

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 15, 2025

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

Michigan State Spartans

Tom Izzo

Jase Richardson

Jeremy Fears Jr.

Postgame Press Conference

Wisconsin - 77, Michigan State - 74

TOM IZZO: Well, I'm disappointed, and I think it shows you how little things can make a difference. We preach that all the time, but sometimes it doesn't go through.

But I'm proud of these guys, especially these two. Coop played awfully well, did a lot of things that we asked him to do. I think Jeremy is playing his best basketball in the last three, four games. Jase has had an eight, ten game run where he's playing phenomenal basketball.

You've got to give some credit to Wisconsin. Tonje was -- he definitely, along with Smith, were the best players in the league at that time. He played like one of them today. I thought we did a pretty good job on him most of the way, and he cut loose a little bit, and that's what great players do.

And yet I thought our game plan, I thought we -- you know, they didn't get 19 3s. How many did they get, eight, nine? And they got a couple of those late.

We just made some mistakes in some key runs, and that was the difference in the game. Both teams had seven turnovers. That's a helluva basketball game. We outrebounded them, shot pretty much similar, shot pretty well from the line, so did they.

So probably a helluva basketball game except for the couple things that happened that probably cost us.

Q. For both of you guys, obviously strength in numbers has been a thing, but foul trouble still matters, right? I'm wondering, are there lessons today -- Jase, for you -- like when you take fouls, when you



get them, what's worth it in terms of risk/reward?

JASE RICHARDSON: I think I've just got to be smarter about when I'm aggressive on the ball. I came in the second half with those two fouls, and I picked up two early ones and had three, so I had to sit for a little bit. I just know I've got to come in and play smarter with that.

But I should know that I've got guys coming off the bench that are going to work for four or five or those six minutes that they're on, so I've got to rely on my teammates.

JEREMY FEARS JR.: I'd definitely say just got to be smarter. Obviously I picked up that second one at the end of the first, and that hurts because we kind of was rolling a little. It wasn't a big momentum shifter, but just going out is hurting my team. So I've just got to be smarter on that end and stay out of foul trouble.

Q. I guess moving forward, is there ever any silver lining from going into the big tournament with a loss? Maybe it's a bit more clear, especially the little things, what you guys need to do better?

JEREMY FEARS JR.: No, Coach hit on it last night, just the little things, you know, they win and lose your games. He talked about it a lot.

I think down the stretch we didn't do what we needed to to win the game, and it was the little things, like the small possessions. It just matters the most, especially around this time.

JASE RICHARDSON: I agree with Jeremy. We touched on it when we got back into the locker room today. We didn't get rebounds. Those late rebounds, we didn't have late floaters, and a couple missed free throws here and there. So those little things lost us the game tonight.

Q. For both you guys, young players, what did you learn today that might help you in the next three weeks?

JASE RICHARDSON: We got to come out in the second half with energy. I think Wisconsin came out with more



energy in the second half and then went on that run and put us down seven, almost ten, and we had to start clawing back at it. So we've got to come out in the second half ready to play.

JEREMY FEARS JR: I would definitely say stay out of foul trouble obviously, but really just maintaining ourselves and just doing everything that you can do to be successful. I don't think we put ourselves in the right position today, and obviously it wasn't an outcome we liked.

Now we know we've got to emphasize that even more.

Q. For both of you, what have you learned in this back-to-back games on back-to-back nights style since the last time we saw that in Maui?

JEREMY FEARS JR: Really that I think it works for our advantage. Strength in numbers, we've got a lot of guys, we're 10, 12 deep, and with us, you never know whose night it might be. So I think it kind of works in our favor. It's going to be a good game every night.

JASE RICHARDSON: I agree. I think Maui really helped us for a tournament like this. We kind of learned just how to recover from games like this. You're playing one game, and then you're back at it in the morning for the next one.

So kind of just learning that recovery process. Once again, we play 10, 11 guys. So we know, if we get tired, there's going to be five new people that come in that are going to play hard for the next six, seven minutes.

Q. Obviously right now there's a lot of disappointment you guys are feeling. How do you take that disappointment now going into this next week to turn that into motivation and focus to get ready for March Madness?

