

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Michigan State vs Mississippi State

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Spectrum Center

## Michigan State Spartans

### Tom Izzo

### Tyson Walker

### A.J. Hoggard

### Malik Hall

Media Conference



**what you want the last few games. They're shooting closer to 45% the last five games. What have you done best defensively this year, and maybe what do you need to get back to in this tournament?**

MALIK HALL: Just sticking to our principles really. We've played a lot of varying teams and varying styles of play over the years. So just getting back to our principles of Michigan State defense, making sure we're in our gaps, making sure we're helping, making sure we're doing different things off the double or things like that. Just making sure we're doing what we do best.

I think that's what's most important for going into this tournament.

A.J. HOGGARD: Just kind of getting back to who we are. We've kind of been not as engaged on that side of the ball, I would say, let some lapses get us in spurts or let teams go on running spurts, which is hurting us or hurting our defensive percentage.

We need to get back to doing what we were doing before, and we'll be fine.

TYSON WALKER: I would just say letting our defense start us off instead of letting the offense dictate everything, dictate the game with our defense. We should be fine.

**Q. Every one of you guys have been to the tournament every season you've been there. The advantages of having been there, done that?**

MALIK HALL: The advantage is just experience really. You understand what it's like. You understand every possession in this tournament. You understand the difference in emotion and kind of the emotion not only of your team, but of the crowd, and just everything that's going on around you. I think that's probably the biggest thing that stands out to me.

A.J. HOGGARD: Definitely the experience, understanding what it takes to win at least a game in itself and just know what it takes to prepare for these types of games, playing teams you haven't seen before, only seen a couple days

THE MODERATOR: We're about to start our first press conference with the Michigan State student-athletes.

With that, who has the first question?

**Q. I'm wondering what you guys have learned about Mississippi State in the days since we last talked to you and sort of the scouting report that you can give to everyone without giving away too much.**

TYSON WALKER: I would just say they're big, physical, athletic. So just got to keep to our principles, defending and rebounding.

And they've got some players who can go off. So we've just got to do what we can do to contain them.

A.J. HOGGARD: Pretty much similar. They're relentless on the glass, relentless with their effort. They have a lot of athletes, especially in that SEC Conference, like they get up and down and they have, like he said, people that can go off and we have to contain.

MALIK HALL: Same thing, tall, long, athletic. They rebound well. We've just got to do a good job of making sure we handle the rebounding portion. That's it really.

**Q. This is for anybody that wants to answer. The KenPom numbers are really good for those of you with field goal efficiency. But the numbers haven't been**



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after they called your name and you knew who you were matched up against.

So just the experience you have going in and being prepared and knowing what it takes to prepare and come out here and handle business.

TYSON WALKER: Really just like nothing's given. No lead is safe. You've got to still play every possession. You've got to finish the game. You've got to play the whole 40 minutes.

**Q. How do you guys expect to slow down Josh Hubbard, who's playing really efficient ball right now?**

TYSON WALKER: Make all his shots tough. He makes tough shots. So just continue to make them tougher. You're not going to hold anyone scoreless, but if you can, it's always a plus.

A.J. HOGGARD: Make every shot he takes tough on him. Don't give him nothing easy, no clean looks. Close off space and don't give him too much space because all he needs is a little bit to get a shot off.

MALIK HALL: I would say it would also help with help defense. Our defensive style is different than most of the teams in the SEC, so I think it will be a little bit of a different look for him.

**Q. Malik, Tom Izzo keeps talking about whether you guys can make the patented Michigan State run. What do you think he's talking about? Sort of what you did last year or other years where you guys were lower seed? What's your sense of what he's talking about and how much has he talked about that with you guys?**

MALIK HALL: He always talks about a run, going on a run, whether it's in the tournament or in regular season. I think he just means putting solid games together.

For me, I try not to look too far ahead. For me it's every game, one game at a time, just because that's how a run starts.

I mean, he's talked about it a little bit, but I wouldn't say it's something we continually stress on every day.

