

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Louisville vs Michigan State

Saturday, March 21, 2026

Buffalo, New York, USA

KeyBank Center

**Michigan State Spartans**

**Coach Tom Izzo**

**Jeremy Fears Jr.**

**Coen Carr**

**Trey Fort**

Media Conference

Michigan State 77, Louisville 69

**TOM IZZO:** This is tear-jerking for me because I'm watching guys grow in front of me like it's supposed to happen. Jeremy has grown up so much this year. They has had a miserable year for what he was expecting and for what we were expecting. And instead of quitting, instead of doing when the going gets tough, nowadays everybody gets out of dodge, he's stuck with it.

These two guys hung with him, and he's had a big tournament so far. And Coen Carr played like the player we've all been waiting for. I think it was an incredible day for you, Coen, because he wasn't just good offensively, but he was really, really, really good defensively, and they have some guys you have to guard.

And I'll be honest with you, Conwell is a guy that we put him on, and we put him on him for a reason, and you can say, he got 21 points, he got a couple of them late, Coen Carr did an incredible job on him. Jeremy did his job.

We made some mistakes. We turned the damn ball over too much. What did we end up with, 15? That's on all of us, including me. I should have called a time-out when Jeremy was trapped. So that one was on me. So the good news is you're in good company. We all screwed up a little bit.

To be honest with you, you guys, what you've done for me, bringing back a feeling of the right way to do it, you guys battled all year, you hung together all year, and we get to



go to Washington, D.C., again and go back to the Sweet 16 where this program belongs.

**Q. Jeremy, what did you think of the way Coen played today and through this weekend on both ends of the floor?**

**JEREMY FEARS JR.:** Great. That was the Coen we seen all summer, the Coen coming in. It was a little up and down, obviously, throughout this whole year. He had some really good games, and then he had some where he was okay.

But Coen showed himself. He's been putting in time on his free throws, his shooting. His defense was something that me and him talked about, like in order for our team and us to take another step, that we needed to take our defense to another level.

And I think today he answered the bell. Obviously they have some tough players and they made some tough shots, but Coen was everywhere. To be that big, 6'6", 225 and moving like that, you can't find it anywhere else.

**Q. Coen, your thoughts on Jeremy, the assist record he set and how much he helped you have this scoring day?**

**COEN CARR:** Yeah, today he did a great job getting downhill off them screens. Once he gets downhill, he's pretty hard to stop, whether he's shooting that pull-up or whether he's finding guys. I feel like our bigs were setting good screens. And once he got downhill, Jeremy is a tough player to guard.

**Q. Coen, first career double-double. When you're able to play at this level on this stage, what does that mean to you?**

**COEN CARR:** It means a lot. Just to be in March Madness, one of the greatest stages on earth, and to have a game like this, I just credit it to my coaches, my teammates, just for always believing in me. They want me to go out there and be aggressive, and that's what I tried to focus on today.

**Q. Trey, Coach talked about how you worked through**



**all of this. Where does your motivation come to kick it to this level, and is there another level?**

TREY FORT: I feel like there's always another level. One thing my dad and just people behind me always told me, if you feel like you made it somewhere, start over. I've had a lot of ups and downs, but it just keeps me going. There's challenges, but that should make you stronger. Should never fold when it comes to the ups and downs. Your team needs you, your coach needs you, and they just want what's best for you.

One thing I told the guys coming into this game, empty the tank and when we get home we can get a new tank. You can't leave anything out there unless you want to go home.

**Q. Jeremy, what is your favorite thing about passing? And, Coen, what's your favorite thing about dunking?**

JEREMY FEARS JR.: I'd say my favorite thing passing is seeing my other teammates score and the joy and the excitement it brings them. If they're happy, I'm happy. Just to see somebody get a dunk or somebody hit a three and you know they're hyped, I'm hyped with them. So it's just a great feeling somebody else be successful.

COEN CARR: For me I would say the energy it brings to everybody, the crowd, the little kids, the band section, the coaches, the bench, just everybody. It's kind of -- it's for me, but also it's for everybody else. I like to see the gym have energy, and that's what I try to bring every time.

