

## Kenny Thompson Talking Zach Edey And The NBA





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Columnist

### Edey's Selection and a Ranking of Purdue Draft Picks by Round

Imagine if ESPN existed in 1968 and had the rights to the NBA Draft as the so-called worldwide leader in sports does today.

How long would it have taken to analyze 214 players, from future Hall of Famer Elvin Hayes to Willie Horton of Delaware, over 21 rounds – the length of that year's draft for a 14-team NBA?

Let's be conservative and estimate an average of 5 minutes per pick. That's 1,070 minutes, not counting the introduction to the draft telecast and one or two-minute blocks of commercials as was common in late 1960s network television. At four minutes of commercials per hour, the 1968 NBA Draft would have taken nearly 20 hours of network time.

It shouldn't come as a surprise that when the first televised NBA Draft took place in 1980 on USA Network, the selection process had been slashed to 10 rounds. The current two-round format was adopted in 1989, and ESPN gained the TV rights in 2003.

Two-time National Player of the Year Zach Edey became Purdue's 11th first-round draft pick Wednesday night when the Memphis Grizzlies drafted the Toronto native ninth overall. The pick shocked ESPN draft host Malika Andrews, who uttered "wow" moments after commissioner Adam Silver announced the pick.

The Athletic's Mike Vorkunov wrote that the pick "was met with shock and groans here in Brooklyn."



Photo courtesy of Purdue Athletics

### Zach Edey gets the phone call from the Grizzlies and became a first round pick in the NBA Draft

More positive in his analysis was someone who has seen Edey play several times.

"His footwork and his mobility have improved so much over the last several years," ESPN college basketball analyst Jay Bilas said. "I think his game is going to translate to the NBA. Is he going to be a guy that's going to be a stretch big? No. But he's going to change your rotation when he's put into the game because of his size."

ESPN reporter Adrian Wojnarowski said that once the Portland Trail Blazers took Connecticut center Donovan Clingan at No. 7, Memphis shifted its focus to Edey.

"Zach Kleiman, general manager of Memphis, was determined he was going to get a center in this lottery," Wojnarowski said. "Zach Edey heads to Memphis where he'll have an opportunity on a team returning that can be a 50-55 win regular season team to be their starting center."

CBSSports.com writer Adam Finkelstein also sees Memphis as a good fit for Edey.

"This is a pick where beauty is in the eye of the beholder," Finkelstein wrote. "Nobody cares what Edey did in college in terms of Edey's decorated trophy case. But they do care about your rate of improvement – and Edey improved every single year. He's massive, so big that it can actually hurt him on defense because he will be attacked on ball screens. But he's massive, he's a worker and he's improving every single day. And he fits: Edey is the best screener in the draft, and

Ja Morant loves running a pick-and-roll."

Purdue joins Michigan and Ohio State to have a freshman class in the last 35 years with two top-10 NBA Draft picks. The Wolverines' Chris Webber went first in 1993 and Juwan Howard fifth a year later; Lawrence North and Ohio State teammates Greg Oden (1st) and Mike Conley (4th) in 2007 and the Boilermakers' Jaden Ivey (5th in 2022) and Edey.

The Boilermakers have had 52 players selected since Ed Ehlers went third overall to the Boston Celtics in 1947. That year, there were 10 NBA teams in existence, including the now defunct Pittsburgh Ironmen, Toronto Huskies, Providence Steamrollers, St. Louis Bombers, Chicago Stags, Washington Capitols and Baltimore Bullets (not the same Bullets that eventually became the Washington Wizards). Only the Celtics and New York Knicks remain in their original cities from 1947. The Philadelphia Warriors are now in San Francisco as the Golden State Warriors.

Here's my rankings of the best Boilermakers drafted by round.

#### 1 – Glenn Robinson

Taken first overall by the Milwaukee Bucks, Robinson signed a 10-year, \$68 million contract. The "Big Dog" fulfilled the first eight years in Milwaukee and only averaged fewer than 20 points a game one time in that span. That was an injury-filled 1998-99 season and Robinson still managed to average 18.4 points over 47 games.

Robinson earned his lone NBA championship ring during his final season

playing for the 2005 San Antonio Spurs.

