

Big Ten Basketball Media Days

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Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Michigan State Spartans

Men's Head Coach

Tom Izzo

THE MODERATOR: Please welcome from Michigan State University Head Coach Tom Izzo. Coach Izzo is entering his 29th season with the Spartans, and last season made his Big Ten record 25th consecutive NCAA Tournament appearance advancing to the Sweet 16.

Coach, welcome back. We'll begin with your opening statement.

TOM IZZO: Well, it's great to be back, and I'm excited about the season. I not only think we have a better team, but I think you're going to find this league is so much better than what I've seen in preseason rankings. When you look at some of the teams that got a lot back and yet, I'll be honest with you, other than my own team, a little bit Purdue, it's kind of who knows who has what because there's been a lot of changes in our league, as there has been in the country.

So I'm really excited. I've got some guys that have been through the wars that have succeeded in some and have failed in some, and I think that helps prepare them for what we're in for this year.

The schedule is pretty good early, and it will kind of give us a great way of figuring out where we are. Especially, you know, with this game with Tennessee that would have been just a scrimmage, and now it's kind of a little more than a scrimmage, since we're going to give the money to Maui. I think it's a great deal for Rick and I, and they're really good, and we scrimmaged them last year.

So I'm excited about a lot of it. I think in general the Big Ten is still the Big Ten, and it seems like other leagues and I guess we get this negative part about the NCAA Tournament. Understand it. Understand it. Know that one of us got to win a national championship to get this thing straightened out and put a little pressure on Matt, what he's got back. I think they have a great shot, but I think there are some other teams in the league that have a shot too.

So questions, I'll take.



Q. The four former Pac-12 teams coming into the league next year, what do they add and what concerns, if any, do you have about scheduling and travel?

TOM IZZO: Well, for me they add a chance to get some tan lines in the winter, you know. That's what they're going to be for me.

You know, I don't know about the scheduling. I have all the faith in Tony and our group and K.P. and how they do it. It's going to be a little interesting, but I was here and I was just telling Tony behind the stage and Jim Delaney, when they started this expansion and everything, I was one that was telling him how crazy he was. As they say, crazy like a fox. Look what happens with the Big Ten Network. Look at what's happened with the expansion of our league.

I think there's been a lot more positives than negatives, and I think that will continue. So I'm excited. Those are some good -- Mick Cronin is a good friend. We played USC last year. We played Oregon last year. We haven't played Washington recently, but I guess I'm excited. There's going to be some incredible trips, and I'm looking forward to it.

Q. Can you speak a little bit on Tre Holloman, his development from last year to now, and then has the campus settled down since the shooting? Has it got somewhere back to normal that your players feel comfortable again?

TOM IZZO: Yeah, two good questions. Tre Holloman has had a heck of a summer. He is probably as hard a working guy as I've got. He is a guy, I say, three Ls, do you like it, do you love it, or do you live it? He has lived the game. He has been in the gym all summer. He is gaining some weight. I think that's the last thing he really has to do. He is still a little skinnier, but stronger. I think very, very good defensively. He has become a much better shooter. So we're excited. Tre will definitely be in that playing group. We're excited what he's done.

As far as the campus, you know, it's a shame what's gone on a lot of campuses around the country and what went on at our place. It happened. I think our administration did a



phenomenal job as we reacted very quickly and within a couple of hours and apprehended the shooter.

Then how our campus kind of rallied around each other was what impressed me the most. I think it's through times that things go wrong that you realize how close-knit you can get, and I think we miss the people we lost. We still feel for the people that have been injured and are recovering, but we are moving forward the best we can, and I think things have been pretty positive.

Q. My question for you is based honestly off of your opening statement. You've got a returning group of players. You have some new guys coming in. I'm a Chicago guy, so Joliet West, Jeremy Fears Jr. is interesting to me, but broadly, over your career you've seen a wealth of successful teams. This early on in the season, are there any specific or thematic traits, characteristics that you see in a group early on in a year that sometimes that you have seen in other successful teams of the past, and exactly what are those this early in the season?

TOM IZZO: About three weeks ago we had a bunch of our pros that came back and a lot of our alums came back, and the first thing they all brought to my attention was it seems like a pretty close-knit, together team.

Everybody talks about that. Everybody has a family. But the only way you get that is that's earned through time. I've got some fourth and fifth-year guys. I've got some guys that have been successful. I've had some guys that have failed and had to relook at things. Had some tough losses in the NCAA Tournament. I've had some big wins in the NCAA Tournament.

So I think they understand the difference between winning and losing, and then last year coming within an overtime win of maybe getting to another Final Four. I think that left some hunger.

The best thing I look for now is togetherness in your team. Is the chemistry good? Especially when you bring in a good class of freshmen, and yet you have some upperclassmen. Is it a player-coached team? Do the upperclassmen kind of help coach those freshmen? And do we have leadership? I think we have a chance to have very good leadership.

Jeremy Fears I think is one of the best leaders as a freshman that I've had, and I've had a couple of really good ones. Only a couple because there aren't many like that, but he has been great for practices, great for A.J. Hoggard. Those guys go at it every day, and Tre Holloman.

I think one of the reasons I'm excited, I think we have pretty good guards. We have both depth and we have talent at that spot, and hopefully that leads you as you go through the season.

Q. Just curious, in the time that you've spent coaching him after recruiting him, if there's any observation, takeaway, thought that comes to mind that you can share with us with Xavier Booker?

TOM IZZO: Very, very skilled and talented player is what I like. Great family is what I like. And not entitled is what I love. Okay?

He knows he has to get stronger. He knows he has to get better. He knows he has to play harder, but he has some things that I never had. You know, a foot and arm length and a foot and a half in height, and those things are valuable.

Very good athlete. He has adjusted pretty well to college. The banging has been something we all knew he had to get better at, but I give a lot of credit to his mom and dad because they knew that. The day he got out of school, they wanted him up lifting and getting better.

Xavier has been a treat to coach, to be honest with you. We know with freshmen everything changes when the game starts and you don't play enough minutes and this and that. That's normal. I mean, everybody has gone through it.

It kind of helped me a couple of weeks ago I had Jason Richardson in there, and as a freshman he was a top-5 player. He came off the bench, and played limited minutes early and then grew into a spot that helped us win a national championship, helped him get to a Final Four the second year and the fourth or fifth player taken in the draft.

This is a process, and that's what we're trying to tell Xavier. In fact, all the freshmen. But Xavier has the longest process from a standpoint of strength and that ability, but he's got one of the highest prospects as far as skill level and he can shoot it. He can run. He's been fun to coach. I've been really enjoying Xavier.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Izzo, thank you for your time.

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