

# Even with brief jolt of terror, Purdue looks terrifying

Gregg Doyel / Indianapolis Star / March 19, 2017

We could focus on the collapse. Sure we could. Purdue led Iowa State by 19 points and then Purdue trailed by two, all of that happening in the second half, and what kind of team blows — OK, almost blows — a lead like that?

We could go there. But if you ask me, that would be missing the bigger point of this (briefly) knee-knocking 80-76 victory against Iowa State on Saturday in the NCAA tournament. And the bigger point is that for the first 25 minutes, and then again in the final 3 minutes, this Purdue team was terrifying, the kind of team that better pack some scissors this week for Kansas City, just in case the Midwest Regional ends with Purdue players on a ladder near a net.

Terrifying, I tell you. Before the collapse, which matters and we'll get to it in a minute, this was the stuff of a Purdue fan's dreams — and everyone else's nightmares.

Biggie Swanigan was having a typical day for him, which is another way of saying it was one of the best stat lines produced by a Big Ten player this season: 20 points, 12 rebounds, seven assists. He scored inside, he hit a trio of 3-pointers, he had the game-winning offensive rebound. Typical.

Vincent Edwards had what is becoming a more and more common day for him in recent weeks, this eventual NBA small forward nearly matching Swanigan with 21 points, 10 rebounds and four assists.

Isaac Haas was unstoppable in 15 minutes, scoring 14 points on 6-for-8 shooting. What happened to Iowa State is what will happen to most teams if Haas gets an officiating crew like the one he got Saturday, a Ted Valentine-led crew that didn't punish Haas for daring to be 7-2, 290 pounds. He got the ball near the rim, turned and shot and scored. Over and over.

Terrifying, that Purdue frontcourt.

The Boilermakers were destroying a really good Iowa State team — the Cyclones won this season at eventual No. 1 seed Kansas and also beat No. 3 seed Baylor and No. 4 seed West Virginia — and they were doing it without shooting all that well from distance. Take away Biggie's 3-for-6 day, and the rest of the Boilermakers were 5-for-19 on 3-pointers.

And they led 58-39 after 25 minutes. To get that exact lead, Dakota Mathias was dribbling from the key to the right side of the floor when Edwards cut from the corner to the rim. In one motion, Mathias one-handed a bounce pass to Edwards for a dunk.

And then, yeah, you know. The collapse. Part of that was on Purdue, but most of it was Iowa State finally enjoying a few minutes of hot shooting, drilling a trio of 3-pointers in 4 minutes and getting an All-American stretch from All-American point guard Monte Morris. He had nine points and four rebounds as Iowa State unleashed a 34-13 barrage that turned a 58-39 deficit with 14:23 left into a 73-71 lead with 3:11 to play.

Part of that was an unusual player for Iowa State, not unusual like Isaac Haas — a one-in-a-million giant, even in a game played by tall people — but unusual like Notre Dame's smallish center Bonzie Colson. At Iowa State his name is Deonte Burton and he's a 6-5, 250-pound linebacker, listed as a guard but playing center against Purdue. That was Iowa State coach Steve Prohm, acknowledging he couldn't stop Swanigan or Haas, but asking a question in return:

Can you stop Deonte Burton?

And the answer, for the 4 minutes when the collapse was concluded, was: no. Purdue can't stop Deonte Burton. He scored 11 points in 4 minutes, dunking monastically on Swanigan and beating him to the rim for another bucket and then taking him outside for a 3-pointer.

"We were playing for our lives," Burton said.

And Purdue's season was dying, right before our eyes. Up 19, down two. What in the world was happening? The NCAA tournament was happening.

"I just kept trying to tell the guys: Everybody makes a run," Edwards said. "It's March, it's Madness. It happens. We got to be able to withstand it."

A fraudulent team falls apart. A fraudulent team — riding the wave of good fortune to a 19-point lead before having it fall apart as an overwhelmingly pro-Iowa State crowd becomes deafening — packs its bags and goes home. We gave it a good run, right?

A great team, the kind of team I've been telling you all year that Purdue has — sorry; only a fraudulent columnist gloats when he's finally right — responds to having some of its teeth punched out by smiling crazily and wading in for more. Iowa State led 73-71 with 3 minutes left. Iowa State fans were delirious.

Purdue waded in for more.

The biggest shot was hit by the deliciously low-key P.J. Thompson, a 3-pointer that immediately regained the lead for Purdue at 74-73. Then Swanigan scored. Swanigan had a steal. Ryan Cline had a steal. Vincent Edwards scored and it's 78-73 with less than a minute to go. All Purdue needs now is a knockout punch, and there it is: Swanigan jumping between two Iowa State players to tap an offensive rebound to himself, then passing it to Thompson, who hits two free throws for the final margin.

When it was over and Boilers coach Matt Painter and three of his players were sitting at the podium for the postgame news conference, someone was asking Swanigan about winning this game and advancing where the program hadn't been in years: to the Sweet 16.

Swanigan didn't smile. I'm not sure he ever smiles.

"I'm excited," he said, sounding not excited at all. "I'm ready to get back to campus and get to work and watch the game (Sunday), Kansas-Michigan State, and see who is left."

Painter is watching, and he's listening, and he can't believe Biggie. The guy's going to the Sweet 16. He sounds bored.

"That's great," Painter said, lobbing some sarcasm at Swanigan. "That's all we get? That's beautiful."

That's all you get, coach. Biggie knows. This team is special. There's another trip to take. Another game this week, maybe two. Pack for four days in Kansas City. And don't forget the scissors.

# Dakota Mathias' dark days as a freshman helped shape him

Brian Neubert / GoldandBlack.com / March 18, 2017

Today, Dakota Mathias is bright-eyed and razor sharp, brimming with confidence, a player who might think the game even better than he plays it and he's played it pretty damn well all season, an outstanding offensive player for Purdue who's improbably made himself just as valuable at the opposite end of the floor.

He's become the player he wanted so badly to be when he arrived in West Lafayette in 2014, the player he figured he'd be from the outset of his college career, his assumption being that he was advanced enough mentally to hold an advantage and that his preparation would set him apart. It was going to be a far smoother transition for him to a higher level of basketball than it would be for most others, he believed.

A player who'd show up at Purdue's practices with a notebook in hand while still in high school believed that immediate success was his birthright of sorts at the college level, because he was going to be prepared for it.

It didn't come, mostly for reasons outside his control. Mathias couldn't stay healthy. He rolled both his ankles in preseason practice, one, then the other. Previously, he'd gotten sick in the summer. The actual condition was never officially pinned down, but Mathias calls it mono. The mono, he believes, spawned a case of vertigo.

Vertigo.

For a basketball player.

For a jump-shooter.

Obviously, that is not ideal.

It was a testament to Mathias' value to his team that he played through his freshman season — his passing and offensive savvy were transformative elements for the team that returned Purdue to the NCAA Tournament — that he got on the court at all.

"I don't know how he played," team trainer Chad Young said.

But he was a mess.

"I remember — he was just out of it all the time," teammate and classmate P.J. Thompson said. "I knew he was a really good player because I played against him in AAU and he was pretty freaking good. When he got here, you just knew it wasn't him. He was always out of it and didn't talk much. Or if he did talk, he didn't remember it because he was all dizzy."

Thompson said he remembers conversing with a disengaged, glossy-eyed Mathias back then.

"You'd be talking to him and thinking you were having a conversation and he'd be like, 'Huh?'" Thompson said. "You're like, 'I was just talking to you for like 30 seconds straight.'"

"He was pretty messed up."

As classmate Vincent Edwards put it, "Dakota fought a lot of battles our freshman year."

Mathias remembers being fatigued and dizzy, wobbly on the floor and foggy off of it.

"There were times (coaches) were probably talking to me and I wasn't hearing them," Mathias remembers now. "I was just trying to not fall."

The player was not well, but his physical condition parlayed itself into affecting his mental well-being, his ambition coming to Purdue turned into a powder-keg as he struggled physically. All those mental advantages Mathias figured he'd enjoy didn't matter, because his body couldn't hold up its end of the bargain.

"That was definitely one of the hardest parts of my life," Mathias says now. "I put a lot of pressure on myself coming in and didn't deal well with some of the illnesses and injuries I had. That's not an excuse, but it was more of a maturity thing. Looking back, I wish I'd have handled it a little differently. It made me a stronger person and made me deal with adversity a little sooner than I thought."

Mathias admits that he allowed his health issues to affect his mind, and affect his life.

"I just wasn't as happy as a person as I normally would be and as I am now," he said. "I wasn't happy, I wasn't healthy and I wasn't playing like I knew I could."

Mathias kept playing, though — and, somehow, playing well by most standards other than his own — but Purdue started pulling him out of practices at times.

"He was supposed to be sitting out, but he'd be trying to get back in drills anyway," Thompson said. "Coach (Matt) Painter and Chad had to force him out."

After games, Mathias would text message coaches about his play, looking for constant answers to the big-picture question of, "Am I doing OK?"

It was as if a player of "ultimate confidence" — as assistant coach Greg Gary, who recruited Mathias and was largely his sounding board in those days, called it — had turned into the opposite.

"He's such a perfectionist," Gary said. "He eats, sleeps, lives basketball and has always putt in work to where it's benefited him. As a freshman, it was hard for him to accept not succeeding."

"As much as he wants to be successful, when someone's built that way and it doesn't happen right away, it's an adjustment period."

Now, Mathias looks back at his trying freshman year at Purdue as part of what's made him what he is today. He can even laugh about it now.

It's made him a better player, he says. But it's also provided him some added clarity.

"It's made me want to work even harder, study film more, but also just relax and enjoy it," Mathias said. "It's, 'This is what I've worked for, what I've worked my ass off for. I need to have fun and embrace it.'"

# Think Big

David Cassilo / SLAM Magazine / March 13, 2017

"Where's Biggie?"

Roosevelt Barnes waited anxiously at the airport. It was 2011, and his life was in flux. Barnes was just recently divorced, his kids were grown and he was about to be a father again—to a 6-2, 360-pound son. But despite Biggie's size, he couldn't be found.

It was all set up just a few weeks prior. Carl Swanigan Jr, a former AAU player of Barnes', called to ask if he would take care of his 14-year-old brother Caleb—aka Biggie. By that point, Caleb, his mother and his siblings had bounced around from Indiana to Utah, living in homeless shelters, all while their father, Carl Sr, was addicted to crack cocaine and in and out of jail.

Carl Jr was himself once a basketball stand-out and Ole Miss commit but dropped out of high school and later lost his right eye in a shooting. He knew his brother needed a change, and he hoped Barnes could help.

"I told him if he comes out here, I have to adopt him," Barnes remembers. "I'm going to raise him like my own child."

Barnes, though, still didn't know what to expect. Outside of a brief phone conversation, he hadn't seen or heard from Caleb since he was 6 years old. And when the plane landed, he couldn't spot his hard-to-miss new family member, who was collecting his own thoughts.

"The biggest thing I remember was being afraid about my future," Caleb says. "I wasn't really sure what was going to happen."

Then Biggie emerged. He wasn't the Caleb Swanigan that the country knows now. He wasn't the Purdue sophomore big man and double-double machine who might just be one of college basketball's best players. He was a heavy eighth-grader with his head down, wearing khaki pants, a blue shirt and even a tie.

"Wow, he has on a tie," Barnes thought.

"He decided to put that on because he wanted to make a good first impression," Carl Jr explains.

That was it for Barnes. He had found a new purpose. He thought to himself, "OK, Biggie. You got me."

Barnes took his new son to their home in Fort Wayne, IN, set him up in his room and laid down the ground rules—keep your room clean, get good grades and go to church. To the last point, he made sure Biggie knew who Caleb was in the Bible.

"Everybody talks about Moses, but Caleb actually made it to the Promised Land," says Barnes. "I was telling him that he was special from the very beginning. Your mother and father never planned on having you. You're here for a reason. Whatever that reason is, you have to fulfill that destiny."

With those rules in place, the two could focus on the task at hand—getting Biggie in shape and making him a basketball player. The latter was the easy part, with one exception. Biggie loved basketball so much that he couldn't focus on much else. So during his eighth grade season, his grades slipped. With his squad undefeated, Barnes pulled him off the team.

"He hated it, but the way he responded was that he never got bad grades again," Barnes said.

Losing weight was the tough part. Barnes stripped his house of junk food, set a new diet for his son and had to stay on top of him at all times, which proved to be an impossible task. As a sports agent, he was on the road a lot. That's when the relapses would happen. When Barnes returned, he'd find pizza boxes in the attic and candy wrappers under the bed.

"I knew I needed to lose weight because I was very self-aware," Biggie admits. "I just didn't know how to."

It wasn't until 2013 when things changed. That's when Caleb's biological father died. Carl Sr was 50 years old, nearly 500 pounds and suffered from diabetes. Shortly after his death, Biggie had a message for Barnes.

"One day we were talking and he said he never wanted to be fat again for the rest of his life," Barnes recalls.

Now strictly following Barnes' diet and workout regimen, Biggie's game and body transformed. He led his high school to its first-ever state title, won Indiana's Mr. Basketball and became a McDonald's All-American. Completely transformed, he now stands at 6-9 and just 250 pounds, leading the Midwest Regional's No. 4-seeded Boilermakers—who will face No. 13 seed Vermont at 7:27 p.m. on Thursday in the opening round of the 2017 NCAA Tournament—with 18.5 ppg and 12.6 rpg and putting his name in contention for POY.

When it was time to choose a college, Biggie eventually opted for nearby Purdue over schools like Michigan State (where he initially committed) and Duke. It was a chance for stability—and it's also where his adoptive father played hoops.

"With all the living conditions and situations [Caleb's] been through, they should be coming in to give Roosevelt Barnes a medal," says Purdue head coach Matt Painter.

But Barnes says this is where people always get the story wrong. His relationship with Biggie isn't about one person saving another. It's about two people saving each other.

"I gave him a focus and something outside of work," Biggie says. "He was going through a divorce right when I came and it helped him transition back into being single. Our relationship became his most important thing."

That's why Barnes' proudest moment wasn't when Biggie committed to his alma mater. It's when Biggie, who almost always calls him "Ro," called him "Dad."

"I don't think he meant for me to hear it, but I heard him say it," Barnes says. "It made me know that he felt that way about me."

Read more at <http://www.slamonline.com/college-hs/college/caleb-swanigan-interview-purdue-march-madness/#88vF3oi4LsMM97Us.99>

# 'Biggie' possibilities has Purdue on the verge

Gregg Doyel / Indy Star / February 18, 2017

He's studying the stat sheet, and he's scowling.

Purdue sophomore Caleb "Biggie" Swanigan is on the court Saturday at Mackey Arena, where No. 16 Purdue has just demolished Michigan State 80-63. Biggie led both teams in points, rebounds and assists. He posted his 23rd double-double of the season, which isn't just the most by any player in America. It's more than all but five NCAA teams.

He's waiting under one basket to be interviewed by the Big Ten Network. Looking at the stat sheet.

Scowling.

So I'm asking Swanigan a few minutes later: What's not to like?

"Team rebounds," he says, noting that Michigan State edged Purdue, 32-31.

See anything you did like?

"Turnovers," he says, and forgive him for getting the word wrong there. He didn't have turnovers, plural. He had turnover. One. As in, four less than he had this past week against Indiana. Six less than he had a month ago, the last time Purdue played Michigan State. Seven less than he had in a single game against Wisconsin. And against Cleveland State.

Swanigan is so good this season, so dominant, the only person who can stop him is ... him.

"Look at his gaudy numbers," Purdue coach Matt Painter was saying after this game, "and the best one is the one turnover. When he's getting the ball a lot and not turning the ball over, it's good for us."

Gross understatement right there, but let's give Painter another chance.

"When he keeps things simple and just takes what the defense gives him," Painter said, "they're kind of at his mercy right now."

Indeed, Michigan State had no chance against Swanigan, who put up 24 points, 15 rebounds and five assists. He was 7-of-12 from the floor, 9-of-10 from the line. He took one 3-pointer. He made it.

On the one hand, Michigan State was trying to defend the 6-9, 250-pound Swanigan – and 7-2, 290-pound junior Isaac Haas – with a collection of walk-ons and forwards, and in some cases, with walk-on forwards. And that was before the Spartans' best two big men, 6-8 Nick Ward and 6-6 Kenny Goins, fouled out.

On the other hand, Swanigan does this to everybody. Again, this was his 23rd double-double of the season, and his ninth in a row – three short of the Big Ten record. Swanigan does this sort of thing to Indiana's 6-10 Thomas Bryant and 6-10 De'Ron Davis (16 points, 14 rebounds). He does it to Maryland's 6-11 Damonte Dodd and 7-1 Michal Cekovsky (26 points, 10 rebounds). He does it to Minnesota's 6-10 Reggie Lynch and 6-11 Bakary Konate (28 point, 22 rebounds). He does it to ...

Everybody.

Which is why Swanigan is the no-brainer Big Ten Player of the Year, and among the leading candidates for national Player of the Year. CBSsports.com has Swanigan as the frontrunner. The NCAA's own website lists Swanigan among four players (joining guards Frank Mason of Kansas, Josh Hart of Villanova and Lonzo Ball of UCLA) in a "race too close to call."

Painter doesn't want to lobby for his guy. He'd rather stay above the fray. Kidding! He wants Biggie to win it, and is pretty sure he should.

"There's a lot of guys out there that are really good players," Painter says. "I'm not saying Biggie's the best player in the country. But he is playing the best. That's what it's all about. No one's putting up numbers like him, and no one's consistent like him."

"I'm obviously biased. But when you look at the numbers and production, it's been pretty special."

Swanigan has stayed consistent because he's not satisfied with anything he's accomplished yet, and more to the point, because he doesn't think he has accomplished anything yet. A few weeks ago he told me his individual goal is a 30-30 game — 30 points and 30 rebounds — and on Saturday he was saying his primary goal has nothing to do with points or rebounds or individual awards.

"Right now," he was saying, "we're just trying to get a Big Ten championship."

They're on the verge. After battering Michigan State on Saturday — leading by 11 in the first half and by 22 in the second — the Boilermakers broke a three-way tie for first place with Maryland and Wisconsin to claim sole possession at 11-3 in league play. Maryland and Wisconsin play on Sunday, meaning someone will join Purdue atop the league with four games left to play.

Whoever wins the regular-season title, an NCAA title is the big target — and Purdue has a shot. Did I just write Purdue is a favorite to win the national title? No, so don't go saying I did. But I am saying: Any list of teams with a legitimate shot at winning it all shouldn't be all that long, and can't be taken seriously if Purdue isn't on it.

Look, you know how March Madness is. Have a bad day on the wrong day, especially from the perimeter — Purdue's greatness is its balance of perimeter and interior scoring — and you're toast. But with four players ranked in the Big Ten's top 10 in 3-point accuracy (Dakota Mathias, second; Swanigan, second; Vincent Edwards, seventh; Ryan Cline, ninth), two others who must be taken seriously (P.J. Thompson and Carsen Edwards) and monster interior scorers like Swanigan (18.8 ppg) and Haas (13.4 ppg in 20.8 minutes), Purdue has more ways to win than just about anyone.

As Michigan State coach Tom Izzo was saying about the pick-your-poison problem posed by Purdue's inside-outside game: "It's six of one, half-dozen of another. That's a good basketball team."

Another gross understatement. Purdue's exceptional, and the Boilermakers are playing their best basketball as March approaches. They've won five in a row, mauling in that stretch NCAA tournament teams Michigan State and Northwestern at Mackey and going on the road to beat Maryland and Indiana.

Going forward, they will almost always have the best player on the floor.

And Biggie Swanigan is not satisfied.

# Swanigan & Purdue take a huge step towards a Big Ten title

Bob Kravitz / WTHR.com / February 18, 2017

Once Biggie Swanigan had his double-double, merely his 23rd this incredible season, he just started toying with people. Bodies were moved. Space was made. And Swanigan, one of the great comeback stories ever in these parts (or any parts, for that matter), went up, cleared the paint with his prodigious strength and corralled a rebound with one hand.

Watch this...

Yeah, Biggie, we're watching. And I'd imagine we've reached the point where the whole country is watching. See, Swanigan is one of the very top candidates – if not THE top candidate – to win Player of the Year honors, thus becoming the third Boilermaker to win the award along with John Wooden and Glenn Robinson. What he did Saturday – score 24 points, collect 15 rebounds and add a team-high five assists in an 80-63 victory over Michigan State – is what he's been doing to everybody all season long.

The rest of the country is taking note of something we've been witnessing all season. Here is a tweet from college basketball analyst Jay Bilas:

Purdue's Caleb Swanigan is my clubhouse leader for the Wooden Award. The most productive player in the country. No big man bias here.

