

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Michigan State vs North Carolina

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Spectrum Center

Michigan State Spartans

Tom Izzo

Tyson Walker

Malik Hall

A.J. Hoggard

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We're ready with the Michigan State student-athletes. We have from my right to left, Tyson Walker, Malik Hall, A.J. Hoggard.

Q. Something a little different for you guys. The new president has only been on campus 18 days, and he came from North Carolina. Have you guys met him yet? Any thoughts about his changing his allegiance to the Spartans?

TYSON WALKER: I didn't know he did that.

MALIK HALL: I didn't know he was from North Carolina. I met him though.

A.J. HOGGARD: I think he just turned so Sparty since he's been here that I never even knew that's where he came from.

MALIK HALL: He just said "Go Green!" I said, hello, nice to meet you. He said, hello, nice to meet you.

He was talking to Coach, though. So I didn't want to interrupt.

Q. Malik, you guys have seen like Edey, for example, as a talented big. What is the matchup for going up against a guy like Bacot, as experienced as he is for you guys going to be like?



MALIK HALL: We've played some outstanding bigs over the years. Edey, obviously, a heck of a player. Bacot obviously brings a little different of a challenge, All-American. I think it gives us a different advantage playing Edey a couple of times and being able to bump and bang with him. I think that will help us for sure.

Bacot is a different player, a little more agile, I would say, a little more bump and bang. I think it will be interesting and will help us for sure, though, having that experience in the past.

Q. In terms of guard play, how important is that in the NCAA tournament? And do you think you have an advantage due to your experience against a freshman like Cadeau?

TYSON WALKER: Experience does help. I played a lot of games in my career. Just being in a different situation, knowing how to handle it.

Guard play definitely important. We're the ones controlling the game for the most part. We know we have to handle the ball. So just making sure that we play well is really important.

MALIK HALL: I'm not a guard, but I value these guys. I think their experience helps a long way. I think, as it comes to tournament time, there's more pressure, there's more just emotion, and there's a lot that comes into each and every game.

I think that experiencing and having experienced it and going further into the tournament, I think it will become more and more important. I think that helps a lot.

A.J. HOGGARD: I think guard play definitely matters. It's something that Coach speaks on all the time. It's something we've got to come to the game prepared and ready to play and do a good job of taking their guards out of their rhythm.

Q. A.J. and Malik, with regard to Tyson, could you speak to kind of what he brings to the table, what he means to the team, and what you see his strengths



are.

MALIK HALL: He can score. No, I'm playing. Obviously we all know what Tyson does. He's super valuable to our team. We trust him with pretty much everything for the most part. He defends some of the best players, takes some of the game-winning shots. You name it, I think he does pretty much everything that we could ask of someone to do.

So I think that's what his value is.

A.J. HOGGARD: His value is tremendous to our team. It's not only just our leading scorer. He's one of the best two-way guys in the country. I think he takes pride in it. Sometimes he gets us in trouble because we get caught up watching him and forgetting we're his teammates.

It's definitely fun playing with him. He means a lot to us on both sides of the ball.

Q. Tyson, I was talking with RJ yesterday, and he was telling me how you used to be teammates and then played against each other in high school. Can you talk about your relationship with him and what it's going to be like to face off against him tomorrow.

TYSON WALKER: I've known RJ for a really long time. We've had some good games against each other. So just to be able to play at this level against each other, there's going to be a lot of people watching, our senior years. It's going to be big time. Hopefully we both can play well.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach Izzo.

Q. Your new president came from North Carolina. He's only been here 18 days. Are you getting a scouting report from him? And also your early impressions of him? I know you've met him.

TOM IZZO: I was on the selection committee. We absolutely love him, and he's only been there, as you say, not even three weeks. I think he brings something that I really appreciate, very outward going guy.

There's always controversy, as we all know, with everybody who's the boss of something. For me and for us, like I said, I was on the search committee, and I think we got a diamond. So I'm excited about that.

How ironic that our women just played North Carolina and we play North Carolina tonight. So that's got to be a little hard on him and his family. You know what, glad we got him, and we'll go from there.

