

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 14, 2025

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

Michigan State Spartans

Tom Izzo

Coen Carr

Jaden Akins

Postgame Press Conference

Michigan State - 74, Oregon - 64

THE MODERATOR: Michigan State has arrived. Tom, we'll go to you for an opening statement.

TOM IZZO: I'm proud of our guys. These guys did a lot, a senior and a sophomore that have to do a lot. I thought the team in general, we were so good defensively, again, first half, but the turnovers cost us. That team shot 56 percent, and I thought we did a helluva job in the first half.

In the second half, we just came out and turned it over five times and gave them some layups, and there were turnovers for touchdowns. I think when Mariucci was here, he thought it was a football game. I felt like after we settled down, we really did a helluva job.

Then the last thing that hurt us is something that hasn't hurt us all year, and that is, we missed a lot of free throws, and that's uncharacteristic of us.

In general, Jeremy did a hell of a job on. The Shelstad kid -- the Shelstad kid is really good. Jase did a helluva job on Bamba. These kids are really good players. We had over half our team trying to guard him.

All in all, defense wins, and our defense was really good, but our offense wasn't bad today.

Q. Coen and Jaden, what was the biggest impact you felt that Jeremy had on this game? Obviously, he wasn't with you last time you played Oregon.

COEN CARR: I thought he guarded the ball well, guarded Shelstad well, made everything hard for him, and that's what we told him to do. I felt like he had good pushes too,



getting it close to the basket and kicking it out. I felt like those plays he made for us was real big for us in the game.

Q. Coen, I'm curious, when you rebound like that in the game, in the moment, what does it feel like for you to translate maybe the athleticism from the dunking into getting those rebounds for your team?

COEN CARR: It feels good. It feels good to help any way I can, help this team win, and that's one thing they want me to do is go in there and rebound like an animal. When I go in there and do that and get extra opportunities for my team, it's amazing for sure. Makes you feel good, definitely.

Q. Jaden, the job you guys did with four of your guards to score in this game, I guess, what was going well for you guys and what were you sort of going off of?

JADEN AKINS: I feel like we just tried to take advantage of some of the things they were doing. We knew they were going to be really aggressive pressing us and denying, so we got a couple back doors to happen, which led to Coen's dunk at the end that Jase had an assist on.

I felt like they were playing drop coverage, so we just tried to do our best to do damage in the midrange, but we've got to be better.

Q. Jaden, when a team wins the regular season, there's all these questions about motivation or what might be going on you guys' heads when you come down here. To start off 8-0 as a senior captain, how good was that to see? What did you notice about your guys in terms of energy right away to start off this tournament?

JADEN AKINS: We just always talk about not getting complacent. I felt like, before winning the regular season, I never won anything. I feel like winning that made me feel good and made me hungry to do more. I feel like everybody's on the same page with that, and we just want to win as many games as possible now.



Q. Jaden, I'm curious, I think everyone in the arena could hear people chanting Carson Cooper's name, but the job he did defensively, especially drawing that charge, I'm curious how impactful is it for you guys for him to be able to come off the bench and provide that?

JADEN AKINS: Super impactful. Coop, I feel like, that's been a staple of his since he got to campus. He's a great defender, very cerebral, knowing what's going on with what the other team is trying to do, and he always finds himself in the right place at the right time.

Q. Jaden, talk a little bit about Troy and then the job that Fears did and the job that Holloman did on Jackson because I thought they were all instrumental in changing their formation as Oregon is trying to run their offense?

JADEN AKINS: Absolutely. He had 20 points in the first half, so we couldn't do that if we wanted to be successful with that today. I felt like they took that personally, and I feel like they're some of the best defending guards in the league.

Q. The first time you played Oregon, they were up 14 in the first half. You guys came out and took control. How important was that? And for Jaden, what does it mean when the guy who everyone thinks is going to dunk the ball, leads you in rebounding, hits a 3, and gets steals, does everything but that?

COEN CARR: For us to start like that, it's great. We knew we had this double bye, and it could be a big advantage or a big disadvantage for us. For us to come out there and play hard and come out and really play defense and lock in and start off good, it was big for us for sure.

JADEN AKINS: I've just been watching Coen grow over these last two years with him. We all knew that he could dunk the ball, but that definitely translates to rebounding the ball, and he uses his athleticism well, and it translates into the game.