Honorable mention: Joe Barry Carroll, Herm Gilliam.

#### 2 – Terry Dischinger

Being the eighth overall pick in any NBA Draft is special, but in 1962 it was a seven-team league. The most unstable franchise in the NBA, the Chicago Zephyrs, took Dischinger with the first pick of Round 2.

Amazingly, Dischinger was voted NBA Rookie of the Year while just playing weekends and holidays so he could finish his Chemical Engineering degree. But those 57 games were productive with Dischinger averaging 25.5 points, 8.0 rebounds and 3.1 assists for a sorry franchise coached by Jack McMahon and Bobby Leonard that went 25-55. The next season, the Zephyrs became the Baltimore Bullets.

Dischinger was an NBA All-Star three consecutive seasons before a two-year hitch in the U.S. Army slowed his career momentum.

Honorable mention: Brian Cardinal, Carl Landry, E'Twaun Moore.

#### 3 – Frank Kendrick

Kendrick played his lone NBA season for the Golden State Warriors, which won the 1975 title. Kendrick averaged 3.3 points per game in 24 games.

#### 4 – Jerry Sichting

Drafted by Golden State in 1979, Sichting never played for the Warriors. The Martinsville native ended up playing five seasons for the Indiana Pacers, for whom he enjoyed a career-best season in 1983-84 at 11.5 points and 5.7 assists a game.

Sichting was traded to the Boston Celtics, whom he helped win the 1986 NBA title. Sichting averaged 6.9 points during his 10-year pro career.

Honorable mention: Wilson Eison, Jim Rowinski.

#### 5 – Bob Ford

The All-Big Ten forward and member of the early 1970s "F-Troop" at Purdue alongside George Faerber and William Franklin was chosen by the New York Knicks but opted for the ABA's Memphis Tams. Ford played nine games for the Tams before being released.

Honorable mention: Larry Weatherford, Bruce Parkinson

#### 6 – Tom Scheffler

Seven years after he was drafted by the Indiana Pacers, the 6-11 center played his lone NBA season in 1984-85 with the Portland Trail Blazers. His younger brother, Steve, would play seven seasons.

Honorable mention: John Garrett, Brian Walker

#### 7 – William Franklin

An undersized Big Ten center at 6-7, Franklin was declared ineligible late in his senior season (1971-72) when admitting he signed with agent Gary Donna. Franklin was drafted by Golden State but signed with his home state Virginia Squires of the ABA. Franklin played one season in Virginia and two with the San Antonio Spurs.

#### 8 – Willie Merriweather

Drafted by the St. Louis Hawks in 1959, Merriweather bypassed the NBA to become a science teacher.

#### 9 – Mike Searce

The Indiana Pacers drafted “Scooby” Searce 192nd overall in 1982, but the popular Boilermaker did not make the team.

#### 10 – No Boilermaker selected

#### 11 – George Grams

The first 7-footer in Big Ten history went 96th overall to the Los Angeles Lakers in 1966. Grams’ chances at a pro career were adversely affected by Charcot-Marie-Tooth syndrome, a neuromuscular disease he didn’t realize he had until 1984.

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### NBA Starting to Realize Zach Edey Just Might Provide Impact

Days after the Memphis Grizzlies made Zach Edey a potential multimillionaire, the former Purdue center made a good first impression in the NBA Summer League.

Edey forced overtime on a “miracle redirect of an intentionally missed free throw,” according to NBA.com and finished with 14 points, 15 rebounds and four blocked shots in the 97-95 loss to the Utah Jazz on Monday night.

“(Edey) showed that his size should provide an impact from the tip,” according to the NBA.com game report.

The Memphis Commercial-Appeal re-

ported that the 7-4 Edey, the No. 9 pick in last month’s NBA Draft, received a four-year contract worth up to \$26.2 million. The newspaper added that the duration and dollar amount was based on his slot in the first round.

Edey’s unofficial NBA debut lived up to the statement the two-time National Player of the Year made during his introduction to the Grizzlies’ fan base.

“It can be a tough thing when people want to take down your game when you play a certain way,” Edey said of those who may wonder if his impact will transition to the NBA. “At the end of the day, teams put stock into rebounding. Teams put stock into having strength in the paint and all that stuff. But I know who I am. I know what I’m good at, what I can stick to and hang my hat on. There are areas I will improve at this level. The team that wants me wants me for who I am.”

