

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

Friday, March 22, 2024

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Spectrum Center

**North Carolina Tar Heels**

**Hubert Davis**

**Cormac Ryan**

**Harrison Ingram**

Media Conference



They're a great team. They've had an up-and-down year. But they're a preseason top five, and they earned their right to play in the tournament. They're a really good team, and we're ready to go.

CORMAC RYAN: Two, like you said, really historic programs. Obviously really well-known in college basketball, especially over the last 25 years. So you can't ask for anything better in March Madness to go up against great teams, great programs, and come away with a great win.

**Q. I'd like both players to address this. How much is toughness going to play into tomorrow's game, and how much do you two factor into that?**

CORMAC RYAN: I think it starts and ends with toughness for us. That's something we've prided ourself on all year is living in the trenches, being tough, playing gritty, doing the dirty work, doing the little things. That's when we're at our best, and that's what fuels us.

So tomorrow's no different. We've got to bring the toughness. We've got to bring the edge, bring the fight. Michigan State's a tough team and the Big Ten's a tough conference. But we're a tough team. We've shown that all year, and that's really what gets us going.

HARRISON INGRAM: 100 percent to add on to what he said. A lot of small lineups, people playing down in their position. A lot of teams come in with the intent to try to bully us. They've done that throughout the year, they felt that was the scouting report or whatever. I feel like we've always stepped up to the challenge, and I feel like we're ready to go for tomorrow too.

**Q. Both Harrison and Cormac, Elliot said he played terrible yesterday against Wagner. What have you guys said to him to keep his spirits up as he prepares to face a really good backcourt in Michigan State?**

HARRISON INGRAM: Elliot, he's a freshman. He was a five-star freshman coming out, and reclassified up, so he should still be in high school right now. For him to be doing

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to start with the student-athletes from North Carolina, Cormac Ryan and Harrison Ingram.

**Q. When you watch Michigan State on film, what stands out?**

CORMAC RYAN: They're a physical team. They're good defensively. They've got a really good half-court defense. They like to push the pace in transition.

We did some scouting personnel obviously last night. So we're ready to go out and compete and play against a good team on Saturday.

HARRISON INGRAM: To add on to what he said, they're a physical team. They've got a pretty good guard in Walker, who's been averaging 20 points a game. He's tough, makes shots off the dribble, makes three-point shots. Four big men they rotate through, so they have a lot of depth and a lot of strength. They play Big Ten basketball, which is more physical.

**Q. North Carolina has been an elite program forever. Michigan State more so in the last 25 years or so with Coach Izzo. But that encompasses your entire lifetime. I wonder how you guys think when you hear Michigan State compared to how maybe older fans think.**

HARRISON INGRAM: It's kind of a surreal moment to think about for the right to go to Sweet 16 you've got to face Tom Izzo and Michigan State.



what he's doing, point guard on the number one team in the country, is an accomplishment itself. You have games you play good and games you play bad.

As a great player, that's not a lot you need to say to him. He knows what needs to be done, as does the rest of us.

CORMAC RYAN: I've said this all year, Elliot is an incredibly mature freshman. People always like to attribute guys making freshman mistakes and whatnot. One thing Elliot doesn't do, he's not a freshman level teammate. He's an incredible teammate. His maturity is far beyond his grade or his class.

That's something that he's shown all season is his ability to be a great teammate, continue to bounce back from tough games, tough performances. So we have no doubt, not a single doubt, that he's going to continue to make incredibly big plays for us on Saturday and down the stretch for us because that's who he is. He's a great player, and he's a great teammate.

We've got all the faith in the world in him. We know how good he is. We know how much we need him and how much this team values what he brings. Can't say enough good things about him. We have no doubt in our mind that he's going to come ready to play because that's who he is.

**Q. For both of you, just wondering, as you close the book on Wagner last night, what sort of is like the overall assessment of how you guys played was and how that matches up with maybe what you think about you need to improve on as you keep trying to advance in this tournament?**

CORMAC RYAN: I think basketball is a game of up and downs, and there's always things to learn from any game you play. Obviously, being a first-round game, these games can get a little tricky at times. The teams you play are unique. They're from far different conferences that you have a short window to repair for.