We know already he will be the Big Ten player of the year. The question is whether he will earn the national player of the year, and right now, the race is deliciously close. There's Frank Mason of Kansas (20.2 ppg, 4.9 assists, 4.3 rebounds). There's Josh Hart of Villanova (18.7 ppg, 6.6 rebounds, 3.3 assists). There's UCLA's Lonzo Ball (15.4 ppg, 6.1 rebounds, 7.6 assists). Tell me, though, who is playing better and has been more productive all season long than Caleb Swanigan?

"There's a lot of guys that are really good players, and I'm not saying Biggie is the best player in the country, but he is playing the best and that's what it's about," Matt Painter said. "A lot of guys can really play, but no one is putting up numbers like he is and nobody is as consistent as him.

"I think you get punished a little bit when you're a big guy; I just do. I mean, look at the other candidates, all good players, but not a lot of big guys. Biggie is definitely the best big man in the country. I'm obviously biased. Like Josh Hart, he's great and if he gets it (the award), you understand, but look at (Swanigan's) numbers and production, it's special."

Generally speaking, I'm not a numbers guy, but Swanigan is producing numbers that seem downright fantastical.

He's averaging 18.9 points per game.

He's averaging 13.0 rebounds per game.

He's averaging 2.9 assists per game.

His field goal percentage is .543, his 3-point field goal percentage is .483 and he's .784 from the free-throw line.

Is there more? There is more. A lot more.

Only five teams nationally have more double-doubles than Swanigan has had this season.

Swanigan has four 20-point, 20-rebound games this year, a number that is double of all Big Ten players combined over the last 20 years.

If Swanigan maintains his current numbers, and there's no reason to think that he won't, he'll become the first player since the legendary Tim Duncan averaged these kinds of numbers in 1993-94.

One record falls after another after another, and during Saturday's thorough trashing of Michigan State, Swanigan surpassed Glenn Robinson and tied Joe Barry Carroll for most rebounds by a Purdue player in a single season. And there are still four more regular-season games left. Plus the Big Ten Tournament. And the NCAA Tournament.

Granted, Swanigan had big numbers against a Michigan State team that lacks height and bulk, and both of the Spartans' big men, Nick Ward and Kenny Goins, played limited minutes and ultimately fouled out. But he's done that to (ital)everybody.(endital) The Boilers front line was thoroughly dominant, Swanigan and Isaac Haas combining for 42 points and 20 rebounds, plus 15-of-23 shooting. What made that possible, though, was Purdue's ability to knock down 3-point shots; they made five in the early going, providing Tom Izzo and Michigan State with a pick-your-poison dilemma.

"I told Matt (Painter) this before the game, but I think they're not only playing the most consistent basketball in the Big Ten, but they're on of the most consistent teams in the country," Izzo said. "I think their defense is getting better. I didn't think they were playing Purdue style defense before, but in these last four, five games, they've started to ramp that up. To me, they're playing even harder. When Purdue gives up 40-some percent (shooting), that's an oddity, but these last few games, they're down in the 30's again.

"If you can defend like that, and the way they're shooting the ball... I like his team. They're a threat inside, they're a threat outside, and the way they're defending now..."

There is so much to like about this Purdue team, it's hard to know where to start. For the last few years, they've been heavy with post players and painfully lacking in perimeter shooters. Opponents could double the post without fear of getting lit up by the three-ball. This year, though, all that has changed. There's Dakota Mathias. There's Ryan Cline. There's the much-improved P.J. Thompson. The list goes on. There is no reason, none, why Purdue can't finish the job and win the Big Ten outright by winning their four remaining games. And there are no excuses, none, why this group can't make a long run in the NCAA Tournament, perhaps even to the Final Four.

I asked Painter if the Boilers, winners of five straight games, are playing their best basketball of the season right now.

He nodded.

"Especially defensively," he said.

This is a team going places, As for Swanigan, the Wooden Award would be pretty sweet. "But I'm more worried about winning the Big Ten regular season," he said. This team has the right stuff, and a guy named Biggie who is having an oversized season for the ages.

# Project Biggie: How Swanigan became the nation's top power forward

Luke Winn / Sports Illustrated / February 13, 2017

The six Swanigan children were all substantial, and they were nicknamed accordingly. First came Fat Cat (Carl Jr.), then Ice Cream (Corey), Fat and Sug (twins Crystal and Candance), Applehead Cut The Bull (Courtland) and, finally, Biggie (Caleb), the largest of Tanya Jackson Swanigan's babies at 24 inches, nine pounds and three ounces. He kept growing into his name, standing 6'2" and weighing 360 pounds by age 13, and now Biggie was listening to his new guardian, Roosevelt (Rose) Barnes, tell him something preposterously grandiose as they worked out on an indoor court in Fort Wayne, Ind., during the summer of 2011.

Biggie rolled his eyes. His vertical was a few inches, max, and if asked to run, all he could do was shuffle. But Barnes, a sports agent who played baseball, basketball and football at Purdue and then spent four seasons as a linebacker with the Lions, wanted Biggie to believe in his potential. So as they went through a progression of baby hooks, drop-steps and the like, Barnes instructed his protégé, "Say it back to me: I'm the best power forward in the world.

"Come on. Say it."

Reluctantly, Biggie gave in. Two weeks earlier Carl Jr. had persuaded him to fly from Salt Lake City to Fort Wayne to live with Barnes. The family had met Barnes in Indiana in 2003, after they'd fled Utah on a bus with Tanya, who was seeking refuge from their father, Carl Sr., in a domestic violence shelter. "What I endured was horrific," Tanya says, "and I did my best to keep our heads above water." But theirs was a nomadic existence among apartments and shelters in Utah and Indiana. Carl Jr. wanted Barnes to adopt Biggie, to give him stability and a shot at the NBA.

Biggie had emerged from the Fort Wayne airport that June carrying all his possessions in a single duffel bag, waddling toward Barnes's car in his one good outfit: a shirt, tie and khakis. He was a full two inches shorter and 100 pounds heavier than Fat Cat had described over the phone. After Biggie quickly became exhausted in their first workout, Barnes took him to a cardiologist to check if he had heart problems. Biggie passed all the stress tests, and this gave Barnes the assurance he needed to proceed: "He's not going to die."

That was where Project Biggie began, and six years later Caleb Swanigan is 6'9" and—after strict dieting and relentless training—250 pounds. He arrived at Purdue in the fall of 2015 as a McDonald's All-American after graduating from Fort Wayne's Homestead High in just three years, then averaged 10.2 points and 8.3 rebounds for a Boilermakers team that was upset by Arkansas–Little Rock in the first round of the NCAA tournament. He has since made the leap from solid freshman starter to dominant sophomore force, with statistical production at

a level not seen since Blake Griffin's sophomore season at Oklahoma, in 2008–09.

Averaging 19.0 points and 12.8 rebounds for the No. 16 Boilermakers, Biggie is a near-lock to be first-team All-America. He has 21 double doubles in 25 games (including four with at least 20 points and 20 rebounds); the highest defensive rebound percentage (33.2%) by a major-conference player in kenpom.com's database; and a chance to become the first since Griffin to average 13 boards in this millennium. "You can tell a player, 'You need to go after every rebound,' but they won't actually go after every rebound," says Purdue coach Matt Painter. "Biggie now goes after every rebound."

Biggie can now use brute force to score on the block and a soft touch to make threes, and he can pass deftly out of the post or in high-low situations. He is not yet the best power forward in the world, but he has become the best one in college basketball, where no one, this season, has been able to stop him.

Biggie has always been Biggie, but his story is a series of transformations, some as public as his shrinking waistline, some as private as what happened last September, when a guest speaker came to address the Boilermakers in their film room at Mackey Arena.

Chris Herren was a 1990s phenom at Fresno State whose story of drug addiction and recovery was the subject of a 2011 ESPN documentary. Herren has spoken to hundreds of teams since, and while he encourages his audiences to engage, he says it's rare for college players to show much vulnerability. But at Purdue, as Herren talked about putting his alcoholic father in rehab and repairing his relationship with his high-school-age son—how he is trying to do the right things but knows there were many ways he failed—it hit Biggie right in the heart.

"Your son definitely does appreciate you," Biggie told Herren. "I lost my father to addiction; I know what it's like to see someone never make it back from that side. For you to make it back for him...."

From there, something opened up inside Biggie, who'd been named one of the team's four captains in the off-season. "When he was done talking, there were guys in tears," says junior point guard and co-captain P.J. Thompson. "Most of them had no idea." Vince Edwards, another junior co-captain, says, "There were times last year when we felt like we couldn't reach Biggie; he'd get so angry that he just couldn't hear us. After that, it was like, O.K., I understand where it's coming from." Says Herren, "It was a breakthrough moment for all of us."

Biggie had begun by sharing the reason he wears number 50: it was the age at which Carl Sr. died of heart failure in a Salt Lake City

hospital in 2013. He had been a prodigious, 6'7" streetballer, nicknamed Big Smooth, who could shoot ambidextrously, and he was a kind soul when he was sober. "But the whole family," Tanya says, "was a victim of my husband's addiction to crack cocaine." She met Carl Sr. through a Pentecostal church, but one year into their marriage he lost his job and began dealing crack, and eventually using it too. "It was like living in a nightmare," Tanya says. At first she tried to rescue him from crackhouses; later she fled his attacks, and he accrued a rap sheet that included a murder charge in Utah. (He was acquitted in 1995.)

By the late 2000s Biggie, who was seven years younger than his next oldest sibling, was the only one living with Tanya full-time. He befriended other shelter kids, for whom naiveté was almost a blessing. "We only knew what was right in front of us," Biggie says. "We didn't know how big the world was, how much better it could be."

Carl Jr. had come close to knowing. He was a 6'9", 335-pound power forward with three-point range; Barnes describes him as "Zach Randolph with a better jump shot." Playing for an Indiana-based AAU program at the Kingwood Classic in Houston in 2003, Carl Jr. outshone future lottery pick LaMarcus Aldridge and soon joined Blessed IJN, a program coached by one of Barnes's friends. Barnes wanted to assume guardianship of Carl Jr. and help him prepare for college—but after a few months Carl Jr. split for Utah to reunite with a girlfriend and play his senior season at Hunter High in West Valley City. "When Rose first found me," Carl Jr. laments, "I was already 17, stuck in my ways, not coachable."

In November 2004, Carl Jr. signed a national letter of intent with Mississippi; his recruiter there, Tracy Dildy, called him a "freak of nature" with NBA potential. But over the next two years Carl Jr. surfaced and then disappeared from prep schools in Indiana, Alabama, North Carolina and Pennsylvania, without ever qualifying academically to play D-I basketball. Upon returning to Salt Lake City in March 2006, he got into an altercation outside Club Vortex that resulted in a 5'9" man firing a 9-mm handgun at Carl Jr.'s head.

It was a tragedy and a miracle: The hollow-point bullet entered Carl Jr.'s mouth, deflected off his facial bones and exited through his right eye socket—without impacting his brain. For the first few days that Carl Jr. was in the hospital, nine-year-old Biggie was unable to enter the room. "I couldn't look," Biggie says. "People would go in and come out crying."

Carl Jr. was fitted for a glass eye, ending his pro hoops aspirations. Watching the NBA made him sick: "I'd get disappointed in myself when I saw people playing that I used to dominate." And so

in 2011, when Tanya was planning to leave Salt Lake for Houston, and a significantly out-of-shape Biggie said he wanted to be a basketball player, Carl Jr. stepped up in the one way he knew how. He called Barnes and pleaded with him to take the boy.

"If you don't, he's gonna end up just like us," Carl Jr. said, meaning himself and his other siblings, none of whom made it in basketball. "And Biggie is different than all of us. He's got a different demeanor. He's smarter. He's calmer. He's still got a chance."

They had come so far by spring 2015. Biggie was a five-star recruit who'd just led Homestead High to a state title and been named Indiana's Mr. Basketball, and he and Barnes had an agreement on how they would select Biggie's college. It would not be based on emotion, friends, the campus or anything other than which coach would best position him to be drafted by an NBA team. It would be a business decision.

This philosophy was easier for Barnes, a 56-year-old agent, to adhere to than it was for Biggie, a 17-year-old with a grudge. In the summer before Biggie started ninth grade, what he wanted most was a scholarship offer from Purdue. He shone in a showcase in West Lafayette, Ind., with Painter in attendance, but when the coach saw the then 6' 4", 300-pound Biggie, he remembers thinking, "He's going to be an All-Pro NFL left tackle." The Boilermakers wanted to wait and see, which Biggie took as a challenge. After his biggest games as a freshman on Homestead's varsity, he'd text his stats to Purdue assistant coach Jack Owens, and when Biggie returned to the same showcase the following summer he—according to Barnes's unofficial record-keeping—averaged 37 points and 24 rebounds. The Purdue coaches told Barnes they still wanted to wait, and when Biggie heard that, he said, "I'm done. I'm never going to Purdue."

On April 10, 2015, Biggie was in Portland preparing for the Nike Hoop Summit and decided that he wanted to end his recruiting process. "I made up my mind," he told Barnes over the phone. "I'm going to Cal."

Biggie says he "really, seriously" wanted to go to Cal, which was on his public list of finalists along with Michigan State, Kentucky, Duke and Purdue. (The Boilermakers by then had offered him a scholarship.) He liked Berkeley, and his friends and Hoop Summit teammates Jaylen Brown and Ivan Rabb were also going to commit to the Bears.

"I refuse to allow you to go to Cal," Barnes told him, and listed the ways it violated their business-decision criteria. For one, they had agreed to wait until May, when rosters and coaching staffs were more settled. Plus, it was essential for Biggie to brand himself as a power forward rather than as an undersized center, which wouldn't happen if he played alongside Rabb, another power forward.

"This is my career," Biggie protested.

Barnes, who was in Portland at the time, was so upset that he packed up and headed for the airport. At 3:01 p.m. Pacific time, Biggie, still set on making a decision, tweeted (and made national news with) what he figured was a "compromise": He was committing to MSU, a school both he and Barnes liked.

The problem was that the Spartans didn't fit the criteria either. They already had several players who profiled as power forwards. They wanted Biggie to live in a general-population dorm; Barnes insisted on an apartment and strict training-table supervision. "If a kid has a drug problem, would you put him in a crackhouse?" Barnes says. "Biggie had an eating problem that he was overcoming. So it was a dealbreaker if he lives in a dorm. You know how college kids are; they're eating pizza, drinking beer, not thinking about nutrition. If he's around that stuff, it's easier to eat that stuff."

Biggie decommitted from Michigan State on May 7, and on May 19, committed to the school he'd sworn off: Purdue. It was the best business decision. The Boilermakers had two 7-foot centers, A.J. Hammons and Isaac Haas, and no true power forwards, ensuring that Biggie would start at the four. They also had private, apartment-style living available in a building directly across from Mackey Arena, and training table and catering that would accommodate his diet of broiled chicken, fish and vegetables.

"I didn't want to come to Purdue," Biggie says. "I just had to put my feelings aside. Purdue had the best basketball situation, and that's all I based it off of."

He didn't even call Painter to tell him the news—Biggie made Barnes do it. They were mad at each other: Biggie at Barnes for not trusting him to make his own decision, Barnes at Biggie for letting emotion hijack the process. Says Biggie, "It was quiet around the house for a couple of weeks."

To free up a scholarship, Purdue also had to make a business decision. The day he decommitted from Michigan State, the Boilermakers had a transfer recruit in West Lafayette on an official visit. "It was one of the lowest feelings I've had as a coach," says Painter, who had to inform the player his offer was on ice. "I loved the kid, and he would have fit here. But he's not Biggie Swanigan. So you've gotta make the decision that's best for your program."

It's noon on the Wednesday after Biggie had 22 points and 10 rebounds in a home rout of Illinois, and the hood on his black sweatshirt is cinched so tightly that all you can see are his eyes and nose. In matching black sweatpants he cuts a menacing figure—an executioner killing calories on a StairMaster. He practices in long sleeves and pants, a vestige of the phase when he was trying to heat up quickly, perspire and cut weight. He's so used to wearing them that

if he doesn't now, it just feels weird. (In high school, according to former teammate Dana Batt, Swanigan's go-to proclamation after hitting big shots was, "I'm always warm!")

Josh Bonhotal, a Purdue strength coach, looks on from his office doorway in the training facility and says, "He's climbed Everest on there a handful of times." Biggie is so driven that he'll work out after games—even after playing 41 minutes in an overtime loss to Minnesota on Jan. 1—but Bonhotal does not worry about overexertion.

"That pales in comparison to the confidence this stuff gives him," says Bonhotal. "When he steps on the court, he knows without a shadow of a doubt, There is not one dude out here that works harder than me. I've earned the right to go put up 20 and 20."

Indeed, during pregame warmups, Biggie has a new tradition of predicting his rebound total—frequently 20—to assistant Brandon Brantley. And now that Biggie is no longer the boy who's anchored to the ground, it's more effective to motivate him from the other end of the spectrum. Barnes keeps a studio apartment in West Lafayette so that, most mornings, he can run Biggie through similar versions of the old shooting and skill workouts they did in Fort Wayne. Except that the man who helped save Biggie no longer makes him declare that he's the best power forward in the world.

"Let me ask you something, son," Barnes will say lovingly, especially in the wake of Biggie's biggest games. "What are you?"

Biggie will roll his eyes as he yields to the new routine.

"I'm garbage," he'll say, "until you tell me I'm not."

# Dakota Mathias rises from bit player to starting catalyst

Pete DiPrimio / Fort Wayne News-Sentinel / February 8, 2017

Dakota Mathias is no fool. He channels his inner Rapheal Davis because he knows it works, helps Purdue win and guarantees playing time.

That all matters, especially with the No. 16 Boilers (19-5 overall, 8-3 in the Big Ten) heading into the lion's den that is Assembly Hall Thursday night for a pivotal game against rival Indiana (15-9, 5-6).

Mathias has morphed from bit player -- mostly for offense -- to an all-around starting catalyst for a Big Ten contender. The junior guard thrives with a high basketball IQ and fierce competitiveness honed by intense family competition, refined by Purdue's blue-collar tenacity.

And it starts on defense.

Mathias consistently guards opposing teams' best perimeter scorers. From Louisville's Donovan Mitchell to Notre Dame's Steve Vasturia to Iowa's Peter Jok to Northwestern's Vic Law to Illinois' Malcolm Hill, he gets guys who put up big numbers, and much of the time, shuts them down.

Specifically, he held Mitchell, a 14.8-point scorer, to nine; Vasturia (14.1) to three (on 1-for-8 shooting) and Law (13.5) to one (on 0-for-7 shooting).

This is huge given Mathias arrived as such a defensive liability, Boiler coaches tried hiding him on that end of the floor. How do you explain the turnaround?

"There are a couple of things," he says. "I'm in better shape. I've gotten quicker laterally. Also film study. I took a lot from what Rapheal Davis did. He knew who he was guarding a couple of days before. He started studying clips understanding guys' tendencies and how they scored in their offense, I took that from him. It helped me out this year."

Davis, the former South Side standout, was the Big Ten defensive player of the year in 2015 not so much for sheer athleticism as for his effort and determination. The 6-4, 200-pound Mathias tries duplicating that. As soon as he finds out who he'll guard for a particular game, the film study begins.

"It depends on our schedule and how many days turnaround we have," he says, "but I try to watch half hour or 45 minutes of their clips and offense, maybe a game or two if we have time. It depends on who we're playing and what our scheme will be for that game."

As for the challenge of matching up with top scorers, Mathias says, "I enjoy guarding those guys. It's big for me to do that."

If other players get hot during a game, does Mathias push coaches to put him on them? "I've done that a few times, but mostly I let the coaches do what they do. They understand what's best for the team."

Coach Matt Painter understands that the more Mathias plays, the better Purdue's victory chances are. He averages 30.8 minutes a game, second on the team to Caleb Swanigan's 31.9, and a big jump from his first two seasons, when he averaged 19.3.

"Dakota's been great," Painter says. "Where he's improved the most is defensively. As a coach, you can't have enough people you trust. A lot of times, players don't understand that. Can the coaches trust you? Can you follow your assignment? Just be accountable. He's gotten better. There were some tough lessons. Last year his minutes went down.

"The true testament to a good player is when a coach can't take you out. You don't feel right taking them out. Dakota is one of those guys."

And then there's the offense. Mathias averages a career-best in scoring (10.3), field goal percentage (49.4), three-point shooting (49.5) and assists (3.7). His 85.2 percent free throw shooting is just off last year's 86.4, but he's going to the line a lot more.