Q. Two-parter. Number one, what's your relationship like with Hubert Davis? Are you guys close? Secondly, do you see any similarities just in the early scout between the way he coaches and some of those old Roy teams?

TOM IZZO: Yeah, just saw him in the hallway. We hugged and kissed and everything. It was great.

No, I've known Hubert for a long time. When he was doing TV, I got a chance to spend time with him then. I think one of the great guys in our profession. He does it the right way. He's been brought up well. I'm a big Roy Williams fan.

He's putting his own mark on it, like I had to do with Jud Heathcote. But what I will tell Hubert someday, when you get one of those jobs from guys who have been in it a long time, you always kind of say to yourself, I'm going to change this a little bit and I'm going to change that a little bit. I remember telling my secretary who had been with Jud for 20 years and me as my years got into it, I said, Lori, now I know why Jud did this and now I know.

I bet Hubert does the same thing. When you have success Roy does. I think tweaking the offense or defense or things like that is normal and he should put his own stamp on it. But I bet you he'll run the program very similar because, if it ain't broke, why fix it? And it ain't broke.

Q. Even though you guys are in different parts of the bracket, I wanted to ask you about your relationship with Rick Barnes, how that's grown over the years as you've both been in this business for a long time and how the Maui Relief game came about and how you called him and arranged the whole deal.

TOM IZZO: Rick is a guy I've known a long time since he was an assistant at Ohio State. Rick did a thing called Hoops For Troops. We went over to Kuwait and spent seven days together with Gary Williams. It was one of the more eventful things. It was strictly coaching and spending time with guys, and the flight was long.

I got a chance to know Rick. I just talked to him this morning, in fact. He's done an unbelievable job. I thought how ironic they're playing Texas and he was there. Come to think of it, I thought he did a helluva job there and maybe was underappreciated a little bit, in my humble opinion.

But he sure has taken things to Knoxville and done an unbelievable job.

The Maui thing, him and I had been there the most, I think four times each. I suggested to him, hey, if we can get this

done, would you have an interest? Him and I played an exhibition game at their place last year, so he was coming anyway. He was a hundred percent for it and just a great guy, one of the guys that I greatly respect.

Q. Tyson Walker was talking about RJ Davis and their relationship, you mentioned the president of your school earlier, all these kinds of connections. But just in general, what does it mean to you to go up against one of these kinds of programs, giving it a shot?

TOM IZZO: When you look at my record in the NCAA against them, it doesn't feel very good at all. But the opportunity to change that and the opportunity to go against people -- I still talk to Roy quite a bit. I've always had great respect for their program and the way they've done it.

I used to work Michael Jordan's fantasy camp, so it goes way, way back.

It means a lot to me. Number one, we're still playing. Number two, it's the opportunity of a lifetime. That's what these are. These are memory-making moments. I watched the Oakland-Kentucky game last night. I'm not going to sit here and act like it's the same because it's not the same. I think we've earned our stripes as a program too.

We've always said, since the first year we got to the Final Four way, way back, and what I've done with scheduling a lot of times, including the aircraft carrier when Roy and I played on that, to be the best, you've got to beat the best. I think they've earned the right to be a great program.

Hubert's done a great job when you look at his years, and going to a Final Four his first year. So it's all good. The president, the women's team playing, the relationship with players, those are all good. But come 5:30 it's the hat fields and the McCoys, and then at 7:30 it's back to hugging and kissing, I guess.

Q. You kind of alluded to not having the best track record against UNC in the tournament. I'm just curious what you remember specifically about that '09 National Championship, the last time you saw this team in the tournament.

TOM IZZO: I do remember that. We made a helluva run. We beat UConn. We had played North Carolina early in the year, and I think got beat by 25. It just goes to show you how good a coach I am because, in that championship game, I was standing on the sidelines, and I think it was Ellington came off a screen, and he rose up, and his shoes -- now, I'm not the biggest guy in America, but they were by

my eyes. He shot one, and I had to watch that thing go all the way in.

Because of good coaching, we only got beat by 20 in that game. So improved from the beginning of the year. Yeah, I remember a lot of those games and a lot of the times.

