

# Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 13, 2026

Chicago, Illinois, USA

United Center

## Michigan State Spartans

### Tom Izzo

### Jeremy Fears Jr

### Coen Carr

#### Postgame Press Conference

UCLA - 88, Michigan State - 84

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Michigan State coach Tom Izzo joined by student-athletes Coen Carr and Jeremy Fears Jr.

TOM IZZO: Really disappointing how we played. I give a lot of credit to UCLA. We beat them by 30 at our place, and Mick, like he should do, he got his team ready, and they played harder, tougher. It doesn't happen to my team very often, but for some reason we didn't answer the bell coming out. We miss some shots, but they probably missed a play or two. They definitely kicked us from start to finish. They deserved to win the game.

We almost made a valiant comeback, but that would have been too little, too late, the way we played. I think they made us play that way. They came at us. They punched us in the mouth, and we didn't respond. That doesn't happen very often. We'll figure out why, and then we'll move forward.

**Q. How did you think you guys approached this game, your mentality coming off the regular season finale and knowing what you have ahead of you with the NCAA Tournament and all that?**

JEREMY FEARS JR.: I think we approached it with the mindset we wanted to win the whole tournament. Obviously we didn't come out and do what we needed to do. That's credit on my part, like I didn't do my job today. It starts with me. If I don't do my job, I can't expect anybody else to mess up.

I definitely hurt the team, and I take responsibility, but overall, it's definitely going to sting for a while, and we've



got to watch it and understand that next time is your season.

COEN CARR: Yeah, we didn't bring the energy we had in practice to the game. They started off and punched us in the mouth. Then we didn't respond. By the time we responded, it was too late. Yeah, I definitely think we're going to look back at this game and reflect on it a lot and see how much things that were so preventable in that game that we could have done a way better job.

**Q. Jeremy, I wanted to ask you about the difference between Donovan Dent in the first game and this game and how much his penetration helps set them up around the arc tonight.**

JEREMY FEARS JR.: I think it was huge for them. He played great tonight. Overall, he's just got to spots wherever he wanted on the court. He got his guys open shots, and he did what he needed to do to help the guys win.

I didn't do my job in trying to contain and make it hard for him. So he was able to be successful tonight. Credit to them, they played great. They made a lot of open shots and got whatever shot they wanted. So we didn't do our part on defense.

**Q. I'm wondering in the second half, when you guys had 6-0, 7-0 runs and they matched them right after that. I wonder what you can diagnose as some of the reasons why things flipped like that with them and some of those extra stops didn't happen?**

JEREMY FEARS JR.: We had some possessions where we'd get two or three stops and chip away and get it down to striking distance, but then they hit a big time 3, or drive and kick and they get it and one. Those moments like this, it's heart breaking. Oh, you're so close, and they score again. Just understanding that, if we didn't put ourself in that position to start with, those big time shots is just part of basketball.

We got down early too much, and they made us pay.



There's just something that we can prevent.

**Q. Tom, I'm wondering about the second half tenacity that you guys have shown this year and the ability to get back into it. Also, kind of what I asked those guys about the 3-point looks they had. It seemed like they had a lot more open looks maybe than some teams have had in recent weeks.**

TOM IZZO: It's hard for me to talk about it from a standpoint of I do not want to take anything away from UCLA. I love what Mick has done. I like what he did after our game. He went at 'em, and they won 5 out of 6, and they've changed.

I think it's really helped them. They went small ball. I think that's helped them. And I think Skyy Clark has really helped them. He's a very good player. He was a great player and had that injury that lasted a month.

The number of shots we missed at the rim really hurt us. We had some wide open 3s late that hurt us. They didn't have many wide open ones that they didn't make, and that really helped them. We had a couple stretches where we gave up three rebounds in a row, and they hit a 3 on it.

It's hard to overcome that. For some reason the combination of Jeremy took some blame. Yet he has 21 points, shoots 7 for 14, 2 for 3, 5 for 5, 13 assists and 4 turnovers is pretty good. There's a combination of things we didn't do on those ball screens. And then you know late in the game and we didn't want to foul, of all people -- some of our freshmen just made some freshmen mistakes.

We should have fouled on that layup. That was the worst free-throw shooter, one of my seniors. We just kind of weren't with it tonight, and it really had nothing to do with looking by somebody or because we beat them by 30. We had great practices. Some of you were there for some of them.

But I did not think we handled -- they played desperate tonight. I absolutely love that. I love the team that played desperate and came at us and took us two-thirds of the game to respond.