His 53 three-point baskets are 12 more than any other Boiler.

"It's a number of things," he says about his offensive improvement. "It's the work I've put in. Just being more comfortable and confident out there. My minutes fluctuated my first two years, but this year it's been more consistent. It's easier to make shots where you're in the flow of the game."

Mathias is on pace to end Vince Edwards' two-year reign as team assist leader. He has 95 assists against 35 turnovers, a 3.06 assist-to-turnover ratio that ranks third in the Big Ten and No. 19 nationally. Edwards is next with 81 assists. Guard P.J. Thompson leads the Big Ten with 80 assists against just 15 turnovers.

"That's more of an aggressive thing," Mathias says. "When you can drive and come off a screen, you can read the defense. It helps get teammates open. Also the film study. You understand the defense teams are using. It helps you find gaps and penetrate the zone and have different ways to get your teammates open and get them shots."

This offensive success isn't surprising. Mathias arrived with a good-shooter reputation out of Elida, Ohio, as the third of three basketball playing brothers. He finished with a school-record 1,906 points and averaged 27.7 points over four years.

He honed his game by working at the family home gym with older brothers Dustin and Bo. Their father, Dan, built a basketball facility right off the kitchen, and the family took full advantage.

Still do.

"It's more like a small high-school gym," Mathias says. "The ceiling is arched a little bit. It has a three-point line and extends a little farther than that. It gets the job done. We always worked out there, and worked on our skills there."

Even now, over Christmas break or whenever they're all together, the brothers go at it.

"We have three-point contests and one-on-one contests," Mathias says. "Anything you can imagine. We still do it. Always. It's gotten more competitive as we've gotten older."

Who wins?

"I win every time," he says with a laugh.



# Purdue's Caleb Swanigan has changed his body and his life

Myron Medcalf / ESPN.com / January 27, 2017

For Caleb Swanigan, Purdue's star power forward, it's the cheesecake.

It's always the cheesecake.

"I'm a dessert person," he told ESPN.com. "I'm not a potato chip [eater]. I can say no to those easy, but desserts are really my thing."

The sophomore knows one dessert could become two, then three, and over time, un-hinge the weight roller coaster he rode to 360 pounds the summer before eighth grade.

Throughout his youth, he floated between unstable housing situations and homeless shelters, back and forth between Indianapolis and Utah, as his mother, Tanya, tried to stabilize her life with six children, all while his father, Carl Swanigan Sr., wrestled with a crack-cocaine addiction. Swanigan developed a complicated relationship with food as he was surrounded by the unhealthy options peddled to those who can't afford to consider quality -- sugary cereal, ice cream, pizza. Today, however, the projected All-American resists the demon that haunted him before he lost more than 100 pounds in high school.

"You think it's something really small, but it just builds up," he said. "One meal won't kill you, but if it becomes three or four meals that are bad in a row, that's when it starts to hurt your body."

Things were different in Utah, where he spent a chunk of his childhood and ballooned in his youth. Then, he could not seek advice from Purdue's strength and conditioning staff, which now designs the day-to-day meal guidelines he consults as he fights to maintain his sculpted, 6-foot-9, 245-pound frame and to avoid the obesity challenges his family endures.

Caleb's father, who stood 6-foot-8, weighed nearly 500 pounds when he died three years ago, at the age of 50, of complications related to diabetes. Years of drug abuse had affected his health, too.

Before his death, Carl Swanigan Sr. played a minimal role in his son's life. Caleb was only 16 years old when he lost his father, but his father's weight challenges became the son's, too. The Purdue standout visited his father in a Utah nursing home before his death in 2013.

As a child, Swanigan ate according to availability. He did not have an abundance of good choices.

"It is a lot more expensive to eat healthy than it is to eat unhealthy," Swanigan said. "If you're in a position to eat right, then you should eat right. Sometimes, financially, it just isn't right."

His father's drug habit created a monsoon of instability. In 1995, a reporter at the Deseret News wrote that Carl Swanigan Sr. knew he "was dragging his family into poverty." Swanigan recalls staying at five different homeless shelters throughout his youth. Before eighth grade, former Purdue football star Roosevelt Barnes, now a sports agent worth \$14 million, according to Forbes.com, adopted a 13-year-old Swanigan and moved the young man to Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Swanigan was living with a family friend in Utah when Barnes contacted him. He finally felt anchored to something. Prior to the move, Swanigan had endured a tumultuous education experience, as his mother tried to find a reliable living environment for her children.

"I went to four different middle schools alone, and probably nine elementary schools," Swanigan said.

When asked how many times he remembers feeling secure about his living situation, Swanigan paused.

"When I moved in with Roosevelt," he said.

The kid an aunt nicknamed "Biggie" -- "She just started singing that 'Biggie, Biggie, Biggie, can't you see?' song," says Swanigan's brother, Carl Swanigan Jr. -- transformed his body in high school and earned an invite to the McDonald's All-American game in 2015 after winning Indiana's Mr. Basketball award the same year.

He then committed to Michigan State before changing his mind -- "I just felt like it was better basketball-wise for me," he said -- and signing with the Boilermakers.

At Purdue, the staff turned a soft body into a lean powerhouse, with four 20-point, 20-rebound performances in 2016-17. His new body spawned new dreams.

Perhaps a Big Ten title for Purdue. Possibly an All-American nod. Maybe the Wooden Award. Then ... the NBA.

"I think he has a chance if he can improve his jump shot and help defense," one NBA scout told ESPN.com. "Big-time rebounder, works hard on his own. He's still more undersized

center than power forward, though."

All far-fetched ideas just six years ago.

He has come so far. He will not go back.

He can't.

"We feel we can win a Big Ten championship," he said. "We're confident. We know it's been a long time since Purdue has done it. Our biggest enemy is us."

Life in homeless shelters included daily rations of bologna sandwiches and soup, along with harrowing scenes a child should not see.

Sometimes, Swanigan would watch men and women shoot heroin in the corridors of the shelters. They'd turn and stare at the boy. He'd stare back, unable to decipher what they were doing but smart enough to know it wasn't good.

"Yeah, I saw it," Swanigan said. "All you had to do was walk out and you'd see it. It was just right in front of you. That was just regular, I guess. You just get used to it."

Per Bleacher Report, the uncertainty of his life began when his mother accidentally dropped him while he was an infant. Swanigan's mother was concerned with how Swanigan Sr. would react to the bruise on his son's face, so she loaded the family onto a Greyhound bus bound for Utah.

Carl Swanigan Sr.'s bouts with the law started when he was a teenager. In 1983, an Indianapolis police officer shot him in the thigh when he allegedly tried to hit the officer with a tire iron after he and another man were caught stealing tires, according to the Indianapolis Recorder.

In 1995, he was charged and arrested for the murder of a man at a crack house in Salt Lake City. He spent five months in jail before a jury found him not guilty, citing a lack of physical evidence and questionable witness testimonies.

Carl Swanigan Sr. told the Deseret News that he "got in touch with God" while in jail and kicked his drug habit. That demon, however, returned and led to more havoc for his family in the coming years. Three of Swanigan's siblings faced criminal charges in their 20s, and all of his brothers and sisters dropped out of high school.

"I really think it did affect him to the point where he knew our dad loved us," Carl Swanigan Jr. said of the impact his father's addiction had on his younger brother. "He was just sick. And when I say sick, I mean drugs."

The same ailment fueled the rage of the man who sometimes spoke to Swanigan's mother, Tanya, with his fists. When he was younger, Swanigan said he never felt responsible for intervening because he had older siblings. As he grew older, however, he accepted a role as her protector.

"You really don't know how to process it," Swanigan said. "You really don't know how to react to it, because it's just the first time it's happening. I didn't have anyone's energy to feed off but my mom's. The few times I maybe did catch glimpses, I really didn't grasp what was going on until I got older."

His mother, then jobless, first fled Indianapolis and moved with her six children to Salt Lake City 20 years ago in search of the elusive sense of stability that plagues America's poor.

Throughout Swanigan's childhood, the family would return to Indianapolis and then go back to Utah in a ping-pong cycle of relocation. The instability left Swanigan's family in long stretches of limbo without reliable housing or food. Per the United States Department of Agriculture, 42.2 million people lived in "food-insecure" households in 2015. Swanigan's family fell into that category. When his mother could not find a stable home, the family would seek beds in a shelter.

"There's a humbleness about it that you can't have unless you experience it," Swanigan said.

His mother always tried to do right by Swanigan and his siblings. And he remains her protector, choosing to highlight the positive experiences of his youth and his mother's efforts.

"My mom always kept a roof over my head," he said.

Still, his limited food selection and a genetic disposition toward obesity merged as the boy's body expanded when he approached his teenage years.

His admitted sweet tooth expedited the weight gain.

"Don't let Biggie gas you up too much," Carl Swanigan Jr. said. "Because Biggie would eat. That boy used to eat. You know the FatBoy ice cream sandwiches? He'd eat two of them."

By the summer before eighth grade, he had entered a dangerous zone at 6-foot-2 and nearly 400 pounds. His father's health complications toward the end of his life only heightened the fears about Biggie's future.

Carl Swanigan Jr. knew something had to change for the young man who loved basketball.

"He had the moves, but he just couldn't move," he said.

Carl Jr. knew he had missed his chance. He had signed a letter of intent with Ole Miss in 2004 but never competed for the Rebels because he dropped out of high school prior to what would have been his freshman season in college. He enrolled in multiple prep schools as he tried to regain his eligibility to compete at the Division I level, but he got shot in the face by a friend in 2006, he said, an incident that cost Carl Jr. his right eye.

Caleb Swanigan liked sweets -- a lot. And when he was young, his weight ballooned. Courtesy of Roosevelt Barnes "I think that's one of the things that stopped me," he said.

He did not want his little brother to miss his chance, too.

Caleb Swanigan could not be left alone with food, because he would eat -- and eat and eat. Courtesy of Roosevelt Barnes After Swanigan's mother decided to move from Utah to Texas, again in search of stability, Carl Swanigan Jr. called Roosevelt Barnes, his former AAU coach in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Biggie needed help, he told him.

Please.

"My mom was moving to Houston, and to me, I felt this was the best situation," said Carl Swanigan Jr., who is 12 years older than the Purdue sophomore. "Biggie is spoiled. He's the only kid that's been with my mom for years. I knew he would gain more weight if he went to Houston. He just would have gotten bigger."

Barnes, an influential sports agent who once called Ndamukong Suh a client and was a member of Purdue's 1980 Final Four squad, agreed to bring Swanigan to Fort Wayne if he could raise him as a son and adopt the 13-year-old. Swanigan moved to live with a man he'd met only a few times as a kid hanging around his older brother. Swanigan told Barnes that he'd never spent more than a year at the same school because of all the

moves. He wanted stability. Barnes could grant that wish.

But it did not take long for Barnes to recognize the difficulties ahead.

"The first day he was there, I told him to get up in the morning and eat breakfast," Barnes said. "When I came downstairs, there was a big, giant box of Wheaties on the table. The whole box was gone, and the whole gallon of milk was gone. I said, 'What happened?' He said, 'You told me to eat.' I said, 'I didn't mean the whole box.'"

Later, Barnes would find a stack of pizza boxes in a utility room he rarely checked.

"I remember that," Swanigan said. "I just knew sometimes he'd look in the trash can and he would say something [if he found them]."

But Swanigan craved the structure Barnes offered. He just needed time to embrace the new responsibilities with a new guardian in a new home and a new lifestyle.

Barnes, whom Swanigan calls Dad, took him to a cardiologist to gauge his capacity to endure stressful workouts.

After doctors cleared Swanigan, Barnes took him to the gym and challenged him with workouts he used to evolve into a three-sport standout at Purdue (football, basketball and baseball) and a 10th-round pick of the Detroit Lions in 1982. Barnes said he knew Swanigan would rise because he engaged every drill. He never said no. Although the 360-pound teenager needed an extra minute or two to complete each drill, he had the attitude and intellect of a pro, Barnes said.

When they ran 17s -- 17 sprints from sideline to sideline -- he could see the youngster's heart.

Once Swanigan started working out, and focused on getting into shape, the results came. Randy Belice/NBAE via Getty Images "When you're in excellent shape, you can do it in a minute, with a minute's rest," Barnes said. "When we first started doing it, it used to take Biggie 3 minutes and 50 seconds to do it. The thing that impressed me was that he never quit."

Barnes addressed Swanigan's eating habits. More cooked meals, less fast food. Fewer sweets. The occasional pizza. A bowl of cereal, not the entire box.

"Something really small since we always practice at 2 p.m. I don't like eating big before practice, so I never really have a lunch. It's more of just fruit or something like that."

Dinner?

"I always try to make sure I get protein and just a good range of vegetables. I'm not too big on starches."

Haas, Purdue's 7-foot-2, 290-pound center, not only challenges Swanigan in practice, he also blocks him when it's time to eat. If he catches Swanigan piling an unhealthy entrée onto his plate, he'll tease him with an "Ahhhhh, Biggie!" and the sophomore will return the favor if he sees Haas gobbling junk. As big men, their bodies demand more care, Haas said. Bad food ruins their oversized engines and extends recovery time.

"You don't want to put regular gas in a Lamborghini," Haas said. "As a very fine-tuned machine, you have less room for error as a big guy. Whenever you eat like crap as a big guy, you're gonna feel like crap when you're on the court. It'll last one or two days, so it's a little different from a 5-10 point guard like P.J. Thompson, who can smash down on [Buffalo Wild Wings] every night and it'll be no big deal."

The NBA is a big deal to Swanigan. He never followed college basketball as a kid because he never expected to qualify for college. But he loved the NBA. He followed Kobe Bryant and Carmelo Anthony. In a few months, he could join Melo at the next level.

Last summer, in fact, he declared for the NBA draft. League officials told him to work on his body.

He'd lost the weight, but now the big man had to sculpt his frame. He did, and now the Big Ten must deal with the monster in the paint who has made 58 percent of his shots inside the arc and hit 10 of 21 spot-up jumpers, per Synergy data.

"He's continued to improve his body," Painter said. "He's been selective as a perimeter shooter. He was a good defensive rebounder last year. His improvement lies in his ability to go every single time."

He proved that in the overtime loss to Minnesota and the late-night workout that followed.

Sometimes Swanigan reflects on his journey, which he often omits in conversations with teammates and friends. But he calls his experiences -- the eating issues, the stops in shelters, the constant relocation, the family turmoil, the academic woes -- "fuel" for his improvement.

There is a difference in Swanigan, however, that the box scores will never capture. They're the smiles and playful moments evident in practices and games.

After the trials and obstacles, Swanigan discovered the other side of life's potholes: joy.

"I'm having a lot of fun," he said. "I'm in a good spot right now. I'm trying to enjoy it. Last year they told me I didn't do that well. I wanted it so much, and I was working so hard, that I didn't allow myself to enjoy the things around me. I'm trying to be more open with people and not just stay closed off."

# ***Carsen Edwards coming of age for Purdue at the right time***

**Brian Neubert / GoldandBlack.com / January 23, 2017**

Talented as Carsen Edwards is and has impactful as he's been early in his Purdue career, there was always going to be some inconsistency there. It was inevitable.

For the dynamic freshman to best use his many gifts as a basketball player, Boilermaker coach Matt Painter has needed aggressiveness from him. It's part of what's always defined him.

But aggressiveness — and Edwards, really, has known no other way — and inexperience can be a toxic mix. And so through the first half of this season, there'd be situations where every two or three rights might be paired with a wrong, that inconsistency that there was simply no way around for Purdue as Edwards proved to be too good too early to not play a major role on an otherwise already well-established team and lineup.

The freshman has been good for Purdue this season — good enough to cement himself in the starting lineup where there otherwise seemed little opportunity to do so prior, good enough to make him a clear contender for the Big Ten's All-Freshman team a few months from now.

Lately, though, things have been clicking for the 6-foot, 190-pounder from the Houston area at the right time.

His 12-point game at Michigan State Tuesday night was his fifth double-digit scoring game in eight Big Ten games.

After four- and eight-point games in Purdue's win over Wisconsin and its loss at Iowa, Edwards has taken off.

In the past three games — all Boilermaker wins — Edwards is averaging 13 points on 16-of-27 shooting. In the past three games, he's shooting 50 percent from three-point range. For the Big Ten season, he's shooting 38.3 from three-point range, 46.2 overall, up from 29.3 and 37.2, respectively.

Turnovers have been a nominal issue. At Michigan State, he committed none — no Purdue guard was guilty — while handing out three assists in 32 minutes, which tied a season-high.

Incidentally, the two games Edwards' minutes have hit their high-water mark: Notre Dame and Michigan - two of Purdue's biggest wins.

Both of those games came away from Mackey Arena, as did his 12-point game in the Boilermakers' narrow win over Ohio State and his 21-point eruption against Auburn in the title game of the Cancun Challenge.

"I just try to stay consistent," Edwards said of playing on the road, prior to the Michigan State game. "I know it's a different environment, but I try to just block everything out. I'm still learning, still experiencing new things. I'm just trying to be consistent, regardless of where we are, just trying to be consistent and do my job."

It's been an adjustment for Edwards guarding away from the ball — Purdue flipped it against Illinois and Penn State, putting P.J. Thompson on the 2 and Edwards on the 1 — but he's been an impact defender for Purdue, too. His 19 steals this season are second only to Dakota Mathias' 20 and no one on the Boilermaker roster has the ability, which he's shown in flashes, to turn defense into offense than Edwards, who has so often looked the part of a one-man fast break.

The biggest development, perhaps, for Edwards lately: He's finishing at the rim. He's been inconsistent this season on his point-blank layups — layups might not be the right way to put it, given that some have been challenged or otherwise difficult. But at Michigan State, he attacked in transition and from halfcourt sets and made every shot he got going to the basket. He's shooting 63 percent from two-point range the past three games.

"I think I've played all right," Edwards said prior to Michigan State. "I'm just trying to do my job, honestly. I'm just trying to improve on doing my job more and more every game and eliminating mistakes. I'm just going to continue to watch film and seeing what I need to continue to keep working on."

"I'm just trying to take good shots. That's something I'm working on as well, understanding time (and place) and when shots need to be taken."

# ***Edwards transforms from bench player to 'junk-yard dog'***

**Mike DeFabo / CNHI Sports Indiana / January 22, 2017**

Purdue junior Vincent Edwards showed signs of his struggles early.

A 4-for-11 shooting night in a one-possession loss to No.1-ranked Villanova. A seven-point performance against Georgia State in a game Purdue barely pulled out with a 20-0 run. A five-turnover performance against Auburn that contributed to a season-high 21 turnovers.

But it finally reached a breaking point at Louisville in late November when Edwards went 0-for-4 from the field and scored just a single point.

"I felt like I was worried about trying to do too much," Edwards said. "Trying to do this. Trying to do that. Trying to do every little thing to help us win to start the year."

Something had to change. So after Edwards' season-low, Purdue coach Matt Painter ended Edwards' streak of 46 consecutive starts by moving the three-year starter to the bench. It was only then that Edwards started to return to form.

Part of it was mental. Part was schematic.

Edwards was playing primarily the small forward position in the initial starting lineup with Isaac Haas at the center and Caleb Swanigan at power forward. But when Painter split them up, Edwards slid to the four, forcing bigger defenders to try to deal with his combination of size and athleticism.

It worked. And as a result, Edwards has played his way back into the starting lineup. In the five games since, Edwards is averaging 11 points per game and shooting 49 percent from the field, up from just 41 percent in the seven games to start the year.

"It opens up everything for everybody else," junior guard Dakota Mathias said. "He's very versatile. When he's got a bigger guy on him, he can take it to the hole. When he's got a smaller guy on him, he can shoot over him. It extends the defense and opens up lanes for the guards to drive and Biggie to post up. It adds another dynamic to our offense."

The rest of the league is taking notice. Wisconsin coach Greg Gard called Edwards the "X-factor" after the Boilers handed the Badgers their first conference loss.

Following Saturday's blowout win over Penn State, in which Edwards scored 10 points and grabbed seven rebounds, Lions coach Pat Chambers affectionately called him a "junk-yard dog."

"He kept being on the tail-end of our rotations in terms of whether it was penetration or transition or throwing it into the post and then reversing it out of a double," Painter said. "I thought he did a good job of attacking instead of taking that contested 3. Some led to him being aggressive and scoring. Some led to him being aggressive and passing after he drove it."

Edwards was particularly effective because of the pace of the game. Penn State tries to get up and down the floor with its young, athletic lineup. On a Purdue team with tons of size but not a lot of athleticism, Edwards was critical in this phase.

"Our coaches said we needed more in transition," Edwards said. "I was looking to attack and trying to find Biggie on the floor or Dakota or any of our shooters just running the floor. Nobody could really stop me when I was pushing the ball."

