

Big Ten Basketball Media Days

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Men's Basketball Panel

Tom Izzo

Michigan State

Dana Altman

Oregon

Mike Rhoades

Penn State



chasing these guys for sure, but that's the fun of it all.

THE MODERATOR: How you about guys, Tom?

TOM IZZO: I think we have some depth this year. We had some injuries last year too, as a lot of people do. So I think our depth is the positive side of it. The depth is the negative side of it too. I need one or two players to step up and be above that, and I'm hoping that Jaden Akins is one of those guys.

THE MODERATOR: Dana, one of the big stories, maybe the biggest story in the league this year, is the expansion. Obviously four new programs. And I think we spoke last year even about kind of what this was going to mean hypothetically moving forward for the 14 programs already in the league.

What does it mean for your program, though? What does it mean for one of the four programs that's entering the Big Ten? How does it change Oregon basketball?

DANA ALTMAN: Well, there's a lot of tradition in the Big Ten. Obviously the Pac-12 had some tradition with UCLA, Arizona. We had some good programs. We've had a good stretch, but the Big Ten with Indiana, with great tradition, Michigan State, Michigan, Purdue, you know, there's a lot of tradition over here.

So we're excited about that. We're excited to be involved with that. Tom and I were just talking about the trips. Those five road trips in January, February, March, and we're not used to having weather problems on the West Coast. That may disrupt our travel a little more.

No, it's a big change for us, but one our fans are looking forward to. Our program is also.

THE MODERATOR: There's a lot of change in college sports in general, and one of the in season tournaments this year that's going to be emblematic of it is this Players Era Tournament that's going on in Vegas that you are one of the programs that is a part of.

There's an NIL contribution that goes along with it. What is

THE MODERATOR: We are pleased to have Tom Izzo, Dana Altman, Mike Rhoades with us here. I would usually start with Tom. We kind of defer to him in this league. Dana, due to his seniority. I'm going to start with the new guy. Are you comfortable with that, Tom?

TOM IZZO: I love it.

THE MODERATOR: Just a quick overview on your team that I want from each one of you guys, just a modified opening statement on what we should expect this year.

DANA ALTMAN: Well, we've got a full roster. Everybody is healthy now, which is a change for us. Last four years have been kind of rough on our health, but I like our age. We've got an old ball club. We brought in some grad transfers that give us some experience.

A couple of the guys we've played against. T.J. Bamba who was at Washington State, Brandon Angel was at Stanford. So we have a pretty good idea what they're going to do.

We have three starters back. Two guys started as freshmen. Jackson Shelstad, K.J. Evans. I like our competitiveness in practice, and right now we're healthy. If we can stay that way, I like our depth.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Rhoades?

MIKE RHOADES: Excited for these five seniors to return, so we have some experience. We went through the Big Ten landscape last year, and those are valuable experiences moving forward.

I think we addressed our needs. We got bigger, Big Ten bigger, and we got some depth. So taking the next step,



being involved in that mean for Oregon?

DANA ALTMAN: Well, it's a new concept and it's changing our game, but I've had to adjust. I drug my feet on it a little bit, but I had to realize if I was going to stay in the game, that I had to adjust.

NIL is a big part of it. None of us have unlimited funds, and so being part of this tournament helps our collective. We were able to give our players extra money because of the tournament, and it's just a reality of where the game is at today.

As I mentioned, I drug my feet on it for a couple of years, but it is what it is, and I knew if I was going to stay in the game for a while that I had to adjust, and our program had to adjust. Our collective, everyone.

It's part of the game now. We look forward to the challenge. We're playing three really good teams. Texas A&M, San Diego State, Creighton. So it's a good tournament. Vegas is easy for us to travel to, so it's a good situation for our program.

THE MODERATOR: Tom, you guys have an in-season tournament. You'll be playing some pretty good teams in Maui as well. I actually want to talk to you. I was looking through your schedule. It doesn't seem quite as masochistic as it normally is for someone like you in the nonconference. But there's one game that really jumped out at me, and that was your exhibition game at Northern Michigan. The fact that you are going back to the UP and playing at your alma mater, what does that game mean to you?