As you see, teams try to sack off him, but he's been working on his jump shot. He shot that really confident. When he's open, I feel like it's going in. That's just me.

Q. Coen, during the season, Tom and multiple of your teammates have called your dunks worth up to 6 points. How did that 3 compare in terms of momentum for the offense and what you've been building?

COEN CARR: For me, the 3 worth for more than a dunk. Dunk worth 16, worth 9. So that's what we're going to say. It was good, though, for me to be able to get that and shoot

it how how I shot it. I feel like all that gives energy to the team.

Through your dunk, I feel like any play I make gives energy to our team. And I feel like if I can do that, I'll be helping our team a lot.

Q. Jase forever hadn't taken more than eight shots in a game, and even on a night where he struggles, his recognition, his role has changed, and he's got to take 13, and you're going to ride with him whatever goes. How significant is that as you go into this tournament?

TOM IZZO: I think what I'm proudest about him is that he's embraced the process. He didn't get frustrated. He has a very good -- like, he came into the bench in the first half and said, I missed a couple shots, I took a couple bad shots. Who in the hell says that this day and age? I don't think there's such a thing as a bad shot for most of these guys.

He just has that very cerebral, very intelligent way of looking at the game. Talking to me about back-door plays and things that he thinks could work. He's just very efficient and very intelligent, and I think he -- he knows he's got to do some things when we get stagnant. He talks to me about moving the ball more.

I talked to him tonight, when he said I'm not shooting well, I said, let me worry about that. You just keep doing your job.

Q. Tom, you have a team you like and a team that's playing well, and it's March. How much fun are you having right now?

TOM IZZO: You know, I am having fun. I think that's hard to say at this time of year because you're playing for so much, but these guys have been great for me. I think I've made some adjustments for them. It's been good.

We had a walk-through last night, and I think the word fun has been part of it, and I think it's because of the players and my assistants and our managers, just the whole group has been fun. They all feel like our motto's been to be different, be different. Things have either been or things are going around, and they are very together.

Jeremy Fears tonight, I thought, played one of his best games, missed a couple layups and this and that. But he got Jase the ball, he guarded very well all but a couple times. So he's growing.

No doubt Jase is.

Tre, who's been phenomenal, he didn't have quite as good a game, and neither did Jaxon, but part of that is them. That is a good team. That team is going to make some noise in the NCAA Tournament, if you ask me.

Q. A lot of talk about the league's changes in terms of composition and travel and things like that, but on the court, it feels like it's faster, maybe higher scoring than it's ever been. Curious from your perspective how you've seen the shift and what you think it looks like going forward on the floor.

TOM IZZO: I've been in the Big Ten for 29 years without -- probably 20 years without addition of a couple, then we added a couple more, and then more and more. The league's always been tough. I talked to Gene Keady. I talked to Clem Haskins last week.

For some reason, I think our league doesn't get enough credit. We talk about having eight, nine teams in.

It's not our fault that we're beating the hell out of each other, and then who you play makes a big difference. Some of these NET -- I'm just not a big fan of these things. What I'm a fan of is eyeball to eyeball.

That's what I like about football a little better, is they have people on those committee that's are former players or coaches, and they look at how good the team is. We played some really good teams.

When I think down the stretch of Michigan and Purdue and Illinois. I mean, they're getting better and better. Let everybody else go play UCLA or Michigan, and the beat goes on.

Then our teams that haven't been -- I mean, the job Chris Collins did this year is phenomenal. Go play that team. And when you're playing in the Big Ten, you're playing in front of sell-outs every single night, and that's hard too.

I don't know if it's changed that much. We added four good teams. Sadly for me, I'm not in favor -- I hate to go against the Big Ten, but not everybody getting in. I'm in favor of coaches, and I think I'm the only one left on the planet. I don't like when people don't get in for one reason or another because of a coin flip. So I'm hoping that we can do something with that.

All in all, this league deserves a lot of teams in, and there's some teams that will do well. I know we haven't won the Final Four in 20 years, 25 years, 22 years, whatever it is. I don't think that's the only measuring stick. This conference is really good with some really good coaches and really good players and really, really, really good fans.

I'm glad I haven't left. I love it in this league.

Q. Your guys hit 7 of 15 from long range. A lot of that was Jase, but how did you feel about the looks and your guys' ability to knock down those shots while leading Oregon to just 4 of 19?