As Purdue gears up for a critical road stretch against some of the Big Ten's most serious contenders, Edwards' performance will continue to be magnified. The Boilers will play at Michigan State, at Nebraska, home against Northwestern, at Maryland and at Indiana over the next few weeks.

So long as the productive pace continues, Edwards will hear his name announced in each of those arenas as a new starting streak continues.

# Purdue's Edwards chasing defensive potential

Nathan Baird / Lafayette Journal & Courier / January 11, 2017

Carsen Edwards believed he knew a lot about basketball, having played countless hours of it over his first 18 years of life.

Then he arrived at Purdue. The freshman guard quickly learned that when it came to defense, he was a novice again. Misread a screen or neglect to bump a hedger, and Edwards was going to hear about it.

"They'd come off the screen and I wouldn't bump the roll guy and they'd score," Edwards said, recalling open gyms last summer. "My teammates would be like, 'Yo, you've got to do that' — stuff I didn't know. I tried to catch on as soon as I could."

Edwards, a 6-foot, 190-pound guard from Houston-area Atascocita High School, possesses many of the requisite skills to be a great defender. He's short, but strong, and on most nights he's the fastest player on the floor. The 'X' factor is Edwards' confidence, providing the bravado to take on tough assignments and take calculated gambles.

Purdue junior captain P.J. Thompson said Edwards has the tools to be the team's best defender. What the freshman doesn't yet have is the necessary experience to best apply those tools. The older Boilermakers are trying to speed up that learning curve.

"He's young, and when you're a freshman, you're trying to play hard and go hard," junior forward Vincent Edwards said. "I like that he's fearless and he's not afraid to mess up. If you're going to mess up, at least go hard doing it. He just has to learn from his mistakes."

Originally recruited as a future point guard, Carsen Edwards has spent the majority of his freshman season playing off the ball on offense. Thompson typically draws the opposing point guard as his defensive assignment. Dakota Mathias usually matches up with an opponent's best wing or shooting guard.

Which means, as the third guard, Carsen Edwards' defensive responsibilities can vary greatly from night-to-night. Against Wisconsin last Sunday, Purdue coach Matt Painter felt it was important to prevent 6-foot-3 Badgers guard Zak Showalter from getting in a rhythm early. Edwards helped limit Showalter to seven points on 3 of 8 shooting over 33 minutes.

Against Iowa on Thursday, Edwards' opening assignment will be Isaiah Moss. The 6-5, 205-pound redshirt freshman, who averages 7.6 points per night and has scored as many as 21, went scoreless in the first game against Purdue.

"He's had to guard a lot of different types of people," Purdue coach Matt Painter said. "He's done a good job of trying to keep focused on his actual responsibility at times, in terms of whatever action they're running and things of that nature — just trying to be detail-oriented, and it's hard. It's hard, for a freshman, to keep your focus in that area."

"He's done a lot better than I thought he would. When you have that responsibility, you have to hone in on what you have to do, especially late in a game."

Carsen Edwards shares the team lead in steals with Thompson at 17 apiece. His speed and instinct for getting to the rim make him a unique transition weapon for the Boilermakers.

Now Edwards is trying to pressure the ball better and become a full-court defender. He's also been challenged by Painter and teammates not to play through his offense — an adjustment that has served Mathias and others well.

For a player known as a scorer at the high school and AAU levels — and one who could still assume that role for Purdue — playing both halves of the floor didn't come easily at first.

"It's frustrating at times, when you're just trying to soak everything in," Edwards said. "At the same time, it's an eye-opener. It feels good to know that there's a lot of things you still are able to learn. If you love the game, being able to learn more about the game is good."

Carsen Edwards' performance in the first Iowa game may have been his best. He collected 19 points, four rebounds, five assists and two steals while making the aforementioned defensive impact.

The Boilermakers have seen flashes of what's possible when Edwards' entire game comes together. They're eager to see it more often.

"That will come, and when it does come, his game will really elevate, because he's already there offensively," Thompson said. "He's ahead of the curve."

# Purdue's Caleb Swanigan Is a Revelation

Mark Titus / TheRinger.com / January 11, 2017

The sophomore big man is putting up monster numbers and punishing opponents. In the process, he's changing everything you thought you knew about Boilermakers basketball.

Purdue's Caleb Swanigan is the best big man in college basketball by a significant margin, and even if you already knew that, he's still probably better than you realize. I know that throwing out stat lines with arbitrary cutoff points is one of the dumber things anyone in sports media can do, but I can't help myself here. There's just something about him that leaves me desperate to find proof (no matter how insignificant) that a big man who can score, rebound, and pass like Swanigan does is a rarity in college basketball. So yeah, this might feel contrived, and I don't blame you for rolling your eyes one bit. But it doesn't change the fact that the 6-foot-9, 250-pound sophomore is averaging 18.3 points, 12.9 rebounds, and 2.7 assists per game, benchmarks no player in college basketball has hit over a full season since Tim Duncan in 1996–97. (Side note: Make sure you have a change of underwear handy before you look at Duncan's college stats.)

No matter how you feel about contrived cutoff points to make guys fit into exclusive statistical groupings, there's no denying that Swanigan has been otherworldly this season. He's posted a double-double in 14 of Purdue's 17 games (including four 20–20s) and leads the country in total rebounds per game, something no power-conference player has done since Oklahoma's Blake Griffin in 2008–09. In Swanigan's worst game of the season, when he fouled out in 22 minutes of action during a 97–64 win over Arizona State on December 6, he still finished with six points, 10 rebounds, and five assists. Swanigan has led the Boilermakers to a 14–3 record and a no. 17 ranking in the AP poll. We're four games into the Big Ten schedule and he's all but wrapped up the conference's player of the year award, a fate that became even more evident after he tallied 18 points (on 7-of-10 shooting) and 13 rebounds in last Sunday's 66–55 victory against Wisconsin's frontcourt, which is among the best in the country.

The stats are striking, but to truly appreciate Swanigan, you have to watch him play; words alone can't do justice to how relentless he is on the court. Just look at this rebound from the Wisconsin game.

I don't know what's crazier: That Swanigan jumps to contest a 3-point shot on the wing and still grabs the rebound among a group of players (one of whom is 7-foot-2) on the opposite side of the lane ... or that he somehow makes this play look routine. But that's Swanigan. He regularly does things that most casual observers don't notice, even though every coach who watches him probably passes out from sheer giddiness. Here's a similar play from the same half of the same game.

Swanigan is on the wing guarding Nigel Hayes when this shot is put up, yet he busts his ass so hard to grab the board on the opposite block that he knocks over his own teammate. Do you have any idea how rare this is? I mean, all that's really expected of Swanigan in this scenario is to make sure Hayes doesn't get the rebound. If Swanigan can get it, great, but no coach would ever expect him to get it or reach even come close. But that's not enough for Swanigan, who I'm pretty sure believes he should grab literally every board, as though he uses them for sustenance or something.

Think about the most frustrating player you've ever had to endure watching play for your favorite program. If you aren't picturing an out-of-control and/or shoot-first point guard, there's a decent chance you're thinking of a big man whom you'd describe as "soft." There's just something about big men in college basketball that makes fans want to pull their hair out as they scream, "JUST DUNK THE FUCKING BALL! WHAT ARE YOU DOING??? ARRRGGGHHHHH!!!" That's what makes someone like Swanigan such a sight for sore eyes, especially for Purdue fans who had to deal with lethargic 7-footer A.J. Hammons for the past four seasons. Swanigan is more than just aggressive—he's positively implacable with his work ethic.

This is another sequence from the first half of the Wisconsin game. Even though Swanigan touches the ball for only a little more than one second, keep your eyes on him for the entire possession.

Just imagine trying to guard that for 40 minutes. Swanigan establishes post position and calls for the ball, flips his hips and keeps sealing his man as the ball reverses court, steps out to threaten a 3-point attempt (he shoots 43.8 percent from deep), and sets a couple of screens (and slips one) all in the span of about 20 seconds. He never stops moving, which puts an absurd amount of stress on Wisconsin's defense. And best of all,

although Purdue's Dakota Mathias sinks his shot, Swanigan puts himself in perfect position to grab the offensive rebound in case he doesn't. This is Swanigan every time down the floor of every game. He's like a living, breathing instruction manual on how young big men should approach the sport. It gets better. There's this sequence from—you guessed it—the first half of the Wisconsin game that perfectly encapsulates everything Swanigan is about. Again, keep your eyes locked on him for the entire clip. (Note: If it weren't already obvious, I'm purposely including clips from the same half of the same game to give you a sense of how overwhelming Swanigan is. If you're anything like me, it's somewhat jarring to realize everything you've seen happened in 20 minutes of game time.)

I gotta say, it's total bullshit that Purdue gets a guy like this when no other team in America does. A brutally physical big man who never stops working in the paint and can also hit catch-and-shoot 3s in rhythm like a shooting guard? It's just not fair. (Also not fair: this sequence from the second half of the Wisconsin game.) Swanigan really rubbed our faces in his skill set when he used this turn-and-face jab step that almost put Ethan Happ on his ass at the end of the first half against the Badgers.

Yeah, he missed the shot. But does it really matter? You know he has it in his arsenal to knock that down. And with Swanigan, I could be convinced that he missed on purpose just to prove a point, as if his ultimate pleasure comes from seeing opposing fan bases fall to their knees and say, "Oh thank god. He finally did something that doesn't make me want to cry."

When I wrote about Purdue a few weeks ago for the most powerful power rankings in college basketball, I touched on how the Boilermakers have undergone a total culture shift this season. Swanigan replacing Hammons as the face of the program is the single biggest reason. His subpar defense and occasional turnover outburst notwithstanding, Swanigan embodies all the virtues that Purdue fans value most. He plays his ass off every second he's on the court; he takes pride in doing the dirty work; and he's so business-like in dominating the opposition that it almost feels like he's trying too hard to pull off the I-care-so-little-about-being-cool-that-it-actually-makes-me-cool shtick.

Whatever the case, Swanigan's impact on Purdue this season can't be overstated. College basketball programs almost never reshape their identities so quickly unless there's been a coaching change or massive roster turnover. And if a shift this seismic does occur, it's almost always for the worse. That's what makes Purdue transforming from a boring and methodical underachiever to an exciting and versatile Big Ten contender such a testament to Swanigan's approach to the game. He sets the tone for his teammates to follow, and even if they can't step up, he has no problem doing everything himself.

It's clear that there are doubts about Swanigan's ability to succeed at the next level, even if I'm not much for projecting NBA potential. He isn't the greatest athlete, his defense needs serious work, and he doesn't fit the mold for any position in the league. But here's the cool part about being a college basketball fan: I don't have to give a shit about what Swanigan may or may not do in the NBA. I get to enjoy him for what he is now, which is the best player in the Big Ten, the best big man in college basketball, and—this is going to sound sacrilegious to Robbie Hummel disciples, but I'm going to say it anyway because it's true—the best player to wear a Purdue uniform in more than 20 years.



# ***Much improved Dakota Mathias is the glue for Purdue***

**Gregg Doyel / Indianapolis Star / January 8, 2017**

Dakota Mathias was better than that. Well, he thought he was better than that. But his playing time dropped as a sophomore, so he used his end-of-the-year meeting with Purdue coach Matt Painter last season to find out:

How do I get more minutes?

Ask a question, get an answer. In this case, it was a long answer. Painter gave Mathias a list, and Mathias was taking notes and studying it and then changing his summer plans. He stayed on campus for what they call the "Maymester:" the time on the school calendar when most athletes get away. Mathias couldn't get away.

He had too many things to work on.

"My defense, my agility, get into better shape," Mathias was telling me Sunday evening, after the fruits of his labor helped No. 20 Purdue throttle No. 11 Wisconsin 66-55, a victory that ...

Oh, sorry. Mathias isn't done telling me what he had to work on after last season.

"My ball-handling, my speed, creating my shot ..."

It's a list, as I was saying. And it's not that Mathias wasn't good at any of those things. He was. He just wasn't good enough, not to get the minutes and make the impact he felt he could make at Purdue. So after averaging just 19 minutes per game as a sophomore, he got leaner, stronger, faster. His ball-handling, not exactly a weakness, became more of a strength. His defense, which was exactly a weakness, became sound.

"They used to have to hide me (defensively)," Mathias said, smiling at himself. "Now I'm defending some of the best guys in the Big Ten."

Oh, and his shooting? Dakota Mathias could always shoot the ball better than almost anybody at Purdue. And now he's shooting it better than almost anybody in college basketball.

Put it all together, as Mathias has done, and you're looking at a radically improved, indispensable player for a Purdue team that looks to be the Big Ten's best Final Four candidate. On Sunday, you were looking at a guy who had eight points, seven assists and four rebounds, and who led Purdue's remarkably stingy perimeter defense. Wisconsin entered the game shooting 39.5 percent on 3-pointers and making 7.5 per game in league play; Purdue held the Badgers to 2-for-14 shooting (14.3 percent) behind the arc.

Mathias wasn't the sole reason Purdue beat Wisconsin. Nobody's saying that. Caleb Swanigan had another double-double, 18 points and 13 rebounds, though he was unable to stop Wisconsin's Ethan Happ (17 points), and had almost as many turnovers by himself (eight) as Wisconsin had as a team (nine).

Swanigan has become one of the best players in America, but this was not one of his better games. Think about how high that bar is: 18 points, 13 rebounds, not one of his better games. Swanigan's backup and occasional twin tower, 7-2 Isaac Haas, had 13 points in 18 minutes, when Purdue was going to him and going to him and going to him.

"They're really in a bind," Painter said of the Wisconsin defense — of any defense — that has to deal with Isaac Haas on the low block. "He's just going to have to miss in a one-on-one shot. When he posts deep and keeps things simple and doesn't overdrizzle, you're just at his mercy."

Pretty much the same can be said for the rest of the Big Ten as it relates to Purdue: It's really in a bind. And at the Boilermakers' mercy. What Painter has created this season is a team Wisconsin coach Greg Gard decided is as good as Painter's 2010 group of Robbie Hummel, E'Twaun Moore and Jajuan Johnson that won 29 games and reached the Sweet 16.

Painter has a team that can beat you any which way. Purdue is still just too big for most folks, Swanigan and Haas and 6-8 small forward Vince Edwards, but now Purdue can shoot you down from the perimeter as well. Mathias (49.3 percent entering Sunday), Carmel's Ryan Cline (45.1 percent) and Edwards (44.1 percent) rank among the Big Ten's top 10 in 3-point accuracy, and Breuef's P.J. Thompson (41.2 percent) is just outside the list.

Mathias is the glue. He has replaced Rapheal Davis as the team's top perimeter defender. He leads the team in assists (4.1 per game). He is fourth in rebounding (3.7 rpg), fifth in scoring (9.8 ppg), second in assist-to-turnover ratio (3-to-1).

Mathias also is the team's most dangerous shooter, its only guard who can get a shot for himself at a moment's notice. That moment came late in the first half Sunday with the shot clock ticking down — "Six, five, four," the Paint Crew was pointing out — and Mathias at the top of the key and crossing over Wisconsin's Bronson Koenig before drilling a 3-pointer for Purdue's first double-digit lead at 25-15.

Afterward, Painter was nodding before I could finish my question. He heard the words "Dakota Mathias" and "improved" and he was nodding and then he was saying:

"Dakota's been great," Painter said. "Where he's improved the most is defensively. As a coach, you can't have enough people you trust. A lot of times, players don't understand that. Can the coaches trust you? Can you follow your assignment? Just be accountable. He's gotten better. There were some tough lessons. Last year his minutes went down.

"The true testament to a good player is when a coach can't take you out. There's some guys who didn't play as much today as I would have liked, but you just didn't feel right taking some guys out — and (Mathias) is one of those guys."

Mathias played 37 minutes on Sunday. He is averaging 30.4 minutes on the season, second to Swanigan (31.4 mpg). He looked tired when I caught up with him after the game Sunday — Mathias also was the first Purdue player on the court before the game, shooting about 150 jumpers before his teammates joined him — but he looked happy. This whole thing, remember, it started after last season when Mathias asked Painter a question.

Now he has become Purdue perimeter answer.

# Swanigan has turned Purdue into must-watch TV

Matt Norlander | CBSSports | Jan. 5, 2017

May 7, 2015, was the date that changed the direction of Purdue's program.

Boilermakers coach Matt Painter was hosting a recruit on an official visit. He had 12 scholarship players for the upcoming season, meaning one spot was open. This particular recruit looked to be the guy who was going to get that scholarship offer.

And then a twist came. As the recruit was on campus, Painter heard about an in-conference de-commitment from a five-star McDonald's All-American. It was a player Painter was familiar with, sure: He'd only see him play dozens of games and dedicated hundreds of hours and thousands of travel miles to recruiting him. Caleb Swanigan, Mr. Indiana Basketball for 2015, one of the best players to come out of the state in the past decade, was walking back his verbal commitment on Michigan State. He pledged to Tom Izzo's program not even a month prior. But something turned Swanigan, and now Purdue was expected to bring him in.

If Painter could do it, Swanigan would become the first Mr. Basketball to commit to Purdue since Glenn Robinson -- one of the all-time great Boilermakers -- in 1991. That would be six years before Swanigan was born.

Recruiting isn't for the faint of heart. Painter immediately knew the player he was hosting on an official visit (who's since gone on to a mid-major program) couldn't be the priority, not with Swanigan now back on the market. Besides, Purdue was for a time considered the favorite to land Swanigan. What's more, his legal guardian, Roosevelt Barnes, was an alum, someone who was drafted into the NFL out of Purdue in 1982.

It was a hard, perhaps harsh move to make on that recruit, but pretty much any coach trying to keep his job at a power-conference program would have done the same thing. It was the practical move. Less than two weeks after balking on Michigan State, Swanigan swore to Purdue. And now, everything is falling into place for Swanigan, Painter and the program.

If you've missed it, the sophomore big man is putting up numbers we haven't seen at the college basketball level since Tim Duncan was at Wake Forest.

Purdue, which faces an interesting game at Ohio State on Thursday night, is 12-3 and has the realistic goal of winning the Big Ten this season. Swanigan, who is emerging as one of the most dominant two-way players in America, is the catalyst for the program's amelioration. He's averaging 18.5 points, 13.0 rebounds and 2.9 assists. He's also developing a fun and unusual habit of accruing 20-20 games. The 19-year-old already has four games wherein he's scored at least 20 points and grabbed 20 rebounds, the most recent a 28-22 effort against Minnesota on Sunday.

His stats are flirting with the cartoonish, in terms of modern college hoops. Seven times this season a player has had a 20-20 game -- Swanigan has four of them, and the modern record is in sight. The most 20-20 games in a season since 1994 is six by Santa Clara's John Bryant in 2008-09.

Swanigan has also had a 20-20-5 (assists) game, doing that in Purdue's season-opener. The only other players in the past decade to go 20-20-5: LSU's Ben Simmons and Oklahoma's Blake Griffin. Both of them went No. 1 in the draft.

Against Norfolk State on Dec. 21, Swanigan became the first player this season to have a 30-20-2 game; there have been just six 30-20-2 games in college basketball in the past five-plus seasons. The only player aside from Swanigan to do it and come from a major conference: Kansas' Thomas Robinson. He was a top-five NBA pick.

Swanigan also had consecutive 20-20 games, on Dec. 19 and 21, and thus became the third player in the past two decades (Griffin and Hofstra's Rokas Gustys) to achieve the feat. Swanigan's four 20-20 games doubles all 20-20 games by all other Big Ten players combined since the mid-1990s.

"Losing [NBA pick A.J. Hammons] and things like that, we were going to need a guy down there to pick up the load," Swanigan said. "Defensively it's been a lot easier for me, just going through it before and knowing the level you have to play at."

If Swanigan keeps on pace with an 18/13/2 average, he'll join Griffin and Tim Duncan as the only players in the past 23 seasons to finish a season with that average. Going for 18 and 13 might not seem monumental, but averaging 13 rebounds is no longer common at the college level; he's going to crush Purdue's single-season rebound record (352) this year. The guy who holds the record is Joe

Barry Carroll -- also a former No. 1 pick. Based on a plausible 35-game season for Purdue, Swanigan is tracking to be the second college basketball player in the past 20 seasons to score 600 points, grab 400 rebounds and dish 100 assists in one season.

Fifty and 60 years ago, a handful of players put up 30-30 games, but those days are long gone. So when you see a college guy come along and start dropping 20-20 with ease, it makes you pause and appreciate him even more.

