot to win the national title. Before Swanigan, it was a 100 to 1 shot.

For the record, Maryland is the overall favorite at 9 to 1. Indiana was at 25 to 1.

No matter. Painter pushed for perspective.

"You have bigger goals anytime you sign someone of (Swanigan's) stature and return a lot of guys from a NCAA tourney team. Kids will talk. That's what their goals are. There's nothing wrong with that. That's what your goals are as a coach.

"But your job as a coach is to manage those expectations. It starts with working hard today. Try to win the day and don't get past what we need to do today. Keep pushing that envelope with your players.

"Yes, it's fun. There's a lot of enthusiasm and energy. After that, let's get to work and get better today."



# **Purdue's Rapheal Davis has a lot to play for**

**Pete DiPrimio | Fort Wayne News-Sentinel | May 7, 2015**

Of course Rapheal Davis has NBA thoughts. Doesn't every Big Ten player, especially ones who win Big Ten defensive player of the year honors, as the Purdue guard did this past season?

Davis has joked that he was set to skip his senior season and enter the NBA draft, which would be as silly as the New England Patriots' atmospheric-pressure-caused-Deflategate excuse.

In truth, the former South Side standout knows he's not ready, just as he knows the responsibility of fatherhood. His 1-year-old daughter Kyndal, whose adorable photos dominate his Instagram account, is a motivator and source of inspiration.

"(Playing professionally) is always a goal," he says. "I know what I'm playing for. I have a daughter I'm playing for. I want to set myself up to take care of her when I leave.

"I'll put everything on the line, play as hard as I can and hopefully catch some eyes."

Davis has already caught plenty of eyes. His Big Ten defensive player of the year award capped a season full of career highs, from scoring (10.7) to rebounding (4.4) to assists (8.8) to steals (2.8). His 18 three-pointers were one less than his combined total from his first two seasons.

If these numbers don't impress as NBA material, see what another year of preparation will do.

A top-100 prospect out of high school, Davis embraces the four-year college plan that was once the rule for even superstars. He has improved each season, hard work generating rewards gradually rather than spectacularly.

His career averages of 7.5 points (751 points for his career) and 4.0 rebounds (399 total) do not wow. While his career field goal percentage of 45.6 percent is good for a guard, the 29.4 percent shooting from three-point range needs work.

But he was a much better three-point shooter in Big Ten play this season (13-for-34, 38.2 percent) than the non-conference (2-for-14, 14.3 percent), which suggests he'll be a perimeter force from now on.

"In the non-conference I got down on myself when the shots weren't going in. It's about having confidence in yourself. You get that by being in the gym all day, getting up 500 shots a day to prepare yourself."

Davis has never shied away from doing beyond what's expected, and is not about to start now.

"I want to become a complete guard, be an all-around player. I want to be able to play the 1, 2 or 3 (point guard, shooting guard, small forward), all of it. I want to play defense as well as I can, rebound as well as I can, pass as well as I can, shoot as well as I can.

"To not have any weaknesses, whether it's shooting or driving or guarding every position on the floor. Be the best I can be and not have any type of label."

Coach Matt Painter is still looking for a game-changing point guard via a fifth-year transfer in the mold of Jon Octeus (No. 1 target -- Texas Arlington's Johnny Hill; Illinois is main competition). P.J. Thompson is the only point guard on the roster, although incoming freshman Grant Weatherford will join him this summer.

Could Davis fill that role?

"Coach can put me in any position and I'll do the best I can, but point guard is not a focus for me. We have P.J. He's a great point guard and a great leader. I'm not saying I'm trying to play the point, but if I had to, I could."

Davis wants to join the ranks of two-time Big Ten defensive player of the year winners, although teammate A.J. Hammons, the Big Ten's best rim protector, will have a big say in that. Davis understands that opposing players will challenge him as never before.

"The award gives guys a reason to attack you even more," he says. "They want to say they got 20 or 30 on you.

"I don't want anybody walking out of here saying they got the best of me, so I've got to work as hard as I can and focus."

Davis' focus and leadership are among the many things Painter likes about him. He has said Davis is as good a leader as he's ever had.

That leadership surfaced during spring workouts. The Boilers had one especially grueling outside day when they combined 40-pound sand bags with the notoriously steep on-campus Slater Hill. They ran up the hill. They did lunges up the hill. They did situps on the hill, and then ran down it, which in some ways was more grueling than going up.

"We've been on Slater Hill before," Davis says, "but not with the sand bags. It was pretty intense. It took us back to (last summer's) workouts with the Navy Seals. It was tough. We had to stick together. That got us through it."

The goal is clear. With Hammons coming back, with talent such as Davis, Vince Edwards, Isaac Haas, Dakota Mathias, Kendall Stephens and more (including Indiana All-Star Ryan Cline of Carmel), the Boilers rate with Maryland, Indiana, Michigan State, Wisconsin and Michigan in what looms as another brutal race for a Big Ten championship.

Davis wouldn't want it any other way.

"Winning a Big Ten title is what you play for. I haven't competed for one yet. I want to do that before I get out of here."

This past season Purdue was a surprise third-place Big Ten finisher after its last place showing from the previous year. The Boilers' surprise days are over.

"Last year we went into it trying to hunt for others," Davis says. "This season teams will hunt for us. We have high expectations, and people will want to knock us down and show we're not what we think we are.

"We're working out as though we came in last in the Big Ten again. It's tougher than last year. We have the right group of guys. We'd rather be in the gym than outside jumping around. When you have that, when you have great teammates and good chemistry, there's no telling what you can do."

Davis is proof of that.