TOM IZZO: Jase missed some good ones too. That was him telling me that, not me telling him that. I thought Jaden missed a couple, one right before the half. I mean, that's money for him, the one in the corner.

Tre wasn't quite the same today, but he'll bounce back. He's been shooting the ball really well. It's nice to see Jaxon hit a 3 early. We've got to make some 3s. Tonight we made how many, seven? We've been making five and four, and now we made nine, nine, nine seven, and we're shooting a higher percentage.

If our 3-point shooting could join in with our defense and our rebounding and then we could do a little better job on those turnovers for touchdowns, we've got a chance to be a really good team instead of a very good team.

Q. You mentioned earlier about the conference newcomers. Is it something special as a tenured Big Ten member to kind of beat up on one of the conference newcomers?

TOM IZZO: There was no beat up. Were you drinking, or were you seeing a different game? We had one stretch where we got ahead of them, but I mean, that was a dogfight. Let me tell you something, that is a good team.

Let me tell you something else too, they are adjusting, as we adjust sometimes. They've had to come here three, four times now. They just played a game at 9:00 in the morning. I know he won't make any excuse, he's too good a coach, but I'll make some for him. I don't know how I would fare in that.

By the way, UCLA and USC beat the hell out of us. So I wouldn't say we beat the hell out of anybody. What we have is, we have a lot of good teams in this league.

By the way, Oregon did beat Alabama, didn't they? Make sure you judge the whole thing, not just the part. I think they went through a tough time there in a stretch. And what nobody understands yet is the schedule and the way it is, and who you could play and who you could play twice. And when you play them, it makes a big difference. We're all adjusting to that.

We're not an NBA team. Even though everyone wants us

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

to be a pro outfit, we're not. We go to school, and we've got to do other things. If you're from Oregon, I'd be willing to make you a side bet. I guess that's against NCAA rules. Oh, there are no rules anymore, so it doesn't matter. But I bet you that they make some noise in the tournament.

Q. You talked about your motto of being different. How is this unit? How is your unit this year different than the ones from the past couple of years? Can you describe that for me?

TOM IZZO: First of all, I love the Big Ten Network. I love what you do on The Journey. Second of all. Second of all, that's not insulting other teams. It's just for some reason, this team came together at the time it wasn't a super, super star, and people had seen that see we did not as well as we like to do. I did see that we're in the second game a couple times. We're in the Sweet 16 once. It's just not our standards.

So I had to take a good look at myself first, my staff, we talked about it. The being different is, we're going to play a lot of people because we have a group that -- we'll see how they end up. As it's happening, some guys are playing a few more minutes, some guys a few less, but we're still playing a lot of people.

I think it's one of the reasons we've been injury free all year, so there's been some pluses to it. It's just been fun. It's fun. When you're coaching guys and everybody's playing, it's fun. But they have to know there are some guys that are going to play more than others, especially as you get into this.

They've embraced it. They've been selfless. They pull for one another. When somebody -- when I'm getting on somebody in the huddle, the other guys are pulling for him. Come to think of it, nobody's pulling for me. That's got to change too. But that's what's going on with this team, and it's pretty cool.

Q. Tom, you finished up seven in rebounds, but with 12 minutes to go, it was 26-12. The importance of that, and also holding Shelstad to 2 points for most of the game.

TOM IZZO: Yeah, our rebounding has been good for a lot of years, but it's been pretty good this year without what I consider -- we don't have big wings. Coen is really starting to help that, but he plays some at the 4, some at the 3.

There's a mentality, you know, and the mentality is -- this is where I love my former guys. They all get on my players about that, being tougher, rebounding. I don't know, it's not like I love rebounding, but it's a way of actually measuring

your heart, your toughness, your pursuit of the ball, and it's been pretty good.

If we were up that much, I wish I would have known that. I would have enjoyed that for a couple seconds on the bench.

All in all, guys, if you ever see a tournament with eight teams that are playing today, and I think any one of the eight can go somewhere in the NCAA Tournament, enjoy the day because this is as good a day of basketball as I've seen, and I've been in this thing for every one of the Big Ten tournaments.

A lot of good teams. Unfortunately, we're going to have to play one of the two in Wisconsin and Maryland -- or UCLA. I'm sorry. One beat us, and the other one, we beat, but they had an injured player. So we know that they're going to be dogfights too. Enjoy the night. Get to St. Elmo's, have something on me.

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