**Q. Coen, you were the most impactful player on the floor today. I'm sure Tom is wondering this, too, ever wonder why that version of yourself doesn't come out more often?**

COEN CARR: I think just being aggressive from the start. I feel like also my rebounding and the defensive end can also propel me on the offensive end. So starting off there, rebounding the ball, attacking the glass hard, just getting comfortable early, just being able to touch the basketball and things like that, I feel like that helps me a lot.

**Q. Trey Fort, you probably came to Michigan State for moments like this. What does it feel like getting through these two games and moving on to the second round?**

TREY FORT: For sure, without a doubt. This is why you choose Michigan State. My first time in this tournament I was playing against these guys, and you know how good it feels to be on this side? It feels amazing.

We've had great moments throughout the entire season,

but times like this during March when the whole world is watching you, and for us to be able to come out here and do this, it's the best feeling in the world. We're playing the game that we love. We don't want to be doing anything else. So for us we just want to keep these things going together.

**Q. It doesn't show up in the first career double-double, but can you talk about that sequence where you got the big blocked shot in the run-out? And, Trey, did you ever imagine you'd have 18 minutes and 58 seconds of playing time and be sitting where you're sitting?**

COEN CARR: Yeah, I feel like we needed a stop. I think they're running off some points, getting some easy baskets, some threes. And I knew Conwell was going to be attacking. I don't think he -- he shot the ball in a couple possessions, so I knew he was going to attack me. So I tried to stand my ground. He was a strong guy, but keep my chest in front and stay solid. But when I see it go up, I just tried to meet the ball at the top.

TREY FORT: For me, I don't really think about the time I'm going to get. Honestly, like everybody knows, it's been ups and downs. But the thing is I want to be a spark however much time I get, being a spark to my team. I feel like I can lift them up and just keep things going.

I don't want there to be any drop-off when I get out there. I want to contribute anyway I can, defensively, offensively, getting a stop, getting deflection, making shots. Whatever I need to do, whatever the team needs, I feel like I can do that.

**Q. How has Trey -- Trey has talked about the ups and downs. How has he handled that, and how have you seen him grow?**

JEREMY FEARS JR.: A lot. Obviously just understanding it's a process. Everything don't go the way you expect it to go, so just understanding. And he's stayed in the gym, stayed working, stayed focused. And it's rough. I understand, I know, but at the same time I talk to him and we talk to him, like we're going to need everybody and we're going to need the whole bench. When you come in, be ready, have your head on and make plays.

These past two games have been great for us, and we really needed it. At the end of the day, when somebody maybe not doing the best they can, you need somebody to step up and be a spark.

**Q. On Coen, you've been begging for that level of rebounding from him, sort of the physical impact he**



**has on a game. Can you explain how that changes things when he's doing that?**

TOM IZZO: Yeah, I thought the best part of Coen's game was his rebounding and his defense. We put him on a small guard that can fill it up, and Conwell is, I think, a hell of a player.

I just thought Coen, he was the best conditioned guy. I had some guys, those bigs looked tired early, my bigs, and Jeremy, we ran him into the ground a little bit. But Coen was like an ever-ready bunny, he just kept going and going and going.

We see a lot of that stuff in practice, and you asked a great question, why is it. I ask that question sometimes, too. Just got to realize that there is a process to everything, and some guys it takes a little longer, and some guys a little shorter.

I think in Trey, it's one of the shames of the transfer portal, if you ask me, because there's so many players out there that are playing their best basketball at the end of the year because it takes a while. That's why sitting out and getting used to it, in my humble opinion, was a good idea. It happened with the little guard we had a couple years ago, second and third year he was so much better.

Trey hung in there, man, and I think Coen and Jeremy deserve a lot of credit. Kur is the next guy. He made some shots. I told him a couple of those times I might bring my mother back into the equation here. But we've just got to keep getting better as a team, and I think Jeremy got better.

I think he'll get some confidence, and I think he realizes defense kind of brings some energy like it does with a lot of guys. Cleaves way back in the day, he salivated to be a good defender, and it kind of ignited his offense. I think we'll see a little more of that from Coen now.