Look, Wagner's a good team. They're a conference champion. They play a unique style. I think part of the game last night took a little bit of adjusting to how they were playing. I think us just settling in, kind of finding our rhythm.

There's a lot of things we can improve on. I think taking care of the ball, we were a little sloppy with it. I think our pressure was a little low at times. There's obviously things you can learn from and grow from every single game, but the big takeaway is we were able to find our groove, our rhythm. We won the game by 28 points. We played well down the stretch.

We're a hungry team, and we know what it takes to kind of move forward in this tournament, and the level just raises every round you go to. Obviously with Michigan State coming up tomorrow, that's a challenge and an exciting opponent for us to go and play against. So we're excited for that.

Obviously we wanted to win the game on Thursday and we did that, and now we're moving on to Saturday.

HARRISON INGRAM: Cormac, that was a pretty long answer.

(Laughter).

I think he spoke for the both of us.

**Q. Cormac, for you, you played Michigan State last year at Notre Dame and had a big game. What do you remember from that matchup last year, and how different do these Spartans look compared to last year?**

CORMAC RYAN: They bring back a lot of the guys they had on that team last year. I think at least four or five of the guys who played major minutes in that team. So a lot of similar guys.

But year to year, things change. I think obviously they're a little bit different this year, and we're different. I'm with a different group, and I couldn't imagine a better team to go and take on Michigan State than the team we're with, we've brought to Charlotte here.

We've been saying it all year. Our chemistry, our togetherness, I think that's one of our biggest strengths. So leaning on these guys going into tomorrow and just going out and competing and having fun.

**Q. In the game last night, you had RJ and Armando both moved up in the all time scoring record list for North Carolina, which they noted was a cool thing to do at the same time. I'm kind of curious, though, as much as they've had great individual careers, do you see them as sort of the sum is greater than the individual parts in the way that they work together, they manage, lead the team together, and sort of the back and forth that the two of them have together as a group?**

HARRISON INGRAM: 100 percent. They've been here for four and five years respectively. They've been in the Final Four run. They've also seen the bad side of it, not making the tournament last year. And having their leadership, me

personally, I never played in an NCAA Tournament before, and hearing their thoughts, their voice, just kind of treating it as another game and not trying to put too much pressure on yourself because knowing that, if you lose, you're out.

Now is the time where one bad game, one bad loss, one bad defensive possession can get you eliminated and end your whole season. For them being there for us, it sets a common aspect having RJ, he can score whenever he wants. And having Armando down low demands a double-team. Having both of them on the team makes everything easier for me.

CORMAC RYAN: I totally agree with Harrison. I think I speak for the both of us in saying like those two guys were a big part of the reason why we came to Carolina. We know how talented they are. We know how historic they've been for this program. Playing alongside great players is what every great player should want to do.

It makes our jobs a lot easier. It's a luxury to have. So we're fortunate to have two guys who are as accomplished as they are. We collectively are looking to help them out, they help us out, and that's something that we kind of thrive on is those two and how they lead us, how they impact the game on the court and off the court.

**Q. Harrison, wanted to ask you, since Cormac was so good with the other question, you've talked about not playing in an NCAA Tournament before, but also not being hyperfocused on watching every game and things like that. Since you are in it now, do you find yourself like soaking it in more, trying to check other games, other scores, or do you find yourself sort of really getting into the experience more of it?**

HARRISON INGRAM: I think definitely I watched more games when I was not in it, just because I had more time to think about other teams and not really worried about who we're playing or the scouting report we're doing. For us this year, we watched so much film. Right now we're watching so much film of Michigan State. Whether it was Wagner and now it's Michigan State, watching film of them.

With all that film, it's kind of hard to watch other games. You get burned out watching all that basketball. For me, I'm just trying to be here and soak in the moment and have a great time.

**Q. Cormac, you played in the NCAA Tournament before obviously. Coach Davis earlier this week, he said he broke down the NCAA Tournament into sort of three separate tournaments: The Charlotte tournament, if you win you go to L.A., if you win, you go to Arizona. Was that sort of a brand new way of**

**thinking about this event for you as someone who's played in it before?**

CORMAC RYAN: Yeah, absolutely. I really like that framework. I thought that was really helpful for us. Everyone likes to talk about six games to win a championship, but six games is a lot of games. I think for us to take it piece by piece, focus on Charlotte first and the task at hand, we're halfway done with the Charlotte tournament.

