

# Braden Smith and Purdue outlast Alabama on the road, 87-80

*Written by Sean Murawski // SM Sports*

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TUSCALOOSA, AL— Braden Smith, perhaps a bit peeved by the narratives to begin this year's college basketball season, was out to prove a point on Thursday night.

Smith was named the AP Preseason National Player of the Year— an honor that SM Sports also awarded the point guard. The four year starter, who is likely under six feet tall if records were honest, has morphed himself into the game's best point guard and perhaps the game's best player.

Still, the conversation quickly shifted to every possible freshman sensation that has starred in the early stages of this season: Cameron Boozer, Caleb Wilson, AJ Dybantsa, Darryn Peterson, Koa Peat, Mikel Brown Jr., and several more that are right on their heels. On top of that, despite not losing in week one, AP voters narrowly voted Houston as the nation's top team in the week two poll, moving Purdue down to #2.

On Thursday, Smith and co. proved their worth as the country's best team. They defeated a surging Alabama team ranked 13th in the SM 25 Hard, who just defeated St. John's at MSG last weekend. Smith (29 pts, 7 rebs, 4 ast) led the way as all veteran leaders should. Smith hit five three pointers and was dishing out phenomenal slip passes all night. Most notably, big man and returning All-American Trey Kaufman-Renn was on the receiving end of those slips.

Kaufman-Renn, who was playing his first game of the year after missing the first two to injury, did not look like he had lost a step. He scored 19 points on 16 field goal attempts, while also reeling in 15 rebounds. Both Smith and Kaufman-Renn played 34 minutes, which is a very typical recipe for success: when both of those guys are on the court, it is difficult for Matt Painter's team to lose.

However, Alabama made it all too close, particularly in the first half. Through the first 11 minutes, there were seven lead changes and three ties. Aden Holloway (21 pts, 3 ast) was the catalyst for the Tide. He drilled four first half three pointers and played 35 minutes. Labaron Philon Jr. was less stellar than expected, with 11 points on 5-14 shooting.

Alabama pushed the pace, as they always do. The Tide are the third fastest team in America, and for a while, Purdue matched them. However, once settled, the Boilermakers were able to get into their halfcourt sets and disrupt Bama, both in the paint and on the boards. Braden Smith, far and away the shortest player on the court, grabbed seven rebounds— three more than anyone on Alabama. Kaufman-Renn was supported down low by Oscar Cluff, who looked sharp in his big game debut at the power conference level. Daniel Jacobsen also contributed with nine points and five rebounds.

This Purdue team feels a lot more energetic and fierce than the teams of the past years. Even with this same core and Zach Edey in the mix, the team never felt this dynamic. Kaufman-Renn went face to face with Taylor Bol Bowen after a scrappy out of bounds play. Braden Smith was particularly hyped up after every three pointer. Perhaps Purdue felt a bit disrespected this week, and wanted to show out.

Alabama's offense has always been this way under Nate Oats: electric, high octane, and fast-paced. However, questions over its efficiency will always loom, especially in big games like this where down the stretch sets often ended in hoisted threes from deep. Alabama shot 44 three pointers, sinking 16 of them. Pretty much everyone in their rotation can sling it, but when the shots don't fall, Alabama feels a little light in other aspects. They do not have a dominant big man, as seen in this game where Purdue was just too much to handle down low.

In the final moments, after the buzzer sounded, Braden Smith rejoiced with his teammates, exclaiming "We run this s\*\*\*!" while celebrating in a huddle. No matter what AP polls or voters might say, this game reaffirmed they they do indeed run this s\*\*\* at the moment. So far, they look like the team best built to run it in April as well— but it is a long season.

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