TOM IZZO: It means pasties for pregame meal. I can't wait for my guys to start chewing on that for a while. I thought about it the last couple of years. I always talk to my buddy Gary Mariucci, which I was trying to get him in, but he is working on the NFL Network so he won't make it.

But it just kind of back to reality. It's going to be good. We're playing in one of the world's largest domes. Wooden domes, I should say. We always play an exhibition game, and so I said, why not go up there, and I'm going to take my guys through a lot of the places we started at.

I know you guys will laugh, but I think you'll agree. I think we do have a more entitled student-athlete. I'm going to bring them and show them where it wasn't entitled, and hopefully that will bring a little wisdom to them.

THE MODERATOR: Does video still exist of the last game that Michigan State played there where a young Tom Izzo in 1974 had six assists and five rebounds?

TOM IZZO: Yeah, man. That was my first college start, Michigan State game up there. Gus Ganakas was good friends with my head coach, Glenn Brown.

Hard to believe that was that many years ago, but I don't know if we took video then, to be honest with you. Hell, cell phones and TV just came up there a few years ago.

But we're going to have some fun with it, and yet hopefully a good cause and do some different things and charity things. I think it will all be good.

THE MODERATOR: Mike, you need to follow suit and get Lebanon Valley on your schedule.

MIKE RHOADES: We're go to play there in a couple of weeks against Lafayette. We're going to play --

THE MODERATOR: In the area?

MIKE RHOADES: Yeah. We'll go back to my alma mater. And the facilities are a lot nicer now than when I played there, that's for sure. And probably the pregame meals are too.

THE MODERATOR: You guys have the Palestra game, the annual Palestra game when you are doing this year, which has been amazing. I had a chance to call one of them a number of years ago. It's one of the most memorable experiences of my broadcasting career.

You also had the Rec Hall game last year which was amazing. You guys pulled out an incredible win. The atmosphere was great. How much discussion has there been about making that an annual...

MIKE RHOADES: I try to make it an every day discussion with our administration, but it's -- it was a great environment. Turning back the clocks for a lot of alums, a lot of fans and supporters, so we're going to continue our administration.

We want to be outside the box. That's what we keep talking about. For us to move forward in this league and to chase these guys like I said earlier, we got to think outside the box, and playing a game at Rec Hall, great environment, on top of the court, old school sort of like double knot your shoes and let's go to work.

Hot gym, hot arena, and everybody walked on the campus, and it was a great night. We're going to continue to try to replicate that and the Palestra game as well and just keep thinking outside the box and promoting our program.

TOM IZZO: You know what's bad, Dave? We played there when it was inside the box. That was the only place we played.

MIKE RHOADES: Right, right.

TOM IZZO: It's been a few years. I remember one of the last games there. Judd fell and tripped in the -- as he was giving the pregame talk because the pregame talk, the showers and the bathrooms were all within about a five-foot area.

It was awesome. Then we happened to get a chance to play in the Palestra too. I think those things are really cool. Not to help your recruiting, but I do think they're really cool.

THE MODERATOR: You thought about going back to Jenison at all?

TOM IZZO: We did that one time a few years ago, and I would do it again. I think, like Mike said, all these things that are a little bit outside the box. Bring back your fans. Bring back your alums. They enjoy it, and it brings a little levity to the players. Magic Johnson played here. It was good enough for him. Why not good enough for you?

THE MODERATOR: Mike, we were talking about this at the outset when we were talking about all the roster turnover and kind of how this is the reality particularly when you take over a new program, as you did last year, and you guys really were -- it was amazing. You returned less than 5% of your scoring last year, and you ended up winning nine games.

What did you learn about kind of how your philosophy and style of play translated to the Big Ten, and what can you kind of carry forward?

MIKE RHOADES: Well, number one, it helped me. We have to be different. We have to be different, the way we play, the way we approach it, and being different is -- we have to take great pride in that.