If you're wondering how he compares to the aforementioned Glenn Robinson, the Big Dog played two years at Purdue and averaged a dominating 27.5 points, 1.9 assists, and on the boards? Nearly 10 per game. That's good, but he was not quite the rebounding force Swanigan is proving to be. Swanigan is averaging more defensive rebounds now (9.9) than Robinson's total rebounds average (9.7).

Swanigan's 12 double-doubles are tops in the country, as is his defensive rebounds clip. He snares caroms on 34 percent of Purdue's defensive possessions, which is a higher rate than any player on any power-conference team (by far) in the history of KenPom.com's database.

All this adds up to an All-American campaign and a clear-cut top-five candidate for national Player of the Year to this point. No one has averaged 15 or more rebounds in a season in Division I men's basketball since 1980. Swanigan might do it.

Though Purdue's been fairly steady, on a national level it hasn't been a must-watch program for most of Painter's tenure. Nevertheless, since he got there in 2005, the Boilers have made eight NCAA Tournaments and will go to their ninth this season. Hammons, a traditional 7-foot center, was a good player in recent years, and the Robbie Hummel-E'Twaun Moore-JaJuan Johnson teams of the late-aughts were the best Purdue teams Painter's ever had.

But this group has become so watchable because Swanigan has turned into a stat monster, and on a certain level, it's captivating to see a guy landlord around the rim. What makes Purdue different is Swanigan can play the 4 or the 5, and so he goes "small" when the 7-foot-2 spruce tree that is Isaac Haas is on the floor. Swanigan is a four-level threat: he can maneuver in the post, is confident from mid-range (59 percent on all his 2s), has foul-shooting ability (77 percent) and is a 41-percent 3-point shooter.

"I feel comfortable on the perimeter. I feel comfortable on all three levels on the floor and I try to make the right basketball decision on every single play," Swanigan said.

He shoots 3s but is selective about it, having taken just 27 this season. Swanigan leads the team in shots but is still efficient in doing so (a solid 117.5 offensive rating). He allows Purdue to have flexibility in its offense.

"He's very good at playing off other people," Painter said. "He's always able to pass the basketball. He's clearly aware of double teams."

His overall defense has been markedly better, too. When he's guarding a man one-on-one, opponents are shooting 20 percent outside of the paint against him, according to Purdue's statistics. Teams might have a "plan," but he's going to win more caroms than not, and if Haas is on the floor, then you've got to worry about Swanigan on the perimeter or in the high post 10 seconds later. Swanigan said he can feel the way teams are scheming against him differently, but nothing anyone can do is stopping him.

Plus, Purdue's able to space itself well with shooters -- and Swanigan. That brings opposing bigs out with him. The Boilermakers are flirting with offensive heights not seen in almost two decades at the program. The team's gone for 80 or more points in five straight games, and if it hits 80 against Ohio State on Thursday, it'll be the first time since 1997 Purdue's done it six straight times. Purdue's also won nine games by 20 or more points. The only teams to win more games by 20-plus? Sixth-ranked Kentucky and seventh-ranked West Virginia.

Swanigan had a really nice freshman season (10.2 points, 8.3 rebounds). He was one of the 20 best first-year players in America last season, but that wasn't good enough to warrant being a one-and-done guy. There was never a real thought he'd go to the NBA.

"He's a very intelligent person but he's also guarded," Painter said. "He's not going to open up to just anyone. With that, he's very business-like for a young person. He's going to shoot extra, he's going to lift extra, he's going to come and watch film. He's done a lot of things a lot of big-bodied guys won't do. He's made some sacrifices that are very hard to do, in terms of lifting, running extra -- during the season -- and there's already enough demands in the season."

For someone as big and naturally gifted at basketball as Swanigan is, the dividends have paid off this year because he's committed to consistency and is as aggressive crashing the offensive glass as he is hungry on the other end.

"I've always prided myself on rebounding, trying to be in the best shape as possible," he said.

His workout regimen is evidence of it. In the fall semester, Swanigan had only two in-person classes to attend, the rest online. So because of this, he spent more time working out than anything else. Two hours of getting up shots, an hour of lifting, an hour's worth of practice, and post-practice workouts were common as well. Swanigan, who is 6-foot-9 and between 245 and 250 pounds, is now down from 13 to 10 percent body fat.

"The biggest jump for him as been a continual improvement of his body, and I think that allows him to have more energy, to play harder," Painter said. "He's really doing a good job of trying to literally go after every rebound, sprint back on defense every time."

He does speed lifting and unconventional weight training. This has helped him get off the ground quicker. He squats and does bench press, but not as much as most others on the team. There's been an emphasis on working auxiliary muscles; getting him stronger where he can't even feel his strength. He's improved his lift speed and hip mobility in big ways since stepped on campus 18 months ago. He no longer struggles to pick up his feet. His natural running motion is now ... natural.

Most impressively, Swanigan is experienced but young for his age, so to speak. He should be a freshman. In 2014, he reclassified to the class of 2015, moving ahead his progress for a year. This mammoth season combined with his young age has taken him from late-second-round prospect he was last year to a guy who could put himself into the first round this year.

"He's showing he can play a role at that level," Painter said. "Sometimes guys don't like hearing that, but guys playing roles [the] past four or five years in the NBA are now making \$10-12 million doing it."

Swanigan's aware of how good he's been, but he refuses to say he's the best player in the Big Ten or anything like that.

"It's one of those things where it will be really special if you can add winning to it, to go to a Final Four," he said. "In the moment it won't be as important. ... I feel like we can win the Big Ten just because of what we have this year. Indiana caught fire last year, won a couple of games and just kept rolling. I feel like I'm the best player for my team. I fit well for where I'm at. It's just the spot I'm in. ... I don't want to speak for anyone else."

He doesn't have to. Swanigan has by far been the best player in the Big Ten this season, and if this keeps up, he'll wind up having one of the best seasons in the history of the conference.

# Swanigan A Dominant Force After Putting NBA Dreams On Hold

Jeff Bartl / Campus Insiders / January 4, 2017

Caleb Swanigan decided the NBA could wait. Now “Biggie” discusses his road to becoming a National Player of the Year candidate as he helps Purdue chase its first Big Ten title in seven years.

Caleb Swanigan needed time to reflect before finalizing the two most important decisions of his basketball career.

And he ended up choosing Purdue – twice.

“Biggie” first pledged to Michigan State and coach Tom Izzo, who Swanigan admitted was surprised when the five-star recruit called to share the news. Swanigan later hinted that he made his decision too quickly during his whirlwind recruitment, and Izzo’s intuition proved correct when the young man flipped his commitment to Purdue a short time later.

Being guaranteed to play his more comfortable power forward position, the benefit of having two 7-footers on the Boilermakers’ roster at the time, was too good to pass up.

“It allows me to do more than just play with my back to the basket,” Swanigan told Campus Insiders. “I can be all around the floor and show more of my skill set.”

Caleb Swanigan (Credit: Trevor Ruskowski-USA TODAY Sports)

Swanigan’s second landmark decision came when, after initially declaring for last year’s NBA Draft, he realized he had even more to show. He averaged 10.2 points and 8.3 rebounds as a freshman, but scored only six points and didn’t have much of an impact in Purdue’s first-round NCAA Tournament loss to No. 12-seed Arkansas-Little Rock.

Swanigan flirted with the idea of leaving school before ultimately deciding to return to West Lafayette, and that decision is paying off. After recording eight double-doubles all of last season, he is tied for the national lead with 12 heading into Thursday’s nights contest at Ohio State.

The prospect of leaving the Boilermakers – or not joining them at all – seems tough to believe now. Swanigan has developed into a favorite for Big Ten Player of the Year honors and is receiving attention nationally for his play on the court – not for where he’ll be playing.

He’s among the Big Ten leaders in scoring with an average of 18.5 points, and ranks second in the nation averaging 13 rebounds per game.

Averaging 23.6 points and 16.6 rebounds over his last five games – including a monster 28-point, 22-rebound performance in Sunday’s overtime loss to Minnesota – Swanigan has helped guide No. 20 Purdue to a blistering 12-3 start. The Boilermakers haven’t won a Big Ten championship since 2009-10, nor have they claimed an outright regular-season title since taking three straight from 1994-96, but are primed to reverse those fortunes this season.

“I felt like I could be a better player and help this team win games,” Swanigan said. “It seemed like the better choice at the time. I feel like I wasn’t ready then, and I’ll be more ready with more time (at Purdue).”

Returning to school has helped Swanigan move into the conversation of being one of the nation’s top players. His NBA draft stock now is much higher should he decide to leave after this season.

But not long ago, playing at the game’s highest level seemed unlikely during Swanigan’s rough upbringing. He weighed 360 pounds in eighth grade before Roosevelt Barnes, a former Purdue football player and mentor to Swanigan’s older brother Carl, legally adopted Swanigan and gave him a steady life.

Swanigan developed into a McDonald’s All-American and has dropped 110 pounds, helping him become more versatile. He’s developed a shooting touch – knocking down 40.7 percent of his 3-pointers – and can get to the basket in multiple ways by putting the ball on the floor. Swanigan has shot 96 free throws in 15 games compared to 94 in 34 games last season.

“I’m in better shape, and the more you play, you gain experience,” Swanigan said. “It’s about the flow of the game and just letting it come to you.”

And that patience is paying off.

# Dakota Mathias' defensive improvement has been key for Purdue

Brian Neubert | GoldandBlack.com | Dec. 27, 2016

As a senior in high school, after he'd signed with Purdue, Dakota Mathias was known to travel from his Ohio home to West Lafayette for Boilermaker practices, during which he'd take notes as he looked on.

That sort of diligence has made him one of Purdue's great success stories of this season, not just at the offensive end of the floor — the portion of the game that's always defined him — but more so on defense.

Mathias has been the face of a Boilermaker team that's been better defensively than many might have expected, itself included. And he's been a veritable billboard for the benefits of simple preparation.

"I can't (say enough) about his preparation. It's really good," teammate P.J. Thompson said. "He might have to make up for some faults with athleticism, but his mental game is probably better than a lot of people in the country. He does his homework and that makes him successful.

"He told me at practice (Monday), 'Man, I was bored over break, so I watched all 200 clips of (Iowa's) Peter Jok offensively. I'm like, 'I was chilling with my family, playing video games with my brother.'"

Jok, the Big Ten's leading scorer who'll lead Iowa into Mackey Arena Wednesday night for both teams' Big Ten opener, is averaging better than 22-and-a-half points per game. He's the biggest test yet for Mathias, but a challenge he now has every reason to look forward to.

He might have last season from a competitive standpoint, but he's far more up to the job now than he'd have been last season.

In many ways, Mathias served in the pre-season as the embodiment of Purdue's concerns at the defensive end, concerning enough that Matt Painter again tweaked his defensive scheme to accommodate a roster long on offensive skill, but short of quickness and athleticism on the wing and smarting from the graduation of former Big Ten Defensive Player-of-the-Year Ropheal Davis in that sense.

Davis left a void, but sometimes, "void" is just a synonym for "opportunity." And Purdue didn't have to look any further than Davis' ascension from sophomore to junior for an example of what a player might be capable of in such a situation.

Mathias isn't going to be Defensive Player-of-the-Year like Davis was, but what he's already done has been to follow almost the same path to this point, including athletically, where Mathias has become noticeably quicker and more agile laterally.

But preparation has been the bigger piece. Davis constantly preached the value of prep work. He studied his forthcoming matchups to painstaking degrees. Mathias has done the same.

"I'm in a lot better shape than I was, but another thing is I've spent a lot more time studying film, studying the guys I've been guarding, paying attention to the plays they run," he said. "We spend a lot of time on that in walk-through, but film study's a big part of that, because you can know what's coming. You don't have to be the quickest (player) if you know what they're going to do. It can put you a step ahead of them."

"He's a guy who's really paying attention to details on the defensive end," said associate head Jack Owens, "someone who'll really take my defensive notecards and study it, go and watch film, then we'll talk about it. He'll watch every clip on Synergy of the guys he's going to guard. He's doing what Ray did. He's watching a lot of film, buying into what we're saying, taking our game plan and following it to a T."

When Davis showed up at Purdue, Owens once told him - half-jokingly, but only half - that he was the worst defensive player he'd ever seen at this level.

Mathias himself would admit he didn't see himself becoming this sort of all-around player. His defensive assignment more often than not in high school could probably be best described as, "Score."

Painter was asked Tuesday if he recruited Mathias to be this sort of player as opposed to just the scorer and facilitator he's already well established as at Purdue and said, "I did not."

But that's what he's gotten, a better-than-expected defender who's "spearheaded" - Painter's word - Purdue being further along in redefining itself on D than it might have expected to be at this stage.

Mathias said this defensive emergence was a priority for him coming into the season, knowing he'd be playing a more prominent role and drawing higher-profile adversaries. He came into this season well aware of Davis' humble beginnings as a defender, too, and thus far has followed a similar path in a program known for its defensive culture.

"It's just what they make you into here at Purdue," Mathias said.

# Biggie effort — on both ends —spurs Boilers' comeback

Gregg Doyel | Indianapolis Star | Dec. 17, 2016

When it was over, Caleb Swanigan had the ball in his hands and he wasn't giving it up. Maybe later. Maybe. But this one felt too good to surrender, and so Swanigan grabbed the final rebound of Purdue's best victory of the season, this 86-81 comeback against Notre Dame, and took it with him to the postgame handshake line.

"I was wondering why you did that, too," Vincent Edwards was asking Swanigan about 15 minutes later, outside the media interview room, after I asked first.

"I didn't want anyone to trip on it," Swanigan told us, smiling in a way that suggested he might be serious, he might not, and either way what does it matter?

That ball, and this game, belonged to him.

Swanigan has been good before — Swanigan has been great before — but never quite this great against an opponent as solid as the No. 21 Fighting Irish. Swanigan had 26 points and 10 rebounds, his eighth double-double in Purdue's 11 games, and a career-high four blocked shots. In a game full of big-time players executing at times at a terrifically high level, Swanigan was the best player on the floor.

Not just on offense. On defense, too. When it mattered most, he was the best player on the floor at both ends of the floor, and when was the last time anyone said that about Caleb Swanigan?

On offense, sure. That's what folks often say about Swanigan, a low-post monster who's just a little too big, a little too quick, a little too explosive for most of the guys trying to defend him. Such was the case on Saturday, when Notre Dame tried to stop him with 6-10, 255-pound Martinas Geben (too slow), and then with 6-5, 225-pound Bonzie Colson (too small).

Nobody was stopping Swanigan (too good).

"Darn if you do, darn if you don't," Notre Dame coach Mike Brey said of the choice Purdue gave his team. "If you're gonna help (defend) on Swanigan, you're gonna give up a 3. (But) he was just crushing us in there."

Swanigan had 13 points on seven shots in the first half and Painter was trying to isolate him to start the second half, and so Notre Dame was helping Geben defend Swanigan. And here came the 3-pointers. Carsen Edwards hit one. Then P.J. Thompson. Vincent Edwards.

Another from Thompson. After going just 2-for-7 on 3-pointers in the first half, Purdue hit four of its first five 3-pointers to start the second half to whittle a 17-point deficit to two.

And now it was time for Swanigan to go to work. He posted Geben for a bucket. Then Colson for a bucket. Then Geben. Then Colson for a three-point play, and now Purdue led 70-67 and never trailed again.

But that's scoring, and what did we say about scoring? Swanigan's going to score, and nobody's going to be surprised. But what happened on defense, well, that's nothing we've seen from Swanigan before.

In 306 minutes entering Saturday, Swanigan had five blocks and two steals. On the season, I'm saying.

In 18 second-half minutes against Notre Dame, he had four blocks and one steal. In one half, I'm saying.

And this is what Swanigan was saying to his teammates as the second half unfolded, and Biggie Swanigan was making like recent Purdue shot-blocker deluxe A.J. Hammons and metaphorically wagging his finger at the Irish when they approached the rim:

"Play solid defense and don't foul them," Swanigan was telling his teammates. "I'll come block it."

In the final five minutes, Swanigan blocked Steve Vasturia at the rim. Next time down the court, Vasturia attacked the rim again; this time, Swanigan pinned the ball against the glass. Two possessions later he stole the ball from Notre Dame's Matt Farrell.

And then with Purdue leading 85-81 and Notre Dame trying to bite into that four-point lead with a 3-pointer, Swanigan left the rim unguarded to defend Colson's 3-pointer — and darned if he didn't block that, too.

"The second half was time to win," Swanigan said, "and that's what I did."

The Boilermakers spoke afterward about how badly they wanted to win this game — because they knew they needed it. Their nonconference schedule featured games with just two no-doubt NCAA tournament teams, Villanova and Louisville, and Purdue lost both of them.

"Going into conference season without this win," Swanigan was hypothesizing later, "we'd have no resume."

They have a resume now. The Boilermakers are 9-2, they are ranked 16th nationally, and they have a victory against a Notre Dame team that is better than its No. 21 ranking would have you believe.

Painter was saying afterward that nonconference wins in November and December can be tricky things, because "with some (vanquished opponents), you don't know how they're going to do. ... With this one, you know."

And this one happened because of Caleb Swanigan, best player on the floor — at both ends of the floor. Who knew?

# Purdue's Isaac Haas playing for sister who has epilepsy

Dana O'Neil | ESPN.com | Nov. 30, 2016

When their son, Isaac, was a baby, Rachel and Danny Haas trekked two hours to an Atlanta-area Target, the only place that carried size 5T clothes with snaps. Isaac wasn't 5; he was barely a toddler. In fact he was still in diapers, but he had outgrown baby sizes, and his parents weren't interested in wrestling their big boy for every diaper change. They needed the snaps.

As their boy grew -- and grew and grew and grew -- Rachel and Danny soon realized that their Alabama home wasn't going to do. So just as the Howards did for Clifford the Big Red Dog, the Haas family retrofitted everything to suit Isaac: The doorways are 7-foot-5, the shower heads loiter somewhere near the ceiling, and Isaac slept in a king-sized bed ... diagonally.

Fast forward to Isaac's freshman year at Purdue. After he suffered through a particularly lousy free-throw performance at a game in Maui, coach Matt Painter carted Isaac off to a small gym to work on his foul shooting. The two returned in time to join the team for a buffet meal. After Isaac left, one of his teammates looked at his coach in awe, "That was the most impressive thing I've ever seen." Perplexed, Painter asked if he meant shooting the extra free throws. "No," his player replied. "He just ate 40 chicken strips. I counted them."

The tales of tall Isaac Haas truly read like tall tales.

And let's get this out of the way, too.

Seven feet, two inches.

Twenty two.

Yes.

Those would be the answers to the three-part question that Isaac hears at every mall, restaurant and airport in America: How tall are you? What size shoe do you wear? Do you play basketball?

So yes, Isaac Haas, all 86 inches and 290 pounds of him, is a big man, like double-take-when-he-walks-in-a-room big.

Except the measure of this man is a lot more than just his height.

"After Erin would have one of her seizures, Isaac would sneak into her room sometimes to comfort her," Rachel Haas said. "I'd find him there, holding her like she was a baby."

SHE WAS THREE months old the first time they realized something wasn't right. By then, by the time the epileptic seizures became obvious, doctors figured Erin had suffered countless infantile spasms that went unnoticed by her parents.

Epilepsy is hardly uncommon -- one in 26 Americans will develop epilepsy or recurring seizures in their lifetime -- but it covers a wide spectrum. Some people can be treated with medications; others need surgery. Erin Haas has what's called intractable epilepsy, which means neither drugs nor the countless brain surgeries she has had over the years can bring her seizures under control.

Isaac didn't understand all of that when his sister was first born. He was 4. He knew only that something wasn't quite right, and his little sister was getting an awful lot of attention, certainly a lot more than he was. He didn't like that very much, either.

When she figured he could at least grasp some of it, Rachel Haas sat Isaac down to explain what was wrong, that Erin wasn't likely to get better, and that the Haas family's new normal would be anything but.

Along with multiple brain surgeries, the most recent in 2012, Erin underwent facial reconstruction necessitated by face-first falls during seizures. Once during dinner she fell so hard onto a hard oak table, the table bounced and moved an entire half inch. Erin jokes she has more stitches than most motocross riders, and for years Rachel feared the bruising on her daughter's forehead would never subside. Before Erin's first surgery, a sudden noise would trigger a seizure, and if Erin expected a noise that didn't come, she'd also have a seizure. Consequently the family's house is quiet and still, the phones all turned to vibrate, the toilet lids made so they don't slam.

All that, and the reality that this would be forever, is what Rachel tried to explain to the boy who loved his baby sister so much that, when she was a few weeks old, he insisted his mom bring her to school for show-and-tell.

