

# Big Ten Football Media Days

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## Michigan State Spartans

### Coach Jonathan Smith

#### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Our next coach is Michigan State's Jonathan Smith. Coach Smith, welcome to the Big Ten. We'll begin with your opening statement.

JONATHAN SMITH: It is great to be here today representing Michigan State University. It's always an exciting day to kind of kick off and get started on this new adventure that me and my family are really looking forward to.

Got three players here that are going to represent this place as well. Nate Carter, running back, that has been awesome for us on and off the field. Get to go know him -- he's actually the first player that I met on the team, and he's had the best off-season of his life because he got married just a few weeks ago.

Dillon Tatum, versatile player in the secondary, does a bunch in our community. Another one that in our locker room has a ton of influence. I think he'll represent us today really well.

And Jack Velling, a tight end we're very familiar with. Just got over in January to Michigan State and has dove into our locker room. Feel like his skill set and his abilities, he has a chance to be one of the best tight ends in the country.

So really excited about those three guys being here as well.

Even for me, being here is impressive to be a part of the Big Ten Conference with the four new schools, the additions, even following a legend like Coach Ferentz is impressive, leads to it's going to be competitive and challenging, and I'm really excited to dive in and do that in this conference.

We went to work starting in December, laying a foundation through spring practice that we felt really good about. We've had some new additions and new faces that we're putting this together this summer, this off-season. Can't give enough credit to our strength staff led by Mike

McDonald for all the work that's been done, and now there's a huge amount of work moving forward that I'm really looking forward to doing.

I want to be a place, Michigan State, of substance. I've been around the building before, and I'm looking forward to building something special here at Michigan State. With that, I'll take your questions.

**Q. Aidan Chiles and Jack followed you from Oregon State to Michigan State. I wonder if you could tell us about Aidan, his potential in his first year potentially starting as quarterback for the Spartans. And Jack, what makes him one of the more underrated tight ends within the country, and does he have a shot at the Mackey Award when all is said and done?**

JONATHAN SMITH: We feel both guys on and off the field are a great additions. They had a good amount of options to consider, so we feel great they chose to come to our place. Both of them, there's some advantages, familiarity within the scheme they're going to be running, the terminology and how we call plays and how we do it.

Aidan, I think athletically, he's gifted at throwing the ball, he can move his feet, but he has a deep passion for this game. He likes studying it, and I think he's got some instincts to play in the game.

Yes, he's still a youngster. He had some action last year, but we're looking forward to seeing how him playing full-time, how he continues to grow and gives us a chance to score some points.

**Q. In spring practice, what did you learn about your offensive line? And how long do you think it will take to gain some real traction there?**

JONATHAN SMITH: I think that O-line starts with a -- they've got a deep passion for the game. They like to play. We want to create an O-line where you're not just targeted to have five guys. We want to have some depth.

O-line Coach Jim Michalczyk does a great job of multi-line positions. We'll be not targeting you're only a left tackle.



We have some play inside and outside to be able to put the best five out there.

We got some things established in the spring, but we have a lot of work in August. And that's for every position, to tighten up our best five, but continue to have some depth. In this physical game, you know you'll end up playing more than five guys during the season.

**Q. What's kind of a mantra or just a philosophy that you've had that's carried you from the Mountain West to the Pac-12 to now the Big Ten, coaching this team? Moreover, when it comes to this roster, how much does it kind of resemble what you were already building at Oregon State based on just the character and the identity of the team?**

JONATHAN SMITH: You start with the first question, my mantra. I've always learned a long time ago, low ego, high output. How we approach it or how we play the game, how we prepare for it, even how you function as a staff, not keeping it just about yourself.

This current roster, I am excited about in regards to I think we've got some talent, but we do have some guys that have a care factor for this game, not just about playing because there's so much work that goes into it and the work needs to be done together. This is the ultimate team game.

So trying to fill the locker room with guys that understand and want to be a part of something bigger than themselves, and I think we've got a lot of those guys.