I do remember the time when we went down there. We were both ranked high and beat them in Chapel Hill. That was a thrill. But I haven't slayed the dragon enough times, so another opportunity. If you keep getting opportunities, that's the name of the game. Sooner or later, hopefully you win the battle.

Q. I have a two-parter. First off, what did you think of Oakland in that game last night? I know you're friends with Coach and stuff like that. Also to see Rocket Watts, what he did, especially on that last play, shooting from the corner for the game-winning three?

TOM IZZO: When you have games -- and Campy and John are good friends too. We all played together in Greg's golf outing for cancer a couple years ago, and John came up and was there, which was really nice of him. I don't think he has to do that and does it.

I'm watching, and I always pull for Rocket, talk to him. I always pull for him. We love him. When he made that last pass, honest to God, my whole staff was just like fired up for him.

I'm pretty good friends with John too because I'm on a couple of committees with him. I've been in that shoes -- yeah, I have. I've been in a 15-2 and lost, and I know how devastating that is to me. Now, if you're in the state of Kentucky, you can times that by a thousand. So it was tough for him.

There was the thrill of victory, the agony of defeat, and I got to enjoy it and feel bad for both sides. Yet when I take it to Rocket, whether people believe this, sometimes people leave programs, and usually when they do at Michigan State, it's talked about. They don't just put their name in the portal. They usually come in, and we talk.

Rock and I had a lot of talks, man. That first year when he was at Mississippi State, hard to believe, because we could have played him. Talked to him a lot down there. Still talk to him at Oakland because he calls. He's a beautiful kid. It's been a tough life for him, and Greg's done a great job. He makes that play, and there are a bunch of Spartans pulling for him in that respect.

Second part of your question?

Q. That was like a two-parter because I wanted to ask about Oakland and Rocket. Where did you guys watch the game? Did you watch it together?

TOM IZZO: We were watching film on Carolina, and somebody came in and said this game's going down to the wire. So the players were in their rooms, but we watched it in our film room.

Just the NCAA Tournament, boy, it's got some highs and lows. That was a memory-making moment for one and a tough time for the other.

Q. I have a lot of questions today.

TOM IZZO: These are three-part questions now? What's going on out there?

Q. No, this is changing gears a little bit. I'm sorry if you were already asked this, but North Carolina and Michigan State obviously have the most Final Fours since 1999, I believe. Two storied programs just facing off in the second round. You haven't beat them yet in the tournament.

TOM IZZO: I was going to give you credit because you asked that a lot nicer than some of these other guys have asked this. Two storied programs, been to the most Final Fours, and yes, we haven't beaten them in the NCAA Tournament.

But you know what, we're going to still show up. We're going to show up tomorrow, and we're going to see what we can do. I don't look at us as a 9 seed, and some of that's my fault. I do look at them as a 1 seed, and yet I think this year with parity in college basketball and craziness, I bet you nobody feels any more comfortable than anybody else. Campy says we can beat them. He said that at the beginning of the week. Usually he's full of you know what, but in this case, I guess he believed what he was saying.

I don't know what the reasons are. The reasons are they've been very good teams. They got beat by very good teams. There's been some great games. The '05 Final Four, we were up at halftime and just couldn't hang on. There's been some blowouts like the '09, when we got beat by a lot in the championship game. But that team, as they warmed up, I thought it was the Celtics or the Pistons, and that was during the Pistons' championship runs.

Q. Coach, apologize if you've been asked this already, but we just talked to Coach Wojcik and Coach Paxson as well. Interesting in your thoughts in what he's feeling now going up against a son?

TOM IZZO: It's funny, we used to take Paxson and my son grew up together, we used to take them on recruiting trips, we'd beg the moms to let their son come to our place by using our kids at bait.

We played Brown last year where his son was, and that was an emotional time. How does it get any more emotional? I guess, if you look at it on the good side, he's going to L.A. either way. Either with me or with Pax. So I guess that's the positive side of it for him.

It's got to be tough. It really does. Loves his son and loves the program he works for. He'll do his job. He's a military guy. He's going to do his job as best as he can, and emotions will flow as they flow.