**Q. Kind of to piggy-back off of that, there has been so many examples, even when Michigan State is not necessarily a 1 or 2 seed, in which those runs have happened in this tournament. Is there something unique about the way that Coach Izzo prepares you for this environment that has made this program in**

**particular so uniquely successful at having these runs? I don't know if any of you have a strong opinion on that. You can answer.**

A.J. HOGGARD: I'll answer. I think just our nonconference and the games that we play leading up to our conference, which is one of the top conferences in college.

But just the way we structure our schedule and play different styles of basketball throughout the year to get into conference play. We're always battle tested when it comes around this time of year. So we're kind of ready for any style of basketball that needs to be played to win a game.

We have a great staff that prepares us every night. So I feel like we always are prepared to play. As long as we go out there for 40 minutes and handle our job, there's always an opportunity.

All right, guys. Thank you.

TOM IZZO: General comment? Well, general comment is I'm excited to be here. When you go 26 times in a row, which is pretty neat and one of your first was here, makes it even neater.

I think the best thing was to actually be in a room, not sure what was going on, not sure what was going to happen, and to see players and families and managers and even me kind of excited that we got in. Not that in ways I didn't think we deserved to get in, but I understood where we were.

It's kind of been, well, we're in. Where are we going? This year it kind of made me appreciate it a little bit what has gone on the last 26 years, and that was probably good for me. Wouldn't want that to happen that often, but it was exciting for that night.

**Q. Tom, you talk about the patented run, something you brought up a little bit. I'm wondering what that looks like to you and if there are characteristics of teams that have made it that need to happen for those games to be put together.**

TOM IZZO: I think a lot of times to make a run you have to have good guard play, and ours has been. I think we have guards good enough to make that, and yet our guards have been a little inconsistent. I think you've got to have experience to make one of those runs, and we do have experience, both as players and coaches.

I think you've gone through hell a little bit. Even our championship year, we beat teams in overtime. We beat

teams by one or two. We lost to Wright State. I think, if you don't go through something that's painful, the rest is never the same.

So we've done all those things, and yet I am optimistic because we've played so many of those top teams. Right there with Arizona, we played Duke, we played Baylor, even played Tennessee in that exhibition, but it was a full game. Then of course Purdue twice and Illinois twice. I mean, those are a lot of 1, 2, and 3 seeds. We've been right there in every one of them.

So I think that brings some optimism to my pessimistic way of living.

**Q. What have you seen in the tape from Josh Hubbard, and what's going to go into limiting him offensively?**

TOM IZZO: We have a kid named Young who's at Maryland who plays similar, but he doesn't take the shots that this kid takes and makes, unfortunately. Phenomenal story when you look at it. He's a guy that can score in a lot of different ways, gets fouled a lot, has incredible elevation on his jump shot.

So we brought a fish net along, see if we can guard him with a fish net. But we've played some good guards. We have pretty good defensive guards. We're going to be tested, though. There's no question. With him outside, Smith inside, that's a pretty good combo.

**Q. What makes this team unique as the school is making its 26th straight appearance in this tournament?**

TOM IZZO: Well, if I said what makes it unique of most of the 26 teams, we've been a little more inconsistent. What makes it unique, though, in the other way is we've had a 12 and a 13-point loss, but there's no 30-point losses or 20-point losses. We've had a few of them back in the day, and we probably had six or seven games that have been one or two points with two or three minutes left, some we led, some we didn't.

That's what keeps me hoping that, if we could ever get it all together and you say, well, why haven't you? But there's been a few reasons. I think Walker getting injured a little bit in the Minnesota game hurt us a little bit, and I think we're getting a little more out of Jaxon Kohler, which would help us inside.

I don't know. I don't know what's unique. We're not as good a rebounding team, but we're at times, like last week, we had an 18-0 fast break. We can be a good running

team. So I don't know. That's a good question I really haven't thought about a lot.

**Q. Looking at the tournament right now, there's a lot of discussion about potential expansion and looking at sort of the format. I guess where do you kind of fall on what you think could change with the tournament? Do you feel like it needs to be expanded at all? What do you see as the future of the tournament going forward?**

TOM IZZO: Four days ago Saturday night, I was sitting there, and I saw some things on the tube, I was hoping they'd expand it to a hundred. But I do think it's a delicate issue. I really do.