"After 30 minutes of me explaining it to him and him crying, he never complained about it again," Rachel said. "It caused him to mature a lot earlier in different ways. He's always silly, in a good kid way, but our entire lives have been stressful situations. He can handle stress like nobody else."

Rather than be jealous of the attention Erin commanded, Isaac decided to be his little sister's champion. Better yet, he would be her hero. Maybe subconsciously at least, Isaac also recognized that by excelling at something, he might swing some of that attention back his way.

So he started to play sports.

Isaac Haas is the kid who looks like a redwood standing in the middle of a hedgerow. So Isaac and basketball were a perfect marriage, perhaps a little too perfect. Understandably he dominated the games and not surprisingly, other kids didn't like that so much. Desperate to find something to make the superior-sized player feel inferior, they zeroed in on his big feet and his big ears.

"Well, he did have big ears," Rachel said. "We used to joke, 'the better to hear you with, my dear.' But we told him if that's all they got, let 'em have it. If the best they have is your ears and feet, you're good to go."

As his game blossomed -- and his head grew into proportion with his ears -- the town bullies didn't have so much to say. Isaac started running with the better summer league teams, attracting college scouts to tiny Hokes Bluff, Alabama (population 4,000). With his recruiting ranking rising and his stats improving (he averaged 18.5 points and 11 rebounds as a high school junior), Isaac originally committed to Wake Forest, choosing the Demon Deacons over UAB, Purdue and a host of other schools. But in the 11th hour he opted not to sign with the Demon Deacons, stunning everyone with his decision to go to Purdue.

Isaac said he liked the school and Painter's reputation for coaching big men, but he also saw the cultural shift as an important challenge. Reared in that small town and happily cocooned by his family, Isaac liked the idea of going away for college and experiencing a place completely different -- even snowy Indiana.

At least that's what he thought he wanted.

"Oh man, I was so homesick," Isaac said. "Getting away from mom's nest was a little harder than I thought."

Rock bottom came one night in the first semester. Isaac called home, telling his mom he didn't think he could stick it out. They talked for nearly an hour, and Rachel thought she had quelled the panic. Except no sooner had Isaac hung up when he called back, saying the same thing.

"I basically told him to suck it up," she said.

WHEN ISAAC ARRIVED in West Lafayette, Indiana, his physical presence was imposing but his stamina not so much. In games, he'd come out of the gates on fire but tire easily. Painter offered much the same advice to his freshman: Suck it up.

In high school, it was so simple. There weren't a whole lot of 7-foot-2 kids walking around, even fewer who were as strong as Isaac. He would barely break a sweat, score a bunch of points, win a game and celebrate with a big pizza. He figured if he got even bigger and stronger, he could follow the same path in college.

"He would make these comments to me and I'd think, are you serious?" Painter said. "He'd say, 'Aw look at me, I'm stacked. I'm up to 315, 320 [pounds]. I had to explain to him that no, you have to lean down to play to the best of your ability."

Out went the late-night runs to Papa John's and the wowing teammates with meals of 40 chicken strips. Over time, Isaac learned to maximize his size and use it to his advantage. Where, for example, others have to use an arm bar to defend an opponent, Haas needs merely to place the palm of one hand on someone's back to have the same effect.

"I've done a better job growing into my body and understanding my body, the conditioning needs, the rebounding and physical aspects you have to go into detail with as a big guy," he said. "It's like coach always says, you don't put regular gas in a Lamborghini. You have to use premium. It's about the right time and work."

As Isaac learned the proper balance, he had a buffer. A.J. Hammons, two years Isaac's senior and only two inches smaller, gobbled up minutes and awards, allowing Isaac to grow into his role on the team.

Hammons finished his eligibility last season, and as the season ended, Painter suggested that perhaps Isaac would like to weigh his NBA draft stock as well.

"His response was, 'Next year is my year,' which I thought was pretty mature on his part," Painter said. "He's been the best backup in the country, but he hasn't started; he hasn't carried that weight. This is his year."

So far it looks that way. Isaac has nearly doubled his production, averaging 16.5 points and 4.8 rebounds per game (9.8 and 3.7 last season).

THE GOAL IS so close now. Like virtually every other player suiting up for a college basketball game, Isaac long has dreamed of being an NBA player. Isaac admits he gets a warm feeling in his stomach when he thinks about it.

His dream stretches beyond simply stepping on an NBA court. He wants to help Erin.

Now 16, Isaac's sister attends the same public high school her big brother did, but she is developmentally delayed and struggles socially. Her social circle consists mostly of her cousins. Her big brother, as he once hoped, is her hero and best friend. Erin loves seeing Isaac on television and rooting for the Boilermakers, but her life has limits. Erin struggles with math, doesn't have the same filters that the rest of us do and because of the severity and frequency of her seizures, won't be able to live alone.

Finding a cure for epilepsy remains elusive. Research is critically underfunded, and the disease, once viewed as a mental health issue or even possession by the devil, is still very much misunderstood. Isaac hopes to change that and dreams of spearheading a foundation that will raise money for research.

"I want to be able to provide for her so she never has to worry about anything ever again," Isaac said. "But I also want to find a cure. My sole purpose, honestly, is to help Erin have the best life she possibly can."

Yes, the tales of tall Isaac Haas are pretty tall tales, but the measure of the man is far greater than how tall he measures.



# **Freshman aims to bring aggressiveness to Purdue**

**Brian Neubert | GoldandBlack.com | Nov. 9, 2016**

Just a couple days into his Purdue career, Carsen Edwards came off a ball screen in a workout, beat Isaac Haas to the rim and dunked in front of the 7-foot-2, 300-pound big man, likely the largest person the Boilermaker freshman had seen in his life to that point, let alone played against.

"I don't know what went through my mind," Edwards said Wednesday, during his first interviews as a member of Purdue's team. "I was just hoopin'. I got off the screen, got to the cup. I jumped and just happened to dunk."

"(Haas) is a great player. Things just happen like that. Everybody gets dunked on. It just happens."

Edwards downplayed the moment, but it was a signal of sorts, a declaration right off the bat of the sort of aggressiveness the rookie guard would bring to his new team, aggressiveness Matt Painter wants him exercising.

The Boilermaker coach told Edwards prior to Purdue's exhibition against Southern Indiana to assert himself.

"He told me to play aggressive and when I do play aggressive I tend to make others around me better too," Edwards said. "He wants me to play aggressive, but remember I still have players around me who can really play, too. Just play my game, honestly, but also play defense. I know I'm not going to have that freedom unless I play defense, that's been made clear."

Purdue's putting Edwards in positions of authority offensively. In the summer, it deviated from its plan to use him as a point guard. Instead, he's playing a shooting guard-type role on offense and may defend the point at times at the same time, as he did in the exhibition.

"I wouldn't say I'm more comfortable at either (position)," Edwards said. "I like the ball in my hands."

"Even if I'm at the 1, I come off ball screens and I prefer to come off ball screens."

Purdue is said to be running more of those, in part due to Edwards' addition.

It stands to be an impactful addition.

Edwards was the Boilermakers' second-leading scorer during an August exhibition trip to Spain. Since his first day on campus, he's looked the part of an immediate contributor to an extent that exceeded even Purdue's expectations.

He will play significant minutes this season, particularly early on as Ryan Cline sits out the first four games of the regular season.

Edwards must develop on defense, where he says details - especially guarding away from the ball - have been an adjustment. And he is learning how to play alongside other highly influential players, particularly Purdue's manpower in the frontcourt - Isaac Haas, Vincent Edwards and Caleb Swanigan.

But as he transitions from high school, the question changed long ago from whether Edwards can contribute, to how much, to how profoundly.

One thing seems certain: He won't back down.

"I just like to play aggressive," he said. "So hopefully I can bring aggression to this team and help my team. That's really all I want to do: Help my team. I can bring physicality. I'm not afraid of anybody."

# Familiar pain behind Purdue's Spike Albrecht

Nathan Baird | Lafayette Journal & Courier | Nov. 8, 2016

Spike Albrecht lay sprawled on the Mackey Arena floor for a moment, mumbled something that cracked up nearby teammates, then gritted his teeth and lifted himself up.

Blue-collar play is a trademark of the Purdue basketball program. Players expect to occasionally hit the deck in pursuit of a loose ball or from physical play in practice.

The other Boilermakers, however, have taken to calling Albrecht the "old man" of the team. Considering he's 24 and coming off two hip surgeries that nearly ended his career, Albrecht understands.

"Every time I go down, I think everyone holds their breath thinking, 'Oh man, this is it,'" said Albrecht, who joined the Boilermakers as a graduate transfer in the offseason. "A lot of times I trip. I stumble, I fall and I do look kind of old when I'm getting up.

"But I'm fine. I'm not too concerned about the injury anymore. I'm just going out and playing freely."

Three days later, Chuck Albrecht watched his youngest son play in Purdue's exhibition game against Southern Indiana. From the Mackey Arena parents' section he sent a group text to family members who couldn't attend.

"Spike's moving really well" — a message of optimism and relief that the pain that plagued the guard's final two seasons at Michigan may be behind him.

When the game ended and Chuck Albrecht stood to leave, the same sharp pain his son once felt fired down the father's leg and up into his lower back.

Basketball has blessed men in the Albrecht family for generations. Chuck's father, Charles "Hook" Albrecht, played briefly at Indiana. Chuck Albrecht played at Vincennes and Purdue Calumet and in men's leagues into his 40s. Spike Albrecht was a freshman Final Four hero and a former co-MVP with the Wolverines.

All were also cursed with a painful genetic condition, eventually diagnosed in Spike Albrecht as a hip impingement. Spike corrected his with surgery. Although it cost him most of last season at Michigan, it's the reason he can now play at Purdue.

Spike Albrecht also had the surgery because he didn't want to one day end up like Chuck, who at age 55 hopes to soon undergo double hip replacement, just as his father did before him.

In the meantime, Chuck Albrecht manages the "terrible, constant pain" while watching his son finish his career on his own terms.

"We watch every game, and we're so thrilled he's out there," Chuck Albrecht said. "To see him play well is just an added bonus."

One doesn't need an X-ray to notice the physical similarities between Spike and Chuck Albrecht. Neither would "pass the eyeball test," to use Spike's phrase, as a college basketball player. Father and son share a smaller frame and similar facial features.

Steven Albrecht said his father and brother bite their nails the same way. They'll send the same response in group-text threads at the same time. They laugh the same way at the same jokes and point at each other while doing it. They're both quick to make friends with strangers in any setting.

"He's a spitting image of his dad," Tammy Albrecht says of her son, who she refers to only by his real first name of Michael. "He plays a lot like Chuck on the court. When something's not going right, he knows where to go next."

Chuck and Tammy met at Gary's Lew Wallace High School, where Chuck's hip problems first flared up. They continued through college. He believes he could more easily play through the pain because, as a junior college and National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics athlete, the demands on his body weren't as great as what Spike faced in the Big Ten Conference.

Chuck Albrecht also managed what his doctors referred to only as "inflammation" with regular cortisone shots. If he knows how many he had, he won't say, confessing only, "It was way too many."

"At the time it took the pain away, but it was probably the worst thing I could have done, because cortisone eats up soft tissue," Chuck Albrecht said. "My hip joints are bone on bone. That's exactly what I didn't want to happen to Spike."

Chuck Albrecht stayed active in backyard sports with his children — sons Steven, Chachi and Spike and daughter Hannah — and played in recreational men's leagues and YMCA pickup games well into adulthood.

Around age 40, the rest of the family noticed him slowing down. He would struggle to walk around the house after games. Tammy said she and Hannah encouraged Chuck to stop playing.

"We've known for a long time our dad's hips are basically nonexistent," Steven Albrecht said.

The family knew Spike inherited his father's hips, as well. The only question was how bad it would be, and how soon it would hit.

'Impressive'

The storybook beginning of Spike Albrecht's Michigan career made its ending even more unfortunate.

Albrecht had only one other scholarship offer — from Appalachian State — when he came out of Northfield Mount Hermon, a Massachusetts prep school. Wolverines coach John Beilein needed another guard for the 2012 class and called another incoming recruit, Glenn Robinson Jr., to ask about his scrappy Amateur Athletic Union teammate. Robinson said Albrecht ran the team without much of a scoring presence in the AAU season, but would put up 30 points in his high school games.

Beilein broke down five of Albrecht's tapes over two days.

"I told my AD, you're either going to fire me or I'm going to look like a genius, but I'm going to bring this kid in," Beilein said.

When Spike Albrecht had 17 points at half-time of the national championship game the following spring, Beilein looked like a genius.

Two years later, when starting point guard Derrick Walton Jr. went down with injury, Spike Albrecht ascended into a central role. He responded with his best season, averaging 7.5 points and 3.9 assists and sharing Michigan's Most Valuable Player award.

While he didn't complain, those close to the program knew Albrecht was toiling in pain — and a little regret.

The twinges of pain Spike Albrecht first felt in high school only worsened under the strain of college competition. Additionally, he suffered from a constant catching sensation in his hip flexor. The X-rays he underwent at the end of his sophomore season revealed the startling extent of the damage.

Chuck Albrecht said the X-ray showed the ball of the femur bone that fit into Spike's hip, round in most people, was oval. It explained why Spike couldn't rotate his hips correctly, either when playing basketball or doing squats in the weight room. At some point in his life, Albrecht's body performed a sort of self-corrective surgery by fracturing the hip.

When Chuck Albrecht asked about doing an MRI, the doctor said he didn't need to see one. He knew the only way Albrecht could move with that damage was with a torn labrum.

"He told me Spike's hip impingement was 'impressive,'" Chuck Albrecht said. "I said, I don't understand what you mean by 'impressive.' He said, 'That's the medical term for severe.'"

Albrecht had a choice — get surgery to repair the torn labrum and hip impingement or play through the pain. His parents wanted him to have the surgery. Chuck said he feared a "Bo Jackson" scenario where his son would suffer permanent damage. But Spike put surgery off, believing he could gut it out through two more seasons.

As he fought his way through that junior season, he second-guessed that decision.

"A couple of times you'd go back and watch film and he damn near falls over because he would get a pinch," said Steven Albrecht, who was working in Ann Arbor, Mich., and living with his brother at the time. "His rotation in his hips was so bad. I've never seen anything like that."

Surgery instead came after Albrecht's junior year. He returned to the court within six months and began realizing his worst fears. He said he wasn't concerned that he couldn't perform as well as before. He worried instead that he would re-injure himself due to his lack of strength and an inability to move laterally.

"I was nowhere near ready to play," Albrecht said.

Albrecht came off the bench in eight games before announcing on Dec. 11 that he was retiring. However, even after returning late in the season to play on the Wolverines' scout team, Albrecht knew he could not return to the court for even a one-second ovation on senior night.

If he did so, Albrecht couldn't have received a medical hardship waiver for the season and played on as a graduate student.

'A lot of rust'

Purdue coach Matt Painter has long admired Albrecht's game. It inspired him in part to recruit P.J. Thompson, another smaller-than-average player known for playing with heart.

Albrecht and the Boilermakers filled mutual needs when he joined the program over the summer. At the time, however, Albrecht had not returned to fully competitive status. When he began working out with Purdue over the summer, Albrecht may have been pain-free, but the physical limitations caused a different kind of pain.

Steven Albrecht knew his brother wasn't himself yet when Purdue freshman Carsen Edwards swiped the ball from him while guarding him full-court. The older brother couldn't remember seeing anyone pick Spike so cleanly.

"I would get so mad when I'd go out there and I know I can play better than I was and I'm not moving like I'd like to," Spike Albrecht said. "That's something I've had to kind of grow up a little bit and have patience with. I get frustrated at times, especially this summer. As we've been moving along I feel I'm making strides in the right direction."

Painter and his staff told Albrecht they didn't want him playing his best basketball in July. They want him for March, where backcourt depth and Albrecht's deep NCAA tournament experience can both bolster a team with high expectations.

"This summer and in Spain he was getting all the rust off," junior guard Dakota Mathias said. "It was a lot of rust, but I think he's good now. He's been playing really well in practice. In the (intrasquad) scrimmage, he was good. He was moving well. A guy like that, with the basketball mind, he has to be able to pass and shoot; he's so key and important to our team."

Albrecht showed he may be ahead of schedule in the exhibition against Southern Indiana. He scored 13 points, making 3 of 4 from 3-point range, with four assists against one turnover in 24 minutes.

Most importantly, he said his body felt fine the next day.

"Everyone asks me, 'Do you feel normal?'" Spike Albrecht said. "I don't know because I haven't felt normal in so long I don't really know what that feels like. I just know I feel a

lot better now than I did when I first got here in June and July.

"I have a feeling I'm going to continue to improve every day and continue to make strides."

Chuck Albrecht, stubborn like his son, won't take pain medication. As a result, he sometimes has trouble sleeping. The elder Albrecht also put off his hip surgery, though not by choice.

He had an operation scheduled for the fall at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago. However, doctors canceled the surgery when he showed an allergic reaction to a necessary anti-inflammatory medication.

So while Chuck Albrecht looks for another surgeon to perform the operation, he'll watch from the Mackey Arena bleachers, in a bit of pain but a lot of joy.

Tammy Albrecht said even with the surgery, her husband wouldn't miss any of his kids' games.

"I was just telling him at the exhibition game, I think I need to go get us some of those back cushions to sit on," Tammy Albrecht said. "He's not going to miss any of his kids' games."

# ***Boilers' Mathias gets defensive***

**Jeff Washburn | Fort Wayne Journal Gazette | Nov. 1, 2016**

Much like 2015 Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year Rapheal Davis, Purdue junior guard Dakota Mathias arrived on campus with an extremely limited knowledge of defense.

But now that Davis, a Fort Wayne native, graduated from Purdue, perimeter shooting specialist Mathias is ready to take the perimeter defensive baton from Davis beginning today when the No. 15 Boilermakers face Southern Indiana in a 7 p.m. exhibition game in Mackey Arena.

Mathias averaged 28 points, 8 rebounds and 6 assists as an Elida (Ohio) High School senior, after which he was selected Ohio Division II Player of the Year and first-team all-state.

But he rarely guarded an opponent's best scorer as a high school player.

"It's a learning experience," Mathias said, "That's one of the reasons my freshman year that I always was frustrated when I didn't shoot the ball well. But I learned that I still can effect the game with my defense and my passing.

"For me, it's about whatever I can do to help the team win. If I'm not scoring, I still can do other things.

"That takes time to learn, especially when you are averaging 25 or 30 points a game in high school."

With Davis and 2016 Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year A.J. Hammons having completed their college eligibility, there are no more defensive safety valves. Defensive rotations are more important than ever for the Boilermakers.

"My freshman year, I didn't know a lot defensively," Mathias said. "In watching Rapheal, he studied the game. He watched film constantly and was such a smart player. I may be limited athletically, especially more than some people, so getting that edge is the key.

"Film study is a huge thing, learning the tendency of (opponents). If you are smarter than them and know what they are going to do, you can stay in front of them. You have to get up on people and cause some chaos."

Mathias, who will start at Davis' former shooting guard spot, averaged 5.5 points and 2.2 rebounds as a sophomore, shooting 40.8 percent from the field, including 38.6 percent from 3-point range (44 of 114). He scored a career-high 17 points twice last season – against Vermont and then against Maryland.

Purdue sophomore forward and Homestead graduate Caleb Swanigan is confident Mathias will fill the perimeter defensive stopper void.

"Dakota is putting the effort into defense, and really, that's all it is," Swanigan said. "He is not as fast as Rapheal, but he is putting the effort in. It comes with a lot of film study and just knowing what the other team is going to do.

"To have that one perimeter defender that you can put on a guy and know he is going to lock him down is really important for a coach."

Mathias will get that chance tonight against a Southern Indiana team that was 19-11 last season and returns three starters who averaged at least 13.2 points a game each.

Screaming Eagles head coach Rodney Watson was a Matt Painter assistant in 2003-04 when the Boilermakers coach was the head coach at Southern Illinois.

"We're not going to be perfect, and we realize that," Mathias said of the exhibition game.

"We just have to be solid and play hard. You can always play hard."

# Purdue's Caleb Swanigan maturing into leader

Nathan Baird | Lafayette Journal & Courier | Oct. 24, 2016

Caleb Swanigan winced a little while watching game film recently with his Purdue basketball teammates.

The footage, only a few months old, seemed much older to Swanigan. The film showed a turnover-prone freshman still adjusting to a higher level of competition. The other Boilermakers even remarked on how young their 6-foot-9, 250-pound power forward looked.

Yet right now, Swanigan describes himself as experiencing a time warp of sorts. The pre-season All-Big Ten Conference selection has come so far since his arrival at Purdue. The approaching season, one he hopes includes his transition from promising prospect to professional, can't get here fast enough.