We have no inward secrets. Paxson didn't give us the scouting report or anything. As far as seeing him play, Doug's seen him play in person a couple of times. Carolina and Michigan State have been the same for 25 years as far as Hubert does a lot of the same stuff, mine is the same. So there's no real secrets. It's the emotion that those guys got to go through.

But I try to look at it as, what a privilege. What a privilege to have your son at a program like he's got him at and what a privilege to be working at the program he's working at. We're both playing for a lot, and that is a privilege.

Q. I'm wondering about the differences. You kind of mentioned about them, but you haven't played them since Roy was there. What are the differences between Hubert's program and Roy's? Secondly, the inside-out game that they have with Davis and Bacot, who does that maybe remind you of this year that you faced?

TOM IZZO: In some ways, it was like Mississippi State with Smith and Hubbard. I do think Davis is maybe the best guard, I really do, in the whole country if you look at everything he does offensively, defensively. He's got some toughness. He can pass it, takes care of the ball. He takes some tough shots but not as crazy of shots.

I think Bacot has really improved as the years have gone on. So they've got an inside-outside threat, and they've got other guys that can shoot the ball and can play. That's why they're who they are. That's why they're a Number 1 seed.

But I do think we match up with them decently, as far as size and positions. I think Ingram and Hall will be a big matchup in this thing, believe it or not. It's not always the ones you look at. It's kind of guys who are difference makers, and I think that will be it.

Q. (No microphone).

TOM IZZO: Hubert doesn't wear those argyle golf sweaters that Roy wears. I haven't seen him in the plaid jackets as much, but none of us are wearing that anymore because Sean doesn't want coaches wearing suits anymore.

Other than that, I'm sure he puts his own mark on it. I did. But I'm sure that he does a lot of things like -- you know, his mentor is Roy. Mine was Jud. It's pretty cool, you look at Paint down at Purdue with Gene, and there are some programs out there that have been kind of passed over to the next guy in line, and it's pretty cool, especially if you can keep going what was already really good. I think Hubert's doing a great job of that.

I think it's pretty cool. I don't know what I'll do when my time is here, but I got a call from Roy who said, I'm coming to your game. He was sitting right behind us. Turned around and looked at him and I said, Man, I appreciate you. Because some people want to stay away, but he's a big part of them. I don't think he hovers over them in any way, but he supports them.

One thing I always criticized Jud for is he left the day, he took off to Spokane. Boy, those first couple of years, I could have used somebody to call once in a while or gone over to see. I think Roy does that, and it's a pretty neat relationship.

Q. For the record, I think it's great rolling hoodies. Even Joe here is in a hoodie these days.

(Laughter).

TOM IZZO: I know one thing, I never see many media guys in tuxedos, I'll tell you that right now. What do you think?

THE MODERATOR: I'm staying out of it.

Q. Serious question, though. Last week you played well, especially in the second half against Minnesota. Really well against Purdue just to make shots. And then maybe your most complete effort yesterday. What do you think the state, the psyche of your team is right now? What do they think of themselves?

TOM IZZO: As you know, all year long I said I was disappointed. I thought we underachieved a little bit. I said we were in every game but one or two. I mean, right down to the wire on a lot of them. With a veteran coach and a veteran team, you should find a way to win those games,

and I took that on myself a little bit.

But it didn't mean I didn't think -- I kept saying this team is good enough, this team is good enough. One game, three, four games like that, but we are playing better basketball at the end of the year. We're starting to rebound the ball a little bit better. We'll have to do that because Ingram and Bacot are phenomenal rebounders.

We're going to have our hands full with that, but I do think we're in a lot better position now than we were a month ago. And yet it's not because there's any different players. It's some of the players are playing different, and we're making some shots, which they had done before.

But I think the biggest key in our program has been to defend the rebound and run. That's been the mantra forever. We are defending better. We're rebounding better, and then we're running. We're 18-0 against Purdue on fast-break points, and stuff like that makes a difference in our program.

Now, they're a program that runs too. So maybe it will be a track meet.

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