JASE RICHARDSON: We can dwell on the game for right now, but once we leave this arena, we've got to move on. We know March Madness is going to be difficult. Everyone wants to win the national title. We know that even all the teams that get the automatic bids, the at-large bids, everybody's going to try to play hard. So we know we've got to move on and get ready.

JEREMY FEARS JR: Really this is a big tournament. Obviously we wanted to win this Big Ten tournament championship, but it just shows that the little stuff matters.

Going into next week when you play in March Madness, every possession matters no matter who you're playing, what team you're playing. You can't overlook no opponent.

TOM IZZO: Let me say this, that was impressive for me because, like Jase, he gets that first foul, that wasn't his fault. That was a weird call. I'm not saying it wasn't a foul, but he goes to hand it off, you know.

I like the fact that some of these guys are making no excuses. We've got to make sure everybody does.

Go ahead. I'm sorry.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Carson and Jaxon and their foul trouble. They're big guys who have to protect the rim, so they're going to pick up fouls from time to time. Just sort of that seemed to, when those two were out late in the first half -- and Jaxon was off to a great start on the glass and had to sit. Just how essential it is going forward that those guys figure out a way to at least be able to have one of them on the court?

TOM IZZO: Yeah, I'm not saying it was all their fault, my fault. I don't know whose fault it is. I'm going to have to watch the film to see. We need Jaxon, and we need Carson.

Szymon struggled today. I know it's his first big tournament. I think that hurt a little bit. We dropped some balls, we had some right down there where we could have scored. We were in foul trouble. The foul trouble came from, if one guy breaks down when you play Wisconsin, you're going to be in trouble because the way they run their offense, it's very good. Greg has done a good job.

I think you can't have breakdowns. We have a breakdown, and other guys have to make up. That's how we were caught out of position a few times with that.

In general, they shot 40 percent, we shot -- they shot 42, we shot 40. We were good enough defensively most of the time except when Tonje went off, and we did not match that.

Q. Tom, 13 days ago when you played Wisconsin, Jaxon played 30 minutes and he had 16 rebounds. He didn't have 16 rebounds today, he had 16 minutes in the game. Even for a team as deep as yours, what does it mean when you get a key guy with an early foul and everything changes?

TOM IZZO: Well, we've got to adjust to it, and that is one of our strength that we have, but those guys have got to play well. A couple of those subs, those big subs just didn't play as well. We've got to get them better. That's my job.

It definitely hurt us. Foul trouble hurt us. Jase gets fouled

10 seconds into the game. But in general, we've got to be a little smarter, our bigs on some of that, and yet, hey, they battled. Wisconsin's big too. Wisconsin's good. That's a good basketball team.

When we played them the first time -- and we went through this a couple times -- we thought they were the best team that we had seen coming into the game. Then we thought Maryland was the most talented team coming into the game.

So you know what it says? There's a lot of damn good teams in this league. I get a kick out of how they talk about eight teams getting in, 13 another league. I don't think we ever get enough respect in this league, if you ask me. I'm not politically trying to set a stage for the people.

But you go through this league and travel, like we travel, some of those teams from out West -- I mean, Indiana, Ohio State, they played a lot of I guess their Quad 1 wins, whatever the hell that means. Let's get the analytics in. It really upset me.

But I think this is a very demanding league, and I think we've proven because our back loaded schedule was brutal, and we didn't have many days to prepare. Which means did it catch up with us because we didn't do a good enough job with some of the little things that we got away with? Or if you had four days to prepare and things like that, you'd maybe do it.

So I told my staff we've got to do a better job too. Don't worry about the players. Let's worry about what we can control, and then we'll worry about what they can control.

Q. The thing I would just ask you, Coach, at this point in the year, what are the kind of things that you can still learn from this team, and how do you use those things that maybe you're still learning to make those tweaks and adjustments to be ready for next week?

TOM IZZO: I think today there was a lot of things to learn. Like the last two weeks I've been talking a lot about free-throw shooting, you know. Everybody's got a different philosophy. Most people are afraid to deal with the white elephant in the room. I never have been.