I feel for some teams that didn't get in when you have those automatic bids. I'm not sure I understand why, but the conference tournament things, you can go and like Purdue go 17-3 and dominate the conference and then lose. It's okay if it's the second place team, but I think that makes it hard, why some teams will get left out.

I don't know if something could be fixed there. But then the conference tournament wouldn't be as -- it's all about what is best for the financial part of it, if we were to be very blunt and honest with you, more than it is the player and teams.

As a guy that's been on a lot of boards and everything, I really haven't sat down and thought about what I'd like to see, but there's getting to be more parity, there's getting to be more unknowns, there's getting to be more upsets, there's getting to be more of these, what, 20 of the 32 conferences, the regular season champ did not -- it just doesn't happen like that. So I think it needs to be taken a serious look at.

Thank God I'm not the czar, so I don't have to take criticism for how I feel, and I'll think about it after the tournament.

**Q. You guys have -- KenPom loves your defensive metrics in terms of defensive efficiency, you talked about having defensive guards, but the last five games, you're allowing 45 percent shooting, 38 from three. What does this team do best defensively maybe that you need to get back to, where you haven't been doing the things you want?**

TOM IZZO: I got ripped earlier this year because I'm not big on analytics in some ways. Analytics never measure injuries, they never measure, you know, somebody lost their grandmother. There's so many things. What I like is the heart and the body language look. That's the metrics I use. What is your heart, and what is your body language?

Lately we haven't defended quite as well, and part of the reason is we've played Edey, I think, two times in that last, and he happens to score a lot of points when he's close to the basket.

We've had our stretches where consistency in general has been a problem. Now, at the same time, against Illinois and against Purdue, we've rebounded the ball a lot better than we were doing earlier in the year. So I think what we have been, though, is more consistent defensively than offensively, and that means that we don't get out of sorts a lot. We're not doing a lot of tricky things. We're just kind of staying to the basics. It's worked pretty well for us so far.

**Q. We just had a chance to talk with Jeremy in the locker room, and he seemed to be in very good spirits. I'm just curious, what's impressed you the most about the way he's handled the last couple months that didn't go as expected?**

TOM IZZO: Jeremy Fears is one of those, when you're picked high, and things don't go as well. Jeremy Fears is maybe the most ready of the freshmen mentally and physically and was playing 15 minutes a game, and then unfortunately the injury.

He's been the most positive guy. He's been really good for me because he just works every day. He's rehabbed every day. He's going to get to go through layups and everything, which is a miracle for what he's been through, and I'm excited for him in the future. I guess he brings a positive attitude like no other and the will to succeed like my old point guard Mateen Cleaves. He has the same kind of mentality.

**Q. Based on preseason expectations for your team, not just median fans but our own expectations, how deep a run in this tournament would you have to go to call it a successful season?**

TOM IZZO: Probably winning tonight, tomorrow. Listen, I've made no bones about that either. I'm pretty honest about how I feel about, have we underachieved? I think so. I think a lot of that falls on me.

Yet when I say that, those couple of injuries early hurt us, Kohler and Fears, so I try to be realistic with that. A couple of those tough losses. I mean, who'd ever think you'd go 1-for-20 and 23-for-38 from the free-throw line and lose a game in overtime at home? We've lost a couple of games with free-throw shooting, and we're one of the best free-throw shooting teams in the nation last year. So things happen.

But the way this tournament is, the way this season has

gone for everybody -- and I said everybody -- Kelvin Sampson, I took over his job at Michigan State. He was the GA when I came. I love him, love his team. For them to get beat by 20 or 30 is just that kind of sums up the season, Kansas losing by that sums up the season.

So I was appreciative of getting in. I think we earned it because of the schedule we played in that, but I was also appreciative, and if we wouldn't have, I would have been able to walk away and say that's on us.

But every game you win in this tournament -- like I said, I've been a 1 seed and 2 seed and been beat by a 15. I've been a very high seed and been beaten early. I've been a low seed and gone to a Final Four. So I'm just taking it one game at a time. I'm actually not. I'm taking it one weekend at a time because that's where our program is at, but you have to win the first game to play the second one.