"It feels like light years ago, when I was playing against Old Dominion and just struggling," Swanigan said at Big Ten Media Day on Thursday. "The season's almost here. It feels close but also feels far at the same time, because it's right there. This is a time when time feels slow."

Swanigan carries himself with a different demeanor than a year ago at this time. More casual, yet more assured.

His teammates say he's come out of his shell — talking more, engaging more socially, even taking to Instagram to roast the entire roster over the summer. Purdue forward Vincent Edwards said it was a matter of Swanigan placing his trust in a group of teammates who had shown themselves worthy of it.

That change in demeanor is one contrast that stood out to the rest of the Boilermakers on that game film. From a gold medal with USA basketball to a Big Ten All-Freshman season to the NBA Draft process, Swanigan has endured a year of growth.

"He's just so mature now," junior point guard P.J. Thompson said last week. "He's really grown up. He's really accepted he had to come back this year and help Purdue win.

"Obviously he wanted to be one and done but he took what the NBA had to say and he came back and he knows what he has to do now in order to get there."

You can hear that sophistication in the way Swanigan discusses his own game. Purdue coach Matt Painter said Swanigan's open mind, from his freshman season experiences through the NBA Combine, set the foundation for an offseason of improvement. Take his perimeter shooting, for instance. Swanigan made 29.2 percent of his 3s last season — 25 percent in Big Ten play. At the time he shrugged off those struggles. Scoring wasn't supposed to be a big part of his game, he said.

Now, Swanigan embraces a reality less obvious in the moment. He was still learning the game, and bad choices led to bad shots.

By the way, multiple Purdue players are talking about Swanigan's perimeter shot as one of his biggest offseason improvements.

"When you watch, you can see why people think certain things about you and see how you look in other people's eyes, because when you're playing you can't see it that way," Swanigan said. "Some of the stuff is obvious, like why didn't I make that play, why didn't I make that play? You can't get it back, so you just have to grow from it."

The man they call "Biggie" continues to drift farther from the pudgy frame that spurred that nickname. Graduate transfer Spike Albrecht didn't play against Swanigan at Michigan last season, but he watched him, and he's noticed a slimmer, more fit athlete. Isaac Haas, Purdue's 7-foot-2 center, said his companion in the post is "faster, more explosive."

While he may cringe a bit when looking back at certain games, Swanigan unquestionably set a high baseline as a freshman. His led the Big Ten in rebounding with 8.3 per game — the sixth-best total for a league freshman since 1993-94.

"He's so big, and he's so skilled," Ohio State forward Keita Bates-Diop said. "He knows how to play the game and he knows how to use his body really well. He's a big guy, so he gets you this way and he'll go the other way, knock you off-balance."

Swanigan said he wasn't necessarily trying to fit in as a freshman. With Rapheal Davis and A.J. Hammons established in their roles, he tried to keep his head down and do his job.

Now, Swanigan said he's ready to be the kind of player Purdue can lean on as those two longstanding pillars of the program have departed.

Swanigan didn't lack confidence when he arrived in West Lafayette. Subtly, however, this year does represent a change.

"This year, I'm sure," Swanigan said last week. "That's the difference."

# No secret – Purdue’s Isaac Haas has ‘big’ upside

Pete DiPrimio | Fort Wayne News-Sentinel | Oct. 21, 2016

Isaac Haas has a secret.

Can you keep it?

Should you keep it?

We have asked Purdue’s junior center what his biggest improvements will be in what looms as a pivotal Gold-and-Black season.

He flashes a big smile, which is what you’d expect from a guy 7-2 and 290 pounds.

“I can’t tell you that now. Don’t you want to see it on the court?”

How about a hint?

“I think you’ll see it in the turnovers,” he says. “I feel more confident in making smart decisions with the ball, not only on offense, but on defense.

“I’m looking forward to showing I won’t make the same mistake even when I’m tired, that I will make the cognitive decisions I have to make.”

If he does, Purdue could put substance to its top-15 preseason ranking and Haas could add all-conference to his resume.

“We’ll see when the season starts,” forward Caleb Swanigan says. “It’s all different when the lights come on, but he’s shown in practice to have really improved. If he keeps that up, it’s going to be huge for us.”

Efficiency is Haas’s best friend. Nobody wants to capitalize on that more than coach Matt Painter.

“He’s so different than anybody else in (the Big Ten). He has so much cargo. It’s a different deal.”

Haas radiates potential. He is one of 20 players to make the watch list for the Kareem Abdul-Jabbar Award, given annually to the nation’s best center. In four postseason games last spring he scored 38 points in 47 minutes while making 16-of-23 shots.

Last year Haas led the Big Ten in points per 40 minutes, at 27.4. He started the first 15 games and averaged 11.4 points and 5.3, and that was with facing a quick hook because eventual Big Ten defensive player of the year A.J. Hammons was waiting his turn.

Hammons is gone to the NBA (a Dallas Mavericks rookie) and Haas has the Boiler center spotlight to himself. Painter says he hopes to play Haas 20 to 25 minutes a game.

“That’s where I’d like to see him, but he determines that. He’s the one with the answer.” Painter pauses for a smile.

“I’m a big fan of playing good players. You play the best players, but they have to handle it.”

Haas aims to show he can handle it, and it starts with improved fitness.

“It’s hard to play those kind of minutes, but I’m not going to discredit myself. I’ve been working really hard. I’ve been conditioning all the time. I believe I’m in the best shape of my life. I’m ready to get out there and see what I’ve got.”

So are his teammates.

“His endurance has always been a problem,” forward Vince Edwards says, “but he’s done a good job of putting in extra work.

“The more we can have him on the court, the more effective we will be as a team. We need his size.”

Haas’s stamina is just as much mind as it is body.

“It’s more about being disciplined when he’s fatigued,” Painter says. “If he can’t show that discipline, then as a coach you don’t want to wait for him to get in those bad moments and then pull him out. You pull him out before he gets to those moments, which can lead to bad shots or turnovers or missed defensive assignments. Get him a breather and get him back in the game.

“I’d rather him keep things simple when he’s fatigued so he can play through it.”

How fit is Haas? Two years ago, he ran a 6:30 mile as part of Purdue’s fitness testing. This year it was 6:14.

“Those 16 seconds don’t seem that much,” he says, “but when you’re at a sprint for a full mile at 7-2 and 300 pounds, that’s a lot to move. I condition a lot on my own. I run hills every weekend. I get on the high-resistance elliptical machine every morning. That’s a normal thing I do, then I have practice and lift weights. I make sure I watch what I eat, and eat the right stuff.”

Adds Painter: “He has a push to him. His mile time was really good.”

Haas epitomizes improvement through hard work. On free throw shooting, he went from 54.7 percent as a freshman to 71.4 percent last year. He cut down his fouling from 73 to 58, and his turnovers from 54 to 39 while basically averaging the same minutes per game. He can’t compare to Hammons in shot blocking, but he does have 52 in his career, which should dramatically increase with more minutes. A sign of that could come during Saturday’s annual Fan Day practice and scrimmage at Mackey Arena.

Haas didn’t enter the NBA draft, as Swanigan and Edwards did. He likely will next spring.

“I knew I wasn’t ready yet,” he says. “I knew what I had to work on because I had a long talk with Coach Painter. I asked him what I needed to improve, and he told me. I’ve worked on that ever since. I’ve tried to work on my weakness and turn them into strengths. We’ll see this season.”

And that’s no secret.

# The legend of Spike Albrecht continues at Purdue

Brandon Carney | The Michigan Daily | Oct. 20, 2016

It's been 1,292 days since Spike Albrecht cemented himself into Michigan basketball lore with a 17-point first-half performance in the 2013 National Championship Game.

It seems hard to believe that after all the time has passed since that legendary night in Atlanta, the 23-year-old is gearing up for yet another season of college basketball. But an even more incredible sight will be Albrecht in a Purdue uniform rather than the Wolverine one he donned for the previous four years.

Albrecht was granted a release from Michigan in late March after coming to a decision with Michigan coach John Beilein that there were more ample opportunities for him to find regular playing time elsewhere.

Under the NCAA's graduate transfer rule, Albrecht was eligible to play immediately without having to sit out a year, essentially making him a free agent. After reportedly considering schools such as Indiana, Wichita State, Texas A&M and Syracuse, the 5-foot-11 guard landed in West Lafayette, just an hour's drive south of his hometown of Crown Point, Ind.

It wasn't a hard sell for Purdue coach Matt Painter to convince Albrecht to join the Boilermakers. With only one point guard on the roster, Painter could offer Albrecht the playing time he desired.

"I think we needed him," Painter said at last week's Big Ten basketball media day. "We had one point guard in PJ Thompson, who we felt like could grow into a point guard, but right now we felt like he was more of a scorer. So we needed two good point guards. Obviously, (Albrecht) is familiar with us playing in the Big Ten. What you'd normally sell to somebody, he already knew about us. He knew our reputation. He knew our program. He had respect for our program."

Since the announcement of his decision in May, Albrecht has been working with the Purdue staff to make strides toward full health. When the Boilermakers traveled to Spain to play four games over the summer, Albrecht saw his first minutes of competitive basketball since a hip injury last December prematurely ended his senior season with Michigan.

Painter still doesn't think Albrecht is back to 100 percent, but has seen improvement since the trip to Spain.

"He's been a lot better in practice now than he had been in practice in the summer," Painter said. "He's had a lot of rest, and it took him some time to get going. We lift a lot, and I think that was an adjustment for him. We're not trying to get him to a magic level, we're just trying to get him healthy and feel good about himself."

While it remains to be seen if Albrecht will be healthy enough to make an impact on the court when Purdue opens its season Nov. 11, he's already helped Painter establish a winning mindset in a young Boilermaker squad.

"He has a calming influence," Painter said of Albrecht. "He's confident in his abilities. He has a lot of experience. He's been through adversity. But he's about winning, and you can't have enough guys that are about that."

It may seem at this point that Albrecht and Purdue form a perfect match, but some controversy over the inter-conference move and graduate transfer policy still lingers.

Albrecht is the second player in as many years who has left Michigan to play his final year of eligibility elsewhere in the Big Ten, following Max Bielfeldt's move to Indiana in 2015.

The NCAA's graduate transfer rule is highly scrutinized by many coaches, including Beilein and Painter, for creating a separate market for immediately eligible transfers that essentially makes seniors with a remaining year of eligibility free agents.

"I don't like the rule, but I don't make the rules. So I just abide by them," Painter said. "I can't change the rule, but if they put me in charge, I would. I don't think there's anything wrong with (fifth-year transfers) leaving, but I think they should sit a year like anybody else. It just makes it free agency. A lot of people look at us differently because we keep doing it. But the market sets itself. I don't set the market. I don't make the rules, but I'm going to do everything in my power within the rules to help Purdue."

Painter has taken advantage of the policy, bringing in three players in three years to add depth to his squad. This time, the Purdue coach further capitalized on the rule when Beilein made the decision to lift restrictions that would have stopped Albrecht from going to another Big Ten school.

When asked why he chose to do so, Beilein made it very clear that, to him, Albrecht isn't just another player choosing to walk out the door.

"There was a lot of uncertainty last year about his health and how much (Albrecht) wanted to play with (freshman guard) Xavier (Simpson) coming in and (senior guard) Derrick (Walton) coming back," Beilein said. "You just got to go and make a call on that. You can't waffle on that. Spike and I had a lot of discussion on that. We basically said, 'Ok, we don't like anything about this, but it's the right thing to do for both programs right now. Especially for Spike.'"

Beilein's admiration for Albrecht created a difficult situation for the Michigan coach. Losing someone as experienced as Albrecht to a conference foe could hurt the Wolverines in Big Ten play. But few players have earned as much respect from Beilein over his three-plus decades of coaching as Albrecht has, and he wanted nothing but the best for the guard no matter what decision he made.

When Painter was recruiting Albrecht, he saw the difficulty the Michigan graduate would face putting on a uniform for any other team.

That only made him want Albrecht more.

"The number one thing that was appealing to me about Spike was the respect he had for Michigan and for Coach Beilein," Painter said. "He wanted to make sure that he was professional and handled his business correctly and did things the right way here. That to me stood out, because a lot of times when guys are moving on, they don't care. He really cared, and it was important to him that everybody at Michigan knew. He stated, 'I wouldn't be in this position if it weren't for the opportunity Michigan gave to me.'"

Albrecht will return to Ann Arbor with the Boilermakers on Feb. 25, Michigan's Senior Day. And just like Michigan's seniors, he too will have a chance to write his final chapter as a Michigan basketball legend that day.

# **Purdue basketball goals start with this -- 'Finish'**

**Pete DiPrimio | Fort Wayne News-Sentinel | Oct. 11, 2016**

Don't think for a moment that the Purdue Boilermakers have forgotten, that they don't dwell on what was lost.

Blowing a double-digit lead to a big underdog in a NCAA basketball tourney opener lingers like a first heartbreak, which isn't necessarily bad when you yearn for championship achievement.

"Our motto is to finish," forward Vince Edwards says. "It's just that simple. We have to finish."

For now, they have to start, with the next step coming via Thursday's Big Ten media day in Washington D.C., the first-time site of next March's conference tourney as the league pushes to expand its East Coast brand.

"To lose in the first round, to put yourself in a position to get a good seed like we did, especially last year, and lose in the first round, that hurt," junior guard P.J. Thompson says. "We thought we learned from our freshman year when it happened, but it happened again."

The disaster that was last March's double-overtime loss to Arkansas Little Rock (losing a 14-point lead in the final five minutes of regulation) which followed the previous season's opening loss to Cincinnati won't be repeated, the Boilers say.

Why?

For starters, Purdue has the backcourt to handle the full-court-pressure heat as it didn't the past two flame-out years.

Thompson is back and seemingly more solid than ever. So are veteran guards Dakota Mathias and Ryan Cline. High-scoring freshman combo guard Carsen Edwards is new, as is Michigan senior transfer Spike Albrecht, once a Final Four hero, and now, thanks to a pair of healthy hips, determined to deliver a grand finale.

So when teams press Purdue, as they will, disaster won't follow, Thompson says.

"Adding Carsen with his speed and his ability to blow by people, and then Spike's craftiness. He's been through it. That will help. And then with me, Dakota and Ryan, I feel we'll be better suited for presses. I don't think it will be that big of a problem for us."

All the guards have strong three-point-shooting upsides, as does Edwards and fellow forward Caleb Swanigan, a preseason All-Big Ten pick after averaging 10.2 points and a Big Ten-leading 8.3 rebounds as a freshman. As Cline says, "If one player isn't having a good shooting night, the other two to three guards will pick him up."

"I feel our shooting last year wasn't nearly as good as it will be this year. Being able to have those threats on the perimeter will really help us."

Albrecht is an intriguing addition. He basically lost all of last season because of hip problems, but seems fully healthy and in sync with a Purdue system far different from Michigan's.

"I feel comfortable," he says. "I had all summer and the (August) Spain trip and individual workouts to adjust."

"It's been a smooth transition. It's a lot different than Michigan, but I'm picking it up pretty fast. The defensive concepts are different. Offensively, Michigan was mostly ball screen, but here it's much more motion. I won't give away Coach (Matt) Painter's secrets, but there is definitely a difference."

He's handled it well, Cline says.

"He's a very smart player. He picks up on things really fast."

Albrecht likes what the Boilers have to offer. They project as a top-20 team and a Big Ten title favorite.

"We've got a lot of talent," he says, "but talent alone won't get us there. There are a lot of talented teams around the country. We have to work hard and get better every day. I think the ceiling for this team is very high."

"We want to set a tone for the preseason. We have some lofty goals, and it starts now."



# **Purdue freshman Edwards loves to score, doesn't back down**

**Nathan Baird | Lafayette Journal & Courier | Oct. 10, 2016**

Carsen Edwards proved his athleticism to his new Purdue teammates the first time he took a sliver of space in the defense and launched himself toward the rim.

That assertive gesture also told the Boilermakers what they needed to know about Edwards' approach. The freshman guard from Texas came in with a hard-headed swagger.

That edge serves him well as he adapts to the Purdue culture and the demands and difficulty of college basketball.

"He can sometimes get down on himself if things don't go right," junior point guard P.J. Thompson said. "But he's growing up — maybe faster than he might have wanted to in college, because he's going to play a big role on our team this year. I'm proud of the way he's handled himself so far. He's getting better and better."

Purdue coach Matt Painter thought Edwards could bring a needed scoring punch to the point guard spot. Yet Edwards proved so dynamic offensively — on full display during the Boilermakers' exhibition trip to Spain — that he's now working as a 2 guard.

"He loves to score," Painter said. "I mean, he loves to score."

Someday, Painter said, Edwards may evolve into a lead guard. With the Boilermakers' exhibition opener three weeks away, Painter wants growth in the finer points of the 6-foot, 190-pound freshman's game.

"His improvements and what he has to work on is just adjusting to a system, adjusting to a structure, adjusting to major college basketball outside of scoring," Painter said. "How to run an offense and knowing what's a good shot, what's not a good shot. When to go, when not to go. Our defensive system — knowing the details of it and playing hard."

"He is a guy that's very talented, and we want to be able to give him some freedom because of that talent."

Edwards, per Painter's longstanding protocol, cannot talk to the media until after playing his first game. His teammates have raved about the freshman's performance since his arrival over the summer.

Initially it was Edwards' pure speed, complemented by consistency and range from the perimeter, that impressed the other Boilermakers. As they got to know him better, they noticed the kind of mentality necessary for Edwards to make an immediate impact with those skills.

"He doesn't back down from anyone," said Thompson, who feels Edwards fits the Purdue mold of underrated players out to prove themselves.

"... He fits the Purdue culture really well. He's adapted great and he's a heck of a basketball player. He's just working on staying positive, staying in the moment. Never get too high; don't get too low. It's a long season."

Caleb Swanigan stood in Edwards' shoes only one year ago. Painter joked on more than one occasion that Swanigan likely had grown tired of hearing the coach yell his name in practice for various corrections.

Swanigan said it took him until the final four or five games to grasp the lesson he said Edwards must learn early.

"You're not alone. The coaches are trying to help you," Swanigan said. "When you get taken out of the game, you don't have to take it so personally. They're just trying to win the game."

"If you're helping the team win, they're not going to take you out of the game, and that's what I had to figure out last year."

Not only is Edwards not alone, he can follow the advice and example of a handful of veteran guards.

At both Michigan and Purdue, Spike Albrecht has watched coaches get on freshmen early in an attempt to set a lasting tone. The graduate transfer has also seen what happens when players respond to that challenge.

"I would tell him about my experiences with Trey Burke as a freshman, and how he would go into every drill trying to kill you," Albrecht said of the 2013 National Player of the Year at Michigan, now with the Utah Jazz.

"That's how I think Carsen should be. He's getting there, but I think he's still got room to improve, and I push him every day to continue to be relentless and work really hard."

# **Edwards embraces basketball fun and pride**

**Pete DiPrimio | Fort Wayne News-Sentinel | Sept. 28, 2016**

Sometimes guys have to let off a little steam after another intense basketball workout leading into what looks for Purdue as a Big Ten title contending season.

So Boilers recently launched shots from all over Mackey Arena to mix fun with all the work.

"We get creative and get real competitive," junior forward Vince Edwards said. "Guys were trying half-court shots.

"The team is close. Somebody shot a half court shot, and the next thing you know, we're trying to to outdo each other. You go into the stands and somebody (hits) one from there. It's just about having fun."

Fun is among the attributes the Boilers hope to hone, starting with Saturday's official start of practice. The 6-8 Edwards figures to be at the forefront of that. His versatility and toughness already has landed him in the school record book. No other Boiler has ever totaled 675 points, 325 rebounds and 175 assists after his sophomore season.

Only one other active player nationally has done that -- Oregon's Dillon Brooks.

Edwards has led Purdue in assists in each of his first two seasons. Last year he averaged 11.3 points and 5.4 rebounds, and made a team-leading 46 three-pointers.

Edwards expects more from himself this season.

"I know a lot more. I picked up a lot more knowledge. I know tendencies now. This is my third (college) year, and if you don't learn anything by the time you get to your third year, then what were you doing your first two years?"

Improving his defense is a top priority. Edwards hopes to fill the shut-down-the-perimeter void created by Rapheal Davis's graduation.

"It's about taking the initiative and going hard, especially on the defensive end," Edwards said. "With Rapheal gone, our top wing defender, it's picking up that load. He did a great job for us. I have to step up on that.

"You have to take pride in defense. You have to want to lock your man down and not be the reason why they won the game. And you have to play help defense, also.