Oh, you don't want to put too much pressure on the kid. Oh, you don't want to make him nervous about his shot. That's just not who I am. I've been harping a little bit on getting in and getting extra free-throw shooting. I think guys felt a little comfortable, and we went from an 82 percent shooting, the last five games we shot about 70. One or two free throws today might make the difference in the game.

So I talked about playing 40 minutes in the pregame speech. I talked about last night, I explained, had my buddy Mariucci there explain when Tom Izzo missed a free throw that would have sent us to the quarterfinals, and 50 years later I'm still using it as a pregame speech. That's the effect things can really have on you if you really care.

I talked about some guys that didn't cut it at the free-throw line, and we lost to a team that went to the Final Four. Those are the little things that we talk about.

It makes me sad because it's kind of like cancer, where you never really appreciate it and how horrible it can be until it happens to you or someone close to you. What happens to preventative management? What happens to listen to the doctor that tells you don't smoke or whatever the issue would be?

I think I really hit on that with our players last night and today. Does it mean a little more because we got away with a bunch of wins? I hope not. I think that's the hardest part about the changing coaching is it's almost illegal to be as demanding, but I did a better job this year. Not quite good enough.

Q. You kind of touched on it a moment ago, but obviously when wins are being stacked up, things can kind of slip through the cracks. Did you feel like the little things that went wrong today were just kind of a buildup and they were kind of due to come, or did you feel that just today they just didn't execute?

TOM IZZO: No. I guess when I talk, I'm a little frustrated now too because I wanted to win this thing. But first and foremost, Wisconsin deserves a lot of credit. Greg Gard has done an unbelievable job with that team. He changed the whole team.

He added one guy or a guy here or there, but that's a lot of home grown guys I've seen for a lot of years. I'm sick of some of those guys, but I love them. That's an easy team for me to pull for.

So first of all, they won the game. We could have done some things to give ourselves a better chance, and you can't make mistakes that cost you. If they're physical mistakes, missing a free throw or things like that, you have to live with that. I did. But if they're mistakes that are controllable, then you have to address them and make people understand why it's so important.

So fouls, you know, what are we going to do? Tell a guy not to foul? You think anybody out there is trying to foul? Miss a free throw, you think any guy out there wants to

miss a free throw or a lay-up?

It's just a never-ending battle where I've heard a lot of people in the media, I've heard a lot of parents over my 30 years, I've heard a lot of players, you're never happy. You're damn right. I don't plan on being happy until we accomplish what I think Michigan State University should accomplish.

I guess number one on the list, I've got to do a better job, and I mean that from the bottom of my heart. So there will be a staff meeting tonight, and we'll talk about it while it's fresh.

That's another thing that I think, everybody wants a cooling off period. Why? Our locker room is open. 30 years, the minute the game's over, locker room is open. If they can't handle the heat, then they shouldn't be in the kitchen, right? Even you media people that I don't like half the time, I let you in because I think that's all part of the deal. Just like if I make mistakes, that's part of the deal. I got to get better, they got to get better. We will get better.

But we did not quit. We did come back. We played a helluva team right to the end. It had to be a great game for TV with seven turnovers for each team or some missed shots because both teams guarded. They've got a damn good coach, and I think they'll go a long ways in that tournament in a week.

I'll be pulling for every single Big Ten team that's in it, and I hope we get more than eight because I think to go through this gauntlet is hell when you play that many games and travel that many miles.

I think there's some good teams out there that I hear are on the bubble that, when I get out of this profession, I'm going to get on one of them committees because the analytics are going to be out the door. The eye test is going to -- I'm going to go to a game, sit there and watch the eye test. The eye test, there's some good teams. There's one that -- I mean, Indiana came in our place and beat the hell out of us. So it will be interesting.

But the tournament was great. The people in Indianapolis, second to none. People down here are unbelievable. I've been here through Final Fours, through Elite Eights, through Big Ten tournaments, and it is, I think, the best place in the whole country. So I appreciate that.

Officiating wasn't bad. Can't even complain. I don't know, that last one looked question mark. Somebody told me it was clean, but I didn't -- we lost the game before that, so why should I be mad at them for things we did wrong earlier?

There's some good teams left. I think you guys will have a good time watching them. So thanks.

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