Grizzlies general manager Zach Kleiman plans to make opponents adjust to Edey’s game and not make the 7-4 center play a style that doesn’t fit his skills.

“I’m not going to say Zach’s career is going to be this or that, but we believe he’s going to be a meaningful, impactful player for our group who can help us achieve high-end outcomes,” Kleiman told Grizzlies.com. “Zach is incredibly unique in that you have to deal with him. From a size standpoint, a physicality standpoint, that’s something other teams are going to have to grapple with. Let them figure out how to deal with us. That is something that really intrigued us.”

Before Edey’s first pro game, a couple of ESPN analysts predicted his rookie season statistics.

Kevin Pelton guessed Edey would average 20 minutes, 12 points and 7.5 rebounds per game.

“I ... think Edey might be able to handle more minutes than that, considering the heavy workload he successfully had at Purdue,” Jeremy Woo wrote. “Memphis has the perfect partner for him in Jaren

Jackson Jr., who excels protecting the paint and covering ground on the weak side and should be able to cushion Edey defensively.”

A third ESPN reporter, Jonathan Givony, foresees Edey working well with Memphis’ star player.

“Edey is a dream target for an electric playmaking guard such as Ja Morant to pair with in pick-and-roll actions,” Givony writes. “He sets wide, bruising screens at 7-foot-5, 298 pounds, and is an outstanding target rolling to the paint and catching everything thrown his way with his huge, magnetic hands and 7-foot-11 wingspan.

“He’ll have to continue to improve his conditioning to keep up in transition, but he’ll be ready to make an immediate impact on both ends of the floor. He could even contend for Rookie of the Year honors with the sheer productivity he’s bound to amass next season.”

Edey may have to use part of his NBA money to buy a trophy case large enough for the honors he has received the past two seasons. The latest is repeating as the Big Ten’s Jesse Owens Male Athlete of the Year.

Iowa’s Caitlin Clark also repeated as the female winner.

Edey joins Ohio State wrestler Kyle Snyder (2017, 2018) as the only repeat winners in the 43-year history of the award. Glenn Robinson (1994) and David Boudia (2011) are the other Boilermaker winners of the Jesse Owens award.

Taking their shot

Edey isn’t the only former Boilermaker in the NBA Summer League.

Lance Jones and Dakota Mathias are part of the Indiana Pacers squad that opens play Friday against the Brooklyn Nets.

Jones averaged 11.7 points and a team-high 80 3-pointers to help the Boilermakers reach the national championship game.

Mathias is seeking a return to the NBA,

having played in 14 games with Philadelphia (2020-21) and Memphis (2021-22).

#### Check your radar

I’m not sure how college football’s defensive freshman of the year can be regarded as “an under-the-radar player who will go a long way in determining his team’s success in 2024” but that’s how The Athletic views Purdue safety Dillon Thieneman.

“Can (he) do everything for Purdue on defense this year?,” reporter Scott Dochterman wrote. “Thieneman was the FWAA (Football Writers Association of America) Defensive Freshman of the Year after intercepting six passes and collecting 74 solo stops, leading Purdue in tackles eight times. But teams picked apart the Boilermakers in the transfer portal, especially on defense. To have the same impact this fall, Thieneman will need to improve exponentially.”

The Walter Camp Football Foundation is guessing that will be the case, selecting Thieneman to its Preseason All-America second team. The former Westfield standout also has been selected a preseason All-American by Athlon Sports and Phil Steele.

Making much more sense to be called an “X factor” is new Indiana quarterback Kurtis Rourke.

“The Ohio quarterback transfer was a three-year starter and former MAC Offensive Player of the Year,” recruiting analyst Ari Wasserman writes. “Some fans don’t get excited about MAC transfers, but the quarterback position is the most important in college football, and MACtion watchers know Rourke can spin it. First-year head coach Curt Cignetti’s offensive background should help Rourke transition to a team that has a host of new additions at the skill positions.”

*Kenny Thompson is the former sports editor for the Lafayette Journal & Courier and an award-winning journalist. He has covered Purdue athletics for many years.*

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