"In high school, I got away with a lot. I was 6-8, athletic. There wasn't much defense. They tried to keep me off the scorer. I was help side and tried to block everything. That's not me here."

Improving includes watching plenty of opponent film, something that Davis, a former South Side standout, excelled at.

"Rapheal did a great job of that the last few years," Edwards said. "You can know what they're going to do. He always used the iPad on the road. That's one thing I have to pick up. He was really successful with it."

Beyond that, Edwards said, it's finding consistency.

"I'm in spurts. When I'm down in a stance and ready and do all the little things, I can be good at defending. If I slack off, and let a good shooter get that one step and I'm behind, then I'm not that good.

"I know my tendencies. (Head coach Matt Painter) preaches them all the time. When I'm down and ready, I can be a good defender. It's just keeping my confidence up on the offensive end, and staying versatile. Don't limit myself."

Edwards had more of a power forward role as a freshman, but last year, with the arrival of forward Caleb Swanigan and the development of center Isaac Haas, he moved to small forward, and even some guard. He's much better suited for that.

"When I came in as a freshmen, I came in to play the role Coach Painter wanted me to. That year he wanted me to be the 4. We didn't have Biggie (Swanigan) and other guys to do it. He told me to fill in that role. That's what I did.

"I always felt I could move to the wing and guard perimeter players. I knew it would take some time. I wasn't going to come in right away and be great.

"I had some games when I was good, some when I wasn't. I'm not impressed by anything I did last year.

"I'm trying to make strides in everything I do, whether it's athletically or getting stronger, improving my shot or getting better on defense."

# **Purdue sharpshooters Mathias, Cline bring outside threat**

**Mike DeFabo | CNHI Sports Indiana | September 23, 2016**

It started with a half-court shot.

The Purdue basketball team was in the midst of a photo shoot when some players began shooting around on the new floor at Mackey Arena. Dakota Mathias hit a half-court shot. Vince Edwards one upped him by sinking one underhand.

Things escalated quickly, and before long Mathias climbed eight rows deep into the bleachers. Swish.

"One of the balls rolled over, and I saw P.J. (Thompson) throw it from the stands," Mathias said. "He had come close so I went up there and knocked it down."

When the season begins, the junior sharpshooter is looking to show off that range, only he's likely to keep it on the court. The 6-foot-4 guard has already proven his ability to hit the outside shot, knocking down 38.6 percent (44-of-114) from 3-point range last year.

Perhaps his biggest game came in a win over No. 10-ranked Maryland, when Mathias matched a career-high with 17 points. After the game, all-time great 3-point shooter Reggie Miller tweeted, "There are special POWERS in that 31 jersey Dakota Mathias of Purdue, keep shooting dat rock my friend."

Mathias, who grew up a fan of Miller, wears the No. 31 because of the former Indiana Pacer.

"He can get his shot off in different ways, and when he gets hot, he can get going. He can hit about three or four in a row," Edwards said. "I think the Maryland game was a perfect example. He showed it on one of the biggest stages when we needed it."

This season, the Boilermakers will again boast a formidable front court, even with A.J. Hammons now in the NBA. Sophomore Caleb Swanigan very well might join Hammons in the NBA next year and is likely to be the focal-point of the offense. Meanwhile, center Isaac Haas was one of the most efficient players in the country last year and is looking to extend that production over longer stretches.

The strength inside should open up opportunities for outside shooters like Mathias and Ryan Cline to make an impact.

"It could be good for us, especially from a perimeter standpoint," Cline said. "Everyone is going to be so focused on those big guys. I feel like me and a couple other guys can knock down some shots."

Last season, coach Matt Painter gave Cline the option of redshirting or playing his freshman year. Cline elected to play and found his role as a 3-point shooter off the bench. He made 42-of-109 3-pointers, tied with Robbie Hummel for fourth-most as a freshman in school history.

Like Mathias, Cline can get hot in spurts. Against Pitt, for example, he made four 3-pointers in six minutes to turn a one-point deficit into an 11-point lead.

"The experience side of it is what helped me as a player," Cline said. "Last year, I played in some pretty big times and some pretty big games. Just them having confidence in me really means a lot to me. When they had confidence in me, trust me, I had confidence in myself."

Painter expects the offense to be improved from last season, and the two long-range shooters are certainly part of that. When they are on the court together, it presents a unique challenge for defenses and helps open up the entire offense.

"You have to respect their shooting ability and their ability to space the floor," Edwards said. "That just opens up driving lines as well as teams can't double down on our size as much. If you don't respect them on the outside, they're going to make them pay."

# For Purdue's Caleb Swanigan, big jump starts with winning

Pete DiPrimio | Fort Wayne News-Sentinel | September 23, 2016

In the end, Caleb Swanigan just couldn't do it.

Octopus remains on his list of things not yet tried.

Still, last month's trip to Spain left Purdue's 6-9 sophomore forward with a sense of the familiar as well as adventure.

"Going out with teammates, being in a different county and having new experiences, is always fun," he says.

"The food wasn't bad. You can get a lot of familiar stuff. It wasn't like it was off the wall."

As for trying octopus (a popular Spanish food) for the first time in his life, Swanigan says, "Definitely not."

Beyond that, the 10-day trip had a business side that could lead to a Boiler season to remember. With three returning starters, and two others who started at least five games for a 26-9 team, Purdue projects as a top-25 squad and a Big Ten favorite along with defending champ Indiana and Michigan State.

"It was about being with my teammates and building the chemistry heading into the season," Swanigan says.

The former Indiana Mr. Basketball out of Homestead High School projects as a potential All-America after an impressive freshman year that culminated with him declaring for the NBA draft before ultimately deciding to return for another season.

"Averaging 10 points and 8 rebounds in the Big Ten as a freshman is pretty good," coach Matt Painter says. "He wants more. That's what I like about him. I think he'll make a big jump and be a better player as a sophomore."

Swanigan showed signs of elite status in Spain. In four games, he averaged 18.5 points and 10.8 rebounds while shooting 59.1 percent from the field.

Granted, this came against teams that remind no one of, say, Duke, but still, could he put up similar numbers this season?

Don't count it out, especially with All-Big Ten center and conference defensive player of the year A.J. Hammons now with the NBA's Dallas Mavericks.

"I feel like I'll score more just because of losing A.J.," Swanigan says. "Those points have to come from somewhere."

"My focus is just winning. If it's me putting the ball in the basket, or whatever it is, I'm willing to do it."

Few players rebound better than Swanigan, who has always had a knack for pounding the boards. Last year he led the Big Ten in rebounding, averaging 8.3. A Boilermaker hasn't done that in all games since, perhaps, Joe Barry Carroll in 1980 (official records only go back to 1990).

Swanigan's eight double-doubles (a school freshman record) included a 25-point, 11-rebound effort against Butler. He added 27 points and eight rebounds against Wisconsin. He averaged 10.2 points.

By the end of last season, Swanigan had gotten early turnover issues under control. Still, his 80 turnovers against 61 assists needs to improve. He was better in Spain, with 11 assists against seven turnovers.

The other key area is shooting accuracy. Swanigan was at 46.1 percent last season, which would have been better if he'd been more consistent from three-point range (21-for-72, 29.2 percent). He was in selected doses, going 3-for-4 against Butler and 2-for-2 against Michigan.

Swanigan continues to put in a lot of time on that part of his game. Look for a significant jump there, as well.

Even without the 7-foot Hammons, Purdue will have imposing inside size with Swanigan and 7-2 Isaac Haas. Swanigan will switch to center when Haas is out.

"There won't be much difference in how we play other than I'm 6-9 and not 7-2," Swanigan says. "The offense will be the same. It might be a little faster. I'm not concerned with how we'll look because we play so well together."

After two years behind Hammons, Haas could emerge as one of the Big Ten's best players. He led the conference in scoring per 40 minutes, at 27.4 points.

A big key -- can he play enough minutes to do so? That means avoiding foul trouble and improving his fitness. Haas has never averaged more than 14.6 minutes a game in college. Painter hopes to get that to at least 25.

"He has to just continue to improve his game," Swanigan says. "Trying to get it better a little bit by little bit."

"It's a constant process, learning how to play longer. It's hard to pick up more minutes when you haven't done it before. It's a long process."

"It might not be by the first game. It might be the Big Ten season before he can do it. It's something we have to be patient with." Swanigan will help push Haas.

"In practice, it's challenging him. Make him finish. Foul him. Try to be the best teammate I can by going hard and make him go hard to compete against me."

# Forget Purdue's P.J. Thompson at your own risk

Pete DiPrimio | Fort Wayne News-Sentinel | August 15, 2016

For all the basketball buzz surrounding new Purdue guards Carsen Edwards and Spike Albrecht, don't forget P.J. Thompson.

Case in point -- the Spain trip.

Thompson's 19-point, six-assist effort during Monday's 117-66 win over the Euro Basketball Academy showcased why the junior will be a major contributor in what looms as a Big Ten title-contending season.

Thompson averaged 10.8 points as the Boilers went 4-0 in the trip. He led the team in assists (4.3) and in three-point shooting (11-for-16, 68.8 percent).

Yes, three-point shooting, huge for a guy who, as a freshman, couldn't break 29 percent beyond the arc.

Granted, this didn't come against Big Ten caliber competition, but it reflected Thompson's continued improvement.

"P.J. did a good job in getting us going, knocking down some shots and making some plays," coach Matt Painter said during post-game radio comments.

Given Thompson set a school record for the best assist-to-turnover ratio last season (he had 93 assists against 23 turnovers), he likely won't be overshadowed by Edwards or Albrecht.

Still, Edwards was impressive in his first action for Purdue. He averaged 16.3 points and was 9-for-16 from three-point range in the four games.

Leading the way was sophomore forward Caleb Swanigan, who averaged 18.5 points and 10.8 rebounds.

Purdue's average victory margin was 26.3 points, and each game got progressively more lopsided.

Those numbers were fine, but they weren't Painter's main goal for the trip.

"More than anything, it's the time we spent practicing and being together for 10 days in Spain," he said. "When you come over here, it's hard to get great competition this time of year. But getting the practices and spending time together will hopefully help us grow and have good team chemistry."

The Boilers return to campus on Wednesday. Classes start next Monday.

"When school starts you get back in your routine," Painter said. "You throw the academics into it, and then it's us getting back into training and getting ready for the season. We need to focus on getting better individually and together."

Albrecht, meanwhile, had low-key impact in his Purdue debut after transferring from Michigan. He's coming back from surgery to both hips that sidelined him for most of last season, and even caused him to retire from basketball for a while.

But he recovered well enough to resume his career. He came off the bench in Spain and totaled 12 assists against five turnovers. He added six steals and four points.

"The hips feel great," he said. "I'm still trying to get into basketball shape. It's nice to be playing again."

Adjusting to Purdue's style after four years at Michigan remains a work in progress.

"It's a lot different," Albrecht said. "The style of play is completely different than what I was used to at Michigan, I have to get used to that. Defensively picking the ball up full court wears on you, so I have to continue to get in good shape."

As a college veteran, he has an edge as far as picking up Purdue's defensive approach.

"I know a lot of the principles. When I was a freshman at Michigan, I didn't know what the heck I was doing. I feel I'm a little bit ahead of the freshmen here, at least I should be, but things are still different. I'm learning on the fly."

Meanwhile, Painter hopes for a big jump from 6-6 junior forward Basil Smotherman. Faced with limited playing time last season because of Purdue's forward depth, he redshirted.

As a sophomore he had some big moments, totaling 17 points, five rebounds, three assists and three steals in 15 minutes against Rutgers.

In a two-game stretch against Iowa and Indiana, he was 9-for-10 from the field for 21 points, 10 rebounds, three steals and two blocks.

In Spain he averaged 5.0 points and 2.5 rebounds while shooting 47.1 percent from the field.

"He's basically that combo forward who can play the three (small forward) or the four (power forward)," Painter said. "We can have a bigger wing with him or Vince (Edwards). There will be a lot of competition there, but it will be a better opportunity for him to compete."

"(Redshirting) can be humbling. You have to sit out. You have to wait. We had a logjam, and now there is still a lot of competition there, but it's a better situation for him. We'll see. He has to have a great fall, reestablish himself and fight for his spot."

Early preseason polls have Purdue as a top-20 team, with a high of No. 13 by USA Today.

"I'm very comfortable where we are with our team," Painter said. "When you look at the pieces that we have, the size that we have, we have one of the best frontlines in the country."

"I like our experience. I like our guard play. We missed quickness last year. We were big and then ballhandling we had a little bit of it. We have improved in that area with addition of Carsen Edwards and Spike. Basil redshirting gives us that speed and athleticism. (Forward) Jacquil Taylor gives us somebody who has worked very hard, and has a chance to help us."

# Caleb Swanigan more 'comfortable' heading into Year 2 at Purdue

Brian Neubert | GoldandBlack.com | August 1, 2016

Caleb Swanigan has never lacked confidence.

Ever.

Now, though, he might be even more so, benefiting from the confidence that comes with the comfort that comes with experience.

Asked about the difference in his fellow forward today as opposed to last season, Vince Edwards quickly says, "He's comfortable."

"He's always been a confident person, but now that he's got that (experience) you can tell it's taken his game somewhere else that it needed to be," Edwards said. "His confidence level and his patience with the ball, he's making good plays, good decisions. It's helped him a lot. I think it'll show and he'll keep improving as a player as the season goes on."

For Swanigan, even though he came to Purdue with more high-level competitive basketball experience than just about any freshman in college basketball, experience from last season - and maybe the NBA draft preparation process - does matter.

"Comfort's everything for every player," Swanigan said last week after one of Purdue's practices in advance of next week's exhibition trip to Spain. "That's why you practice tough shots sometimes: Because you want to make things that are hard comfortable, so when it comes game time, it might look difficult, but really, it's comfortable."

Comfort could directly impact one of Swanigan's foremost areas for improvement: Turnovers.

Though he came a long way through the course of the season on that front, he did fall victim on occasion to spells of over-aggressiveness, probably not uncommon for young players of his ability and track record of productivity and, well, dominance.

In that sense, the term "slower" might bear a good deal of relevance to Swanigan this season.

"The game's a lot slower your second year," Swanigan said. "That's what older players can always benefit from. Being through it before, you have that extra confidence you didn't have before."

Caleb Swanigan may benefit considerably from experience he gained as a freshman last season.

Experience for Swanigan came not just in playing college games, as it would for most any other freshman, but just as significantly in that he played those games in a previously unfamiliar role.

After being almost entirely a back-to-the-basket interior player in high school, AAU and with USA Basketball, Swanigan transitioned to facing the basket more on offense as a traditional power forward.

(Additionally, "comfort" should be a common theme in Purdue's frontcourt next season, since Edwards also is now settled into a different role than he played prior.)

In that sense, the most difficult parts of that transition are over, and will come this season with more opportunities for Swanigan to play center now that A.J. Hammons is gone. The combination of the added minutes that should come at the 5 combined with the favorable matchups he may sometimes encounter there should by themselves boost his productivity.

And by any objective measure his productivity as a freshman made his season one of the finest debuts ever at Purdue.

Now, even more can be reasonably expected.

Whether he cares to admit it or not, there was pressure on Swanigan last season, the pressure of sky-high expectations from those looking on and the pressure to learn a higher level of play and a new role on the fly.

The pressure's not been lifted, Swanigan says.

"The pressure's even more," he said. "We've lost two years in a row in the first round of the NCAA championship. The pressure isn't on me; the pressure's on Purdue to succeed and take that next step as a program."

# Purdue coach sees Caleb Swanigan making 'big jump'

Pete DiPrimio | Fort Wayne News-Sentinel | June 6, 2016

Caleb Swanigan had Matt Painter sweating. The Purdue coach didn't know whether the stand-out forward would return to school or stay in the NBA draft until the May 25 deadline day.

The wait was worth it. Swanigan came back and, as a result, the Boilers loom as major Big Ten contenders.

"I thought it could have gone either way," Painter says. "Ultimately, he wants to get into the first round and I don't think that was going to happen this year. He was going to be a second-round pick. He wanted to start in a better position. Coming back made more sense to him and try again next year."

The 6-9 Swanigan had an impressive college debut season, averaging 10.2 points and a team-leading 8.3 rebounds to make the Big Ten all-freshman team.

"Averaging 10 and 8 in the Big Ten as a freshman is pretty good," Painter says. "He wants more. That's what I like about him."

"I think he'll make a big jump and be a better player as a sophomore."

Still, Swanigan's transition from high school center to college power forward wasn't easy. He had a team-high 90 turnovers and battled inconsistent outside shooting despite devoting a lot of extra time to it. Plus, he faced heavy expectations as a McDonald's All-America and Indiana Mr. Basketball from Homestead. He helped the Spartans win the state championship as a senior. He also played on two international gold medal winning teams.

For those who saw failure in Swanigan not reaching NBA first-round status, Painter has a message:

Get a clue.

"Everybody talks about how great (former Boiler All-America) Glenn Robinson was, but he didn't play at Purdue his freshman year (because of academic ineligibility)," he says, "and then his sophomore year Purdue was 9-9 in the Big Ten. A lot of people want it right away. It's such a microwave society. That's not the way it is. The game of basketball will humble you. It doesn't come right away."

"All the experiences he's had, in winning the state title, and winning two gold medals, in being on the Big Ten all freshman team ... it's a huge accomplishment."

Especially when you consider Swanigan turned 19 in April. He only played three years of high school ball before graduating early.

"Think about it," Painter says. "How many players have you covered who lost 130 pounds like he did, play just three years in high school, then changes positions when they get to college. (His Purdue freshman year) really should have been his senior year in high school. That's not easy to do all of that at the same time."

"Those are positives because he had to work through those things. He had to go through those (struggles) to become the player he will be."

Purdue forward Vincent Edwards also declared for the draft and returned. Unlike Swanigan, Edwards did not get invited to the NBA's Chicago Combine, but did have multiple workouts with NBA teams.

Add those two with returning center Isaac Haas and you once again have one of the nation's best frontcourt.

"It's an impactful decision for our program, to have an all-conference-type player come back in Biggie (Swanigan)," Painter says. "The same is true for Vince. He's one of the top players in our league. Caleb is one of the top players in our league. Haas is one of the top players in our league."

"Then to have guys back like (guards) Dakota Mathias, Ryan Cline and P.J. Thompson. They can use the experience they have to make a big jump. They're capable of doing that. They need to do that."

What will be the biggest benefit from Swanigan and Edwards entering the draft?

"One of the things that doesn't come out sometimes is they're going to have to play a role in the NBA if they're going to make it," Painter says. "It's like that in college -- you're going to have to play a role to help your team win."

"Sometimes when you say that to a young person, they cringe because they want to look at it where they're not a role player. But if they're going to make it at that (NBA) level with that kind of athleticism, size and talent, they're going to fit into that organization and play that role."

"I think these workouts and a lot of the discussions they have with those people, they start to understand that. So now when you're asking them to do things in college, before they don't see the purpose of it. I think this actually will help them see the purpose. How well do you execute offensively? How well do you carry out your assignment? How well do you do the little things and the intangibles? Those things are important to NBA people because they lead to winning. But it's also really important at any level."

"I think that message gets a little bit more clear for guys who go through this process."

As far as what advice Painter gave Swanigan and Edwards about the draft, he says, "I try to be the college coach and not the expert on the NBA, because I'm not. It's important for them to get the proper feedback, and they got it. You need to make that decision with your family on where you are."

"Going to the NBA is your dream. If you're able to start with a guaranteed contract, I understand that. When that's up for grabs and you don't know for sure, and don't have your college degree, then that's why I think it makes sense to go back to school. With those guys, they both were in that ballpark where there weren't guarantees."

"What's encouraging for both of them is that it can become a guarantee. They will be getting evaluated at Purdue next year by (NBA) people, and those people will take a little more notice of them because they put their name in. It's like, Hey, he put his name in last year, he probably will put his name in next year."

"The experience is a positive. They know what's going on. They also are more experienced. They can have a better year and help the team win. Learning how to play roles and the importance of little things can help those guys advance."

Purdue, which went 26-9 last season, projects as a top-20 squad next year. Painter has boosted the backcourt by bringing in heralded Texas freshman Carsen Edwards and Michigan senior transfer Spike Albrecht. With three scholarships available, he says he still might add one more player.

As for when that could happen, consider the Boilers didn't sign guard Jon Octeus until the fall of 2014.

"I'm very comfortable where we are with our team right now," Painter says, "but things are a lot different in today's basketball world than they were, say, even five years ago because of the fifth-year transfers and just more transfers in general. So that door stays open longer than it did before."

"We're waiting on one person right now that we could add. We're not actively recruiting anybody for this upcoming year outside of one guy."