

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 15, 2024

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Target Center

Michigan State Spartans

Tom Izzo

Tyson Walker

A.J. Hoggard

Postgame Press Conference

Purdue - 67, Michigan State - 62

THE MODERATOR: We have Michigan State, Tyson Walker and A.J. Hoggard. We'll start with an opening statement from Coach.

TOM IZZO: I'm really proud of my team. I don't throw that word around very often. I thought we battled a lot of people today. I thought that Purdue is a very good team worthy of their ranking. Matt's a great coach. They got just as good a chance as anybody to, I think, win the National Championship.

So where does that put us? I don't know, we're going to find out. I thought we did enough things in a tough situation, and we didn't make many shots.

But we said rebounding would be a key; we outrebounded. We said turnover was going to be a key; we turned over a little too much.

I'm proud of these guys, especially these two up here, and my bigs who battled the bear. But it was what it was.

Q. You guys put up a really good fight tonight. I saw some frustration at the end of the first half with foul trouble. What goes through your head during those times, not being able to help out your team?

TYSON WALKER: It's frustrating. You know, just got to play through it. Things happen. You can't script the game. Just got to be better and figure it out.

Q. Lance Jones took four charges in that game. How much did you think his physicality impacted things when he came in for Braden Smith?



A.J. HOGGARD: When you can take charges and get teams out of their rhythm, now when you're being aggressive, you're second guessing. It was definitely a big factor that he brought to the team tonight.

Q. Your fans travel really well. What did that mean to you having all that support at the Target Center?

TYSON WALKER: It means a lot. I think, if we didn't play so early, there would probably be more people here too, and it is kind of far. But they do travel everywhere we go. You always hear "Go Green!" It's always big for us, especially when we get on a run and you can hear the crowd really well.

Q. For both players, do you feel like even in defeat you proved what you possibly could do to yourselves and maybe to others going forward?

A.J. HOGGARD: Yeah, most definitely. I'm not a big moral victory guy. I'm big on the way we competed. I think we did a good job of competing. I think we have the talent. I think we have the coaching staff to make a run in the tournament.

I think we had everything it takes. We've just got to put it together. I think we put it together for 40 minutes tonight, just made some mistakes to not come up with the win.

TYSON WALKER: For sure. We paid attention to the scout. The bigs played as well as they could play. Battled down there. The guards kind of controlled them for the most part, but they made big shots. Things happen when you get a rotation.

Today just another lesson that we had that we can learn about. Now we've got time to work on ourselves individually and as a team.

Q. A.J., what can you take away from this performance to carry you guys into the NCAA Tournament?

A.J. HOGGARD: Can't take away our competitiveness, our willingness to not give up and continue to fight. Coming



out of halftime, we were ready to go. And they came out with a 5-0 run. We went down 12-0, and we didn't give up.

I'm proud of the guys with the way they competed tonight. We can take that into every game. With the scouting report and the game plan, we'll be fine.

Q. Tom, you talked about not missing shots obviously, but still it's tied with a couple minutes to go. I'm curious what you think that says. And just these guys kind of learning how to win in the margins. You're obviously going to have games where you don't make shots.

TOM IZZO: Give Loyer credit, that was his only three of the night. He hit that big three, and we just missed some shots. There was a couple of tough calls, that charging one with a minute and whatever left.

It seemed like we were overcoming a lot of things. Guarding Edey is a load. We tried it a number of different ways. We tried doubling. We tried digging. We tried regular head up.

Matt does such a great job of getting them the ball in different spots. But that was a war tonight. That was a classic Purdue-Michigan State of 20 years ago. I know Gene was here and Jud was looking down from up above, and I'm sure both of them had to be proud of the efforts given.

But you've got to make some of those open shots. You've just got to make some of those open shots. When you start looking at the stats, and we outrebounded them, that's a miracle. We did have one or two more turnovers, fast break points 18-0. Points off turnovers 14-5. Points in the paint 36-30 us.

We did what we had to do. We were a couple of tough calls and a couple of tough shots. Give them credit. They made the plays, and we didn't.

Q. With where you guys are projected seeding-wise in the NCAA Tournament, it could look pretty similar next week with you guys playing a team the caliber of Minnesota and then short rest and one of the best teams in the country. How can that prepare your guys, especially some of the young freshmen who haven't played in the NCAA Tournament before?

TOM IZZO: I'm not sure I was for this tournament when it started. Jim Delany started it. I remember the meeting with Bob Knight, Gene Keady, Clem Haskins. Not a lot of people were for the tournament. 25 years later, I think it's proved to be something great, something that rivals some

of the great tournaments around the country.

I thought our guys learned a lot today. The timeouts were great. There was more focus. A.J. did a helluva job.

But how about us? We went to Booker in the last minute. Shows you how much confidence I do have in him in that respect. As he gets stronger, he's going to be a helluva player. He'll learn from this. Coen will learn from this.

Hopefully our juniors and seniors will realize that we can play with anybody. We've shown that all year long. The problem is we haven't made the plays down the stretch. We've got to do a better job of that, and a lot of that falls on me. This week I'm going to try to do a better job of it, and we'll see if we can make one of those patented Michigan State runs.

We've now played Arizona. We've played Tennessee. We've played Purdue twice. Those are potentially all 1 seeds. We've played Illinois and Baylor and Duke. So we've been battle tested.

And we've done something else that we've had to rise up from some adversity and some tough times. I think that's a key in a team making a run, can it handle that, and can it work itself out of it? That's kind of the job of this week.

Q. Tom, after two games here, do you go back home feeling better about your team or about the same?

TOM IZZO: In all honesty, I felt good about this team. I think some of my press conference, I didn't like some of the things we did, but I felt like the potential to be where it was never changed for me all year long. That's what was probably frustrating to the media and the fans.

But I feel better about a lot of things. I really enjoyed the way we were rotating so many guys in there because of foul trouble and every guy answered the bell.

Mady Sissoko gets three of the biggest rebounds I've ever seen in nine or ten minutes.

I'm going to say I feel better about my team, and yet we've got to figure out a way to make some big plays. We made free throws down the stretch and big plays. We've got to get to the line a little bit more. For some reason there wasn't a lot of fouls called our way, so we didn't get to the line much. That's probably my fault.

Q. Tom, you spoke a lot about this team's adversity and you're getting wins over Baylor and keeping it within six and five against Purdue. What can you speak on this team's competitiveness and maybe the

difference with this team compared to your others?

TOM IZZO: Well, the most disappointing part for me as a coach is we've been consistently inconsistent. You've got veteran guards. You've got a veteran coach. You shouldn't be inconsistent. So I have to take a lot of that on my shoulders is figure it out.

But this weekend, the film sessions, the meetings, realized that this team was all in. When multiple times during the game we could have folded because there was some adverse things that happened. We were playing without some guys. It was some bizarre things that happened. And we just kept fighting.

You know what, that last minute and a half, we believed we were going to win the game in the huddle. I believed with every eye I watched, including Book and Coen, my two freshmen, that is a very positive sign, and that is a very good feeling. So I'm going to take that home and see what that brings.

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