Play a little differently than the rest of the league, and our approach is going to be different. For us we have to create a lot of possessions in the game. If the game becomes court on court offense or court on court defense against Penn State, I always say we'll get bludgeoned, so we have to be different.

We have to be bold about that too and not be apologetic for it at all. This is who we're going to be. For us to move forward. We had signature wins last year. We had some great momentum to build on, but now let's see if we can

take another step.

THE MODERATOR: Tom, talking about taking another step, I'm interested in your sophomore class. You were saying in your opening statement we need some guys to take a step forward, and we saw certainly from Xavier Booker last year. We saw some moments. I realize that there was a ton of hype that surrounded, and there was a challenge for him to adjust. Coen Carr, we saw the explosiveness, and then Fears had a terrible and tragic incident that obviously thankfully he came through. Tell me about each one of those guys and maybe the jump that they could make this year.

TOM IZZO: I really do. I don't apologize for it. I think sometimes rankings create problems for kids. I think Book has went from 217 to 240, so he's got -- and it's all good weight. He's gotten stronger. I think he's a player that has got tremendous skills and tremendous measurements, but you still got to have -- you still got to play the game.

I think in Coen Carr, he is one of the best athletes in the country, but you have to become better offensively, which he has. Better defensively. I think he's become.

Poor Jeremy, you know, only played a few games, so he is a freshman all over. I still think the class is as good as it was ranked. I think it maybe just takes a little while longer. If it does, all I care about is the results at the end.

THE MODERATOR: Dana, I mentioned off the top you guys had some good late-season momentum last year. You won the Pac-12 tourney. Maybe it's a silly question in this day and age because the rosters do turn over, but you guys bring back a fair amount. Can you carry momentum from a season -- the end of one season into another season in this day and age?

DANA ALTMAN: Well, I would feel a lot better if we were bringing Dante back with that group, but Dante and Jermaine fueled that run at the end of the year, which seniors do. We got healthy. We've been banged up all year, and we got a little healthier at the end of the year and made a nice run.

No, I think our guys, bringing three starters back and a couple of others that made contributions to the team. I think those things carry over a little bit. Their expectations go up when you have some success at the end of the year.

As Tom mentioned, you know, it's hard on freshmen because you're playing against guys that are so much older right now. That hasn't been worked into the formula. It's hard for them when they're going against 22, 23, even 24-year-olds as an 18-year-old, 19-year-old. It's been hard

on freshmen the last couple of years because of COVID and because of all the old guys.

That will change next year, you know, when we go back to four classes instead of five, but our freshmen did step up last year. Hopefully they'll make that jump that traditionally a lot of freshmen and sophomores have made. If they do, that gives us some real good momentum because Jackson started all year. He was out a few games with injuries, but K.J. started most of the year. Mookie was hurt all year, but those three guys, like Tom said, the rankings don't mean nothing, but ranked pretty high. Hopefully they'll make a big jump.

THE MODERATOR: Closing statement from each one of you. I want to ask you each to answer the same question. One thing you're most looking forward to coaching this team. Coach Rhoades.

MIKE RHOADES: Year two. It's not year one (laughing). For sure. Just having a group of guys that are building on our work of culture. It's been a lot of fun coaching these guys so far.

DANA ALTMAN: Working with a lot of old guys. I enjoy their maturity. I think a lot of the guys came here and haven't been in the NCAA Tournament, haven't experienced the success they want to experience. So hopefully they'll have a team mentality. It's not an individualized sport.

TOM IZZO: I'm looking forward to still making another run. That's what I keep talking to my guys. This summer we went to Spain and I think we got a lot out of that. Now it's going to be can we get off to a decent start?

As these guys said, I think the big problem now is there's a lot of injuries. I mean, we played them two years ago I think it was. They had injuries, and guys got injured in our game. You had two big guys get injured during the game, and you were already down. You might have had more injuries. I hope you don't bring that to the Big Ten, by the way, Dana.

Everybody has to stay healthy, and I'm just looking forward to -- I like my team. I like the chemistry, the camaraderie. I like the culture, which is hard to keep in this day and age.

THE MODERATOR: Great to visit with you. Thanks.

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