**Q. In a profession that seems to burn so many out so quickly, so many of your counterparts retiring, you seem invigorated. What's the secret?**

TOM IZZO: You know, it's a struggle. It's a struggle for me to be invigorated. I love my job, I said I question my profession. I do question it, and everybody should know I question it, because at the end of the day I'm still out for what's best for the student-athlete, and I don't think we're doing that.

So I'm going to -- but I'm too stubborn to quit, too. I'm too stubborn to quit, and I've got some guys that have hung with me. Those four guys could have all left. They didn't

leave. Some guys that left called some of my guys and told them not to leave.

This is what it's all about. This is the greatest part of being a coach, being in that locker room, being in that huddle with a minute left. Going through all the pull your hair out because of the stupid turnovers we made is all part of it.

But when you get to share a moment with guys that stuck with you and you stuck with them -- you heard Coen, you heard Trey, hey, anybody that's with us knows that Jeremy has gone through his growth spurt, too. But so many before him did.

That's the joy I get out of coaching is watching a kid go from here to here to here, and we're getting a couple guys that are advancing. Competition is going to get tougher. One way or another, we're going to play a team that we've already played, one in an exhibition game and one that just kicked our butt a week ago.

We get to do something that we seldom get to do. We played a lot of Friday-Sunday games. Being Thursday-Saturday, we get to get home before midnight. That's a treat. We get to get up tomorrow morning and know that the players are off. We get to get together as a staff and watch a game against teams we can play. It's actually a little human compared to what it's been.

So my energy is because deep down, I respect the guys that left. I understand why some of them did. I appreciate what my boss told me a long time ago: Your job is to be a steward of the game. I don't think right now enough coaches are standing up to be stewards of the game, and a steward of the game means to try to do what's best for a player. We'll see as time goes.

But right now, at least for another week, I'm still hanging in there, man, not going anywhere. Not going anywhere.

**Q. You kind of answered half my question there, but part of it, what is it about the young people that -- enthusiastic, that gets you up in the morning to come back and do this job? And my second question is your teams throughout the years, no matter who wears the jerseys, they seem to play that same type of ball. When you see your team on TV, they look similar. They look similar no matter who's wearing the uniform. How are you able to get that out of these young people?**

TOM IZZO: You just prolonged my retirement for two years because that's the ultimate compliment, and it's because at our place, we play for the players that have played before us, and we play for the players that are



playing with us.

We sure as hell play for the name on the front.

In this day and age, that's getting a little tougher to do. But I'm blessed. I am blessed, from the Magics to the Steve Smiths to the Cleaveses and all the people right up the road, all the people I've been somewhat associated with, they're the same people.

So I get credit for something that I just stole. I just kind of -- you know, I have those guys call my guys. I believe in what I believe in, and I believe that our job is to make them better for 70 years, not for 20.

So if you think that no matter what team you saw, you see similar things, ultimate compliment. Thank you.

**Q. Jeremy's two-game assist total I believe is second all time in the NCAA Tournament for the opening rounds and more than any Big Ten player has had in this tournament since Magic Johnson. How would you assess his ability to, as you mentioned, play for the players that played before him, play for the players he's playing with and perform on this stage?**

TOM IZZO: Well, if he's shy of just Magic Johnson, he's in pretty good -- that's a pretty good place to be. So Earvin, if you're watching, he's coming after you.

I give a lot of credit to Jeremy. We've had our knock-downs, as I have with most of my point guards. Point guards are hard. I wouldn't want to come here and play the point. You get the ball, but you also get abused. I'll be careful. Let me think of a different word. You get harassed and pushed and prodded, and expectations are high of our point guards because what we give them, we need to get in return.

Jeremy, he's just getting better. He's just getting better right now, and he's getting better every week, and he's so much better in my office. I love my office time with Jeremy. I love my late-night texts with Jeremy. That's where you really kind of watch a guy grow, and then when he starts saying what you've already said to him on the side, when you hear him saying it in practice, that's pretty cool.

As far as Coen goes, when you brought up what's exciting about Coen, you guys get to see these dunks here. I get to see a lot better dunks in practice. Unfortunately I just kind of go, hmm, that's Coen. In fact, Jeremy chewed him out for missing that one at the end, so I joined in and chewed him out myself.

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