So being able to focus one at a time, I think it's very important to not get ahead of yourself and not get caught up in the long road to Phoenix, but just staying focused on what you can control and preparing to win the games that you come to play.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you guys. We'll see you tomorrow.

We're ready to start with Coach Davis from North Carolina.

**Q. Kevin Guskiewicz is now at Michigan State, and I understand you knew him pretty well and have a lot of respect for him. Wanted to get your thoughts on him wearing the other colors for this game.**

HUBERT DAVIS: My relationship with them, him and his family, just a terrific person. The time that he served as chancellor at North Carolina was absolutely fantastic. He's one of my friends. I wish him the best at Michigan State. Michigan State is lucky to have him.

**Q. What do you tell Elliot Cadeau when he has a game where he doesn't perform as well as he wanted to on Thursday. Could you just talk in general about the guard matchups in this game Saturday.**

HUBERT DAVIS: The guard matchups is going to be very key in determining the outcome of the game. Elliot, his ability to push the ball and create offense, even before we start our offense, has just been huge for us this year.

He's really fast, and he's even faster with the ball. His ability to pass. I've just loved his progression in terms of from a defensive standpoint, diving on loose balls, and that type of energy and effort is going to be needed against a really good Michigan State team tomorrow.

**Q. Just wondering from a coach's perspective, with Jae'Lyn and Harrison and Cormac coming into the program, what have they done to make it work so well? But also what have your veteran players like RJ and Armando done to make it work?**

HUBERT DAVIS: This group from the start, they've just enjoyed being together, and they have wanted to be a team. It started off the court. Their personalities just work really well together, and it's translated out there on the floor. There's a genuine -- each one of the guys genuinely wants their teammate to be successful. They understand the importance of each individual teammate and what it helps and what it brings for our team to be the best that it can be.

Having guys come in for the first year like Pax and Cormac and Harrison and them just diving into this team, this program, this university, and for guys like Armando and RJ that have been here to welcome them in and to be able to bring them in from the standpoint where it feels like Paxson, Harrison, and Jae Wit and all those guys have been here for more than just one year.

The chemistry with this group is real, and it's been nice to be around.

**Q. Hubert, I saw you guys practice at Johnson C. Smith the other day. Can you talk about your emotions walking into that place. And Armando and RJ said they know how special it is considering the history your parents have there.**

HUBERT DAVIS: Yes, Johnson C. Smith is where my parents went to school. That's where they met and decided to get married and have Hubert Jr. To be able to go back there and practice at Johnson C. Smith was a really big deal. I got to film some of our practice and send it to my dad.

Just to think that my dad grew up, went to South Mecklenburg. He grew up in Pineville, North Carolina. He was the first group of high school students to integrate public schools in the Mecklenburg County, went to Johnson C. Smith, and now his son is the head coach at the University of North Carolina, and they're practicing there before the NCAA Tournament.

So it's just a pretty cool deal. I'm glad we were able to experience that.

**Q. Hubert, you were talking yesterday about really having things on your mind about wanting things to go well for Armando in his last run. I'm kind of curious, you had a four-year career where Dean Smith was your coach, teammates that came back every year. Can you even imagine what his career has been like from a pandemic to Hall of Fame coach retiring to NIL. Just the scope of his career has been -- I can't think of something like this.**

HUBERT DAVIS: He has had a lot. I appreciate you saying that because, during his time in college, there's a number of things in college basketball that have changed. You talked about the NIL, the transfer portal, the extra COVID year, the involvement of agents, and coming off a pandemic and changing coaches.

He's had to -- we always talk about how do you react and how do you respond specifically to changes, and he's had to deal with that from a number of different directions.

So for him to be able to embrace that and then be able to have the career that he has had, I think that's something to be celebrated for. His commitment to this university and this program for five years, that's something that's new as well. I'm glad he's a Tarheel and he always will be. It's been an honor and a privilege to be one of his coaches for the last five years.