**Q. You've had the opportunity to either play under or be coached under some legends in the West Coast -- Coach Riley, Coach Erickson, Coach Petersen. I was just wondering if you could tell us some of the most important lessons that you learned under their tutelage that you're now taking to East Lansing.**

JONATHAN SMITH: Good question. I could talk for quite a while on really all three of those guys. I think about Mike Riley being authentic. Sometimes guys get the title of head coach, been doing it for a while, he never really changed his personality type. Strategy, learned a ton from Coach Riley in regards he was an offensive coordinator and a defensive coordinator in his career. That was my early-on learning about the game, got a ton from that.

Dennis Erickson, ultimate competitor. This guy was competitive. No slow-down, no back-down out of that guy. Evaluator or talent. He could recognize talent quickly. And had long conversations with him as a young coach on how he did that, on recognizing talent.

Chris Petersen, on the coaching side, been with him the longest by far. He told a ton. You talk about organization, vision, setting a direction, alignment, creating alignment within a program, an organization, master at it. Creativity, offensive background, but creativity on the offensive side. Then continued to always push to find ways to improve, never staying the same. I learned that from Coach Pete.

**Q. What I want to talk about, you know what they say, Rome wasn't built in one day. At your alma mater Oregon State, you got it going and built them up to competitiveness. Now at Michigan State, the stakes are a little higher. You have a slimmer margin for error. Did you emphasize to the athletic upper powers that this is not going to be an overnight process and that you want to be in it for the long haul and invest for the long term?**

JONATHAN SMITH: All of us are competitive, so we don't have a long patience for playing quality football. At the same time, I think you're always building. You're starting somewhere, you're going to create a foundation, and then you're building off of that. So I'm looking forward to that approach of we built something before.

Not going to panic on the first adversity we see, understanding that, yeah, sometimes there is a process to it, but not going to say that we have patience for -- we want to be in a constant state of improvement and build it the right way.

**Q. Coach, you spent most of your life on the West Coast. What's been the biggest adjustment coming to the Midwest or maybe the biggest culture shock for you?**

JONATHAN SMITH: I wouldn't say shock. I do think the community in East Lansing has been welcoming and the people, the pride and passion. I don't think that's different than the West Coast, but you feel it out this way.

I'm not just talking about Michigan State football. I've had an awesome opportunity to get around basketball and the year our hockey team had and the passion the place has for Michigan State that's been really, really fun.

**Q. Playing at Oregon State, coaching at Washington, the Oregon rivalry, I'm sure, has a special meaning. You're going into Oregon again this year. How will that be different for you this year going in as a head coach for Michigan State? And prior to you taking the job at Michigan State, when was the last time prior to that you ever wore the color green?**

JONATHAN SMITH: Yeah, I have not worn much green leading into this, but I do have green eyes on that end.

Look, I think, yeah, we're going to play the Ducks, and they're going to be a competitive team again. They are year in and year out. That game, there might be some conversation about myself going back there, but that's really about just myself.

We've got a bunch of guys that we need to prepare a certain way each week to play our best, and that will be my approach in coaching the guys when we head down there.

**Q. You were able to keep a good chunk of your coaching staff from Oregon State, but you did have some new hires to the program, or at least new to your coaching staff. How has that been having about half from Oregon State and half new hires on your coaching staff this season?**

JONATHAN SMITH: I feel good about the blend we were able to put together. Yes, we had a crew of guys that came over that I'm deeply rooted with. I think it helps in transition to get started, speaking the same language, have shared experience through the years. So I thought that was real value there.

But at the same time, we're in a different spot, different conference, location, and so I wanted to have some guys with some expertise of the conference. And with Chad Wilt and Joe Rossi having coordinated in this league and done it at a really high level, felt good about those two additions.

Then important to have some guys that have walked the halls and lived the experience. So having two other coaches that have been former Spartans and played here with Courtney Hawkins, Demetrice Martin, I think it rounded out really well with just those ten full-time coaches.

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