

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

Saturday, March 23, 2024
Charlotte, North Carolina, USA
Spectrum Center

Michigan State Spartans

Tom Izzo

Malik Hall

Tyson Walker

A.J. Hoggard

Media Conference

North Carolina - 85, Michigan State - 69

THE MODERATOR: We'll start right away with Michigan State.

TOM IZZO: Nobody likes to be up here at this time. I feel bad. We played so well the first 12 minutes, and then I don't know, the ball just stuck. We didn't move it as well. Give them credit. We played a good team.

One thing I will say about these guys all year, they could have thrown in the towel many a times with what we went through. Started out the second half, they hit a three to go up 12, and within four minutes we had it cut to 2.

I'll give guys like Trimble credit, two big blocks. We had a couple missed cut-outs, and yet the things we wanted to do, outrebound them was big, we did. Shoot a decent percentage, we shot really well the first half. Not turn the ball over too much, we had 11, that's a little high for us.

But we just didn't come up with big plays, and they did in key times. It's happened to us three times this year. It's never a good omen when a shot banks in at the end of the shot clock, and it happened a couple times this year.

I'm proud of the fact that we could have given up. These guys have been through a lot, but we got beat by a really good team in a tough environment. I'll just say hat's off to Carolina and Hubert and their team, but I'm not going to hang my head because I don't believe it was a 16-point



loss. So many ebbs and flows that were monstrous in that game.

Q. Malik, where did you feel like this game kind of got away as it was getting away, and what were you trying to do as a team to try to stem the tide against a really talented team that kept pouring offense at you guys? Where did you think it got away?

MALIK HALL: I'd have to say probably like around the eight-minute mark. I think we were just talking about it in the second half. We had cut it pretty close, and then we just had some mistakes, offensive rebounds. They made some tough shots. Then after that, we couldn't get anything to go on offense, I don't think really. That's just kind of where I felt like it went.

Q. Tyson, thanks for coming out here in a tough situation. Can we ask you for your thoughts, splendid career, great career. Your thoughts as it came to an end and your thoughts on this game today?

TYSON WALKER: Been in college for a little while, so it's going to be weird. No more practice, no more games. But we played well in the beginning, just didn't execute, and they did. They made big plays. We didn't.

For the underclassmen, it will be something for them to learn, just how the game goes. You can't have big mistakes, and the game is fragile.

Q. It is quite remarkable you guys stayed together all year with all you've been through. It's easy to see a team fall apart with all the experiences you guys had this year. What held you together?

TYSON WALKER: I would say we didn't even think about falling apart. We knew we were better than what we were doing. I think that was what kept us -- made us even closer, just trying to figure out why we were having those slumps.

I don't think -- it's basketball. You can't just, because you lose some games, fall out with people you've been grinding with for some years now. I think that's what kept us

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together.

Q. For any of you guys, when you were on that surge, 26-14, 27-16, and things are really going well, did it feel like this was sustainable? I'm not saying to that degree, but did you feel like you really had something rolling? Or could you tell that -- I don't know. Could you tell North Carolina was due a little bit?

A.J. HOGGARD: I think we definitely thought we could definitely make a run in the tournament in general, and just being up, especially being in this environment where it's a lot of blue and they're close to home, and starting off the way we did and doing the things we did with the way we've been playing the last couple weeks, we definitely thought we had a chance.

I think we definitely thought we had a chance. We just didn't finish how we thought we would.

Q. Malik?

MALIK HALL: I honestly forgot the question. What did you ask?

Q. Did it feel sustainable when you had that lead early on the way you guys were playing?

MALIK HALL: Yeah, it felt sustainable for sure. We were pretty much getting what we wanted, which is what everybody likes. Obviously we know that basketball is a game of runs, and we know they were due for a run just because they're a great team.

I mean, we definitely still thought it was sustainable and we'd be able to sustain a run even if they did go on one.

Q. Ingram being a difference maker today, a guy to go inside out, they go big and put him in the three in those things. Your thoughts on him being a game-changer today?

TOM IZZO: On the scout they said he's the X factor, and he was the X factor. We felt we had to double down on him. We were picking and choosing.

He hit some big shots. He's a 31 percent three-point shooter, and he hit them. We decided to do what we did with Cadeau, and we decided to do -- we didn't try to give Ingram those shots, but he made a couple, and then he got hot, and he made a bunch.

When you look at it, they made, as they said, big plays. Some was a block, some was an offensive rebound. They only had five of them, but they scored 10 points on them.

They scored 16 points off our turnovers, and we didn't have a slew of them.

I thought everything we wanted to do, we did. I thought our offense let us down in that eight-minute mark of the first half. Then what people don't realize is we were two down with eight minutes left in the game, and that was after a banked-in shot. We just couldn't make the plays and they did make the plays.

Q. There were a lot of times this year when you were disappointed with a team's play and you watched the film, you came back and said there were some highlights. What do you think kept the team together? I think it would have been easy for a lot of other teams to fall apart.

TOM IZZO: Yeah, I think you're right. I think that shows something about maybe their character, maybe my coaching staff's and maybe the culture that we have at our place. I think those three things had a lot to do with it.

The former guys still encouraging, calling. Listen, I'm not making any bones about it. We underachieved, and that falls on me. I've said that before, and I'll say it again. That's why I thought we could make a run.

People said why? Because it wasn't always our fault. You can't go 7-of-17 from the line on the road and lose a game down the stretch. I don't care how good you are. You can't do that. We did things like that this year uncharacteristically, since we've been a pretty good free-throw shooting team.

I think all in general what's saddest for me is these last two, three weeks have been the most fun when things should have been the biggest grind. When you sit in that film room like we do and my staff is down there and I've got four guys down there working on academics and three guys on the side watching film together, I've got four guys in the other room watching one of the games that was going on. In other words, everybody started spending more and more time together.

It's my worry that all these kids have so many other things to do that does it take the tournament to really get them to focus in? How can I do a better job of that throughout the whole year? That will be my challenge this spring.

Q. Tom, just talk about the fun you had down the stretch. Maybe it's a grind. You guys played well in Minneapolis, obviously, to make shots against Purdue, but I thought you played well. Then that stretch today, it's one of the things that's tough this season as a whole. It's going to your point of not quite figuring out

how to get there earlier, so today you're not throwing an alley-ooop when it's a fumble or throwing a pass when nobody on the side. Not to single out anybody, but those little, not turning your head on a back-door cut, but those little tiny things in the margins that are important against a Number 1 seed, right?

TOM IZZO: There's a poem out there that I gave to my players about three weeks ago. It's called Every Possession Matters. Really, really hard for a freshman to understand that. Really, really hard. My bad, Coach. It's just one play.

It ends by we didn't do this, we didn't do this, we didn't do this, and by the end of the day, I guess it was bigger than I thought because we lost by two.

That's been the way it's been. I think part of it, if A.J. would have led like he's led these last couple weeks, I think that would have made a difference. I think he had some injuries that hurt us and some guys that were out, but everybody has injuries.

Then Kohler, we were still changing people right and left. And then the development of our young guys. I mean, you've heard everybody say it. It's really hard to do that this day and age, and they'll be much better. Yeah, it made it frustrating because I kept saying to myself I know this team has enough.

You know what, I'll leave today believing I'm right. I really think we have enough that we could have made a little run. Yeah, we would have had to get them past a mountain, but we had them down. We come back in the second half, and we took a couple of punches, and they took some too. We just couldn't get over the hump.

Somehow I got to do a better job. I've got to figure that out. And I promise you between now and October, I will.

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