**Q. Hubert, with the retirements of a bunch of legendary college basketball coaches in the last few years -- Coach Williams, Coach Boeheim, Coach K, Jay Wright -- Coach Izzo is the elder statesman, if you want it to put it that way, of college basketball or one of them. How school is it for you to go up against someone like that for the first time?**

HUBERT DAVIS: It's just really cool to be a part of college basketball and specifically be a coach alongside Coach Izzo. I, for the longest of times, have been one of his biggest fans. As a player, I would have loved to play for him because it's not only his commitment to his players on the court but his commitment to his players off the court into the university and the community.

I think he teaches life through basketball, and that's something that I experienced at Carolina through Coach Smith. When I see Coach Izzo, it reminds me a lot of Coach Smith.

So it really is -- I say this a lot, but it is. It's an honor and a privilege to be on the sideline alongside with him, and for both of our teams to have an opportunity and a chance to compete tomorrow is a really big deal.

**Q. A couple of players are talking about how you talked about that old Coach Smithism about win the Charlotte invitational, you get invited to the next one and get invited to. You didn't mention that two years ago --**

HUBERT DAVIS: I did. They forgot.

**Q. That's obviously one of many things you've taken from Coach Smith and Coach Guthridge and Coach**



**Williams. How does that filter you doing your job through the lens of them. How has that continued to evolve as you've gone through your tenure?**

HUBERT DAVIS: Well, that's who I am. Even through the press conference when I first accepted a job, I set the foundation of this program, I'm not veering from that. I'm not veering from it because it's been successful, but more importantly, I've lived it, and I believe in it.

I've said that, along that path, along that foundation, it's important for me to walk that path, but to do it with my personality in my own shoes. That's what I've tried to do in the last three years.

That's something Coach Smith did and Coach Williams, and the guys forgot. I did do it the first year. I said, let's win the Ft. Worth tournament, and then I said let's win the Philadelphia tournament. That's not something that I just thought about this year. This is something that I've done since the time that I was here at Carolina as a player.

**Q. With Pax playing against his dad tomorrow, I'm wondering if you've had any conversations with him about that, and what do you think that dynamic will be like tomorrow for Paxson?**

HUBERT DAVIS: They've done it before. When he was at Brown, they played at Michigan State. This isn't a situation where he hasn't been in this situation before. The Wojcik family is -- you can't ask for a more connected, better family to be around. Even on the off days that Coach Wojcik could, he would come and fly in to come see Pax play, whether it was on the road or at home.

So being able to go out there and compete against each other, it's something that they've done before. I don't think it's an issue. It's Michigan State versus North Carolina. It will be a good game tomorrow.

**Q. Hubert, I know you already spoke about JCSU. While you were speaking about the program, Coach Joyner announced his retirement. I don't know how much experience you have. I know you spoke the other day at the gym.**

HUBERT DAVIS: Yeah, it's just a longtime, legendary coach at Johnson C. Smith. Very sad to hear he's not going to continue to be head coach. The things that I've loved about him as head coach is the same things that I have mentioned about Coach Smith, about Coach Izzo, about teaching life through basketball.

His service not only to the basketball program, but to Johnson C. Smith and the Charlotte community and for the

CIAA has been something that has been remarkable. So you talk about legendary coaches that have retired, he is a legendary coach that's leaving the game.

**Q. Armando was mentioning with you, you like to give the guys a scouting report two or three days early, if possible. You mentioned that Coach would do one dot for a good shooter, two dots for -- how has your philosophy evolved from that?**

HUBERT DAVIS: I really think it's come from the NBA. My time in the NBA, scouting is just huge. I tell the guys the scouting that we do is probably 5 percent of what is done in the NBA, and we play even more games. Just the attention to detail in terms of scouting in the NBA is ridiculous. To the percentages to when a guy dribbles to his right and when he gets up off the bench and hops on his left foot, this is the play that they're running.

I do. Scouting report is not a cheat sheet, it's to give them and to guide them in their anticipation to be able to be the best out there on the floor. I think it's important for the guys to do that.

A huge reason also to do it is not only for us -- because I always say this to the guys. I'll never ask you to do anything that's a benefit for us that's not a benefit for you personally. Giving these guys scouting reports and preparing them here allows them, or puts them in a position when they go to the next level, they've done this before. So it's in preparation for them moving forward as well. So that when they go to the next level, they know what they're doing. And that's really important to me.

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