How deep? I don't know, I'll tell you after tomorrow night. How's that? I'll give you a better answer.

**Q. You mentioned a little earlier that you're not the biggest fan of analytics. I saw Rick Pitino had suggested that the committee for the tournament might benefit from having some guys like Roy Williams, Coach K, Jim Boeheim that sort of see the analytics behind it. Do you think that's become too much of the conversation, not necessarily those voices, but voices ingrained in the day in and day out and know the struggles, would be better voices to have on that committee?**

TOM IZZO: Listen, no insult to anybody on the committee, but you look at the football committees more, they've got former players sometimes, they have former coaches. When you look at -- I think Rick, maybe because we're both Italian, I agree that there should be something to that. You've got Jim Boeheim, you've got Jay Wright, you've got Roy and Mike.

Over the years, we've had Gene Keadys of the world and Clem Haskins. Guys that really love the game, we're on all the committees, were part of the game. I think there definitely should be some coach, players on that thing to bring some levity to as crazy as it's gotten.

Yet I never know what the NET means, what KenPom means, what the ESPN or Iron Mountain Daily News. There's so many things that do influence. I've had an AD on that committee. I know what he did. If everybody did what he did, I would feel comfortable. He spent more time on that than being an AD. That's what it takes.

That's why I think what Rick said would be a good idea

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either way. Like I said, I'm appreciative of being in, and I wouldn't have felt any different if I was out. I just think it would be best that people who have been in the game that have been around so you know when you lose a game because something happened or what happens when you play three tough games in a row and all that stuff.

Analytics don't show those injuries. They show, when a guy gets hurt, if he misses a game, but what if he plays hurt? What if he misses five games? Analytics don't show that. I think you need some of those kind of people on it. I think that would be a great suggestion.

**Q. I wanted to follow up on the NCAA Tournament. SEC commissioner Greg Sankey has hinted recently pretty strongly about the idea of more opportunities of power league teams possibly at the expense of the one-bid leagues. What do you think about that and just in general about football's potential impact on this tournament?**

TOM IZZO: I'm a Division II guy, you know, so I'm always looking for the little guys. I'm not very big myself, so I always have an appreciation, and maybe that would be a reason to expand.

I just think what's happening now, everybody likes the upsets in the first weekend, but I'm not sure moving on that's what's best for the game. I think it's got to be looked at seriously.

As far as football's impact, it's different. They're working with like 115 or 120 teams, and they never have those kind of issues. What is that going to do if they branch off and all this? Something's got to be fixed because some things are broken.

I'm not going to get into all of my beliefs on all that right now, but there's a great, great game here, and I don't want it to be damaged. I do worry about it. I'm on every committee I could be on to help solve that, and I would love to talk to him and our commissioner. I know they've been talking a lot. I just don't know what the answers are.

My day job is taking up all my time, but in the off-season I'd sure like to really get in a room with people where there's coaches in the room and administrators, instead of the way it's been where there's like one coach and 30 administrators. That makes it really difficult.

**Q. You talked about Mississippi State a little bit there when discussing Josh Hubbard and a little bit of the matchup, but based on watching the film and seeing the tape, what sticks out to you the most about this matchup and this team in general?**

TOM IZZO: I don't know their coach personally. I don't know Chris, but I knew him when he was at Bowling Green. I've known some of the people he's worked for. I think he's done a phenomenal job. That's number one. They're very, very, very well coached. They're very physical and tough. I mean, they should move them into the old Big Ten. I don't know if the new one is like the old one was, where we were a football team on hardwood back in the good old days, and that's what they are.

When you start talking 6'11", 265, 6'10", 250, wing guys that are 230, 235, very physical team. Haven't shot it as well all the time, but they've got one guy that can make every shot. And they've got some other guys that can make some too.

I think the team that gets to the free-throw line a lot -- I just think that somebody told me, a couple of my friends called me that have seen them play, and they just said bring your hard hat and lunch box, and that's what I would say.

I not only admire and respect, but fear a little bit. That's what they are, and that's what -- so it should be a helluva football game on Thursday night, Thursday afternoon.

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