**Q. Your players talked about beating themselves up for lack of effort or not enough effort.**

TOM IZZO: They should.

**Q. I was wondering if you concur with that, or was it more tactical things with their ball screens and whatnot?**

TOM IZZO: We all have to take some blame for it, yeah. We all have to take some blame for it. We made some adjustments at halftime that worked for a little bit, and then we fell asleep again.

When you lose like this, everybody has to take some blame. I've got no problem taking a lot of it. It's my job to get my team ready to play, and they were not ready to play. I never seen so many dropped looks early in the game. I don't know why. We played the best schedule. We played some of the best teams. We've done this and that.

I thought Mick had his guys ready to -- yeah, desperate. That's the best word I can come up with, and we did not look desperate. So if it was coverages, if it was coaching errors, let me tell you something, they'll never, ever come close to beating themselves up as much as I'm going to beat myself up, never. Players don't do that anymore.

We're going to have to get ready, but it ain't going to be tonight. I was disappointed. I was disappointed for our fans. I was disappointed for people that flew in a lot of ways. I just did not think that was a Michigan State effort. I really didn't.

**Q. You've had four games allowing now one point, two point possession in the last five. What is up with the defense slippage? What do you think is the biggest cause for concern right now?**

TOM IZZO: The defense slippage, I think you're right. I do not think we have been defending as well even when we won games. Some of it's a little bit skewed from a standpoint of the Rutgers game when we had a 19-point lead, and they scored, I think, 100 points in a minute and a half or two minutes. I exaggerated by a point or two, but I think they hit five 3s. So that kind of distorts some of that stuff.

But I do not think we're playing as good a defense as we were. I think you start to want to become an offensive team, and we've just got to get back to who we are and who we've been most of the year. I think you're right on your evaluation.

**Q. Coach, two straight games with bad fouls in crunch time. It was the Coop intentional foul at Michigan, and then tonight with Jordan Scott, when you guys could have played it out and gotten the ball back. I'm just curious how you eliminate those going into the tournament?**

TOM IZZO: Got to coach better, definitely got to coach better. You're right, there's a couple of things that didn't

make sense. Not fouling on the layup didn't make sense to me. We've just got to situationally coach better, and that is me. I deserve to take the blame for that because if people aren't doing that, there's a reason they're not doing it, and that's where the coach has to take some responsibility.

**Q. In the first half, the play where Jordan Scott kicks the ball out of bounds, and then he has the turnover, and then there's the jump ball, I wonder if you got a sense that maybe he was out of sorts in that sense, or he took himself out of it. When you see that, how do you get him back knowing there's games you're going to need him coming down the stretch here?**

TOM IZZO: Out of sorts is a phrase I used in the huddle a couple times. I thought we did look out of sorts.

With the freshmen, that's part of the process of growing up and going through things. The sad part is the seniors, they don't get second chances. I said it during the week to the media. When you say that was my bad, it's okay if you're young, but it's not okay if you're old. I do think we were out of sorts.

I don't know why yet. That will be meetings I have with players and trying to figure that out. And again make sure, make sure, make sure, because I know how the media is, they earned the win. That was not a two or four-point game. They kicked our you know what. So they deserved to win, but we did not do the things that we've been doing most of the year. That's disappointing when it gets to tournament time.

So we'll have to regroup and figure it out. Going to have to do a better job coaching them so they don't make the same mistakes.

**Q. For the first year players or maybe even the freshmen that are part of this program for the first time, when you hear win or go home, I think it's a lot easier to hear it instead of experience it. Now that you've maybe experienced that in this setting, how do you -- what's the formula in practice this week to make sure the energy gets back not only for the team, but honestly also for the coaches as well for you guys to get ready for what's coming up?**

TOM IZZO: Really intelligent question because it would be an easier answer if I thought we practiced poorly. I thought we had great practices. Not good, great. I wouldn't have changed one thing.

So what happened between that? That's my job to figure out. Let me tell you something. Players nowadays are so resilient because it doesn't hit home like it does for

coaches, so they'll be resilient. And there's a lot to build on because they've already done it.

I just was disappointed on a big stage with so many people here for Michigan State that we did not give them what they deserved, and that was to play harder. Still miss some of those layups, still miss some of those wide open 3s, that's okay. Those are mistakes again. But throwing the ball away for touchdowns, and I don't even know how many turnovers we ended up with, 12. Make a couple break-aways on that, that's unexcusable. That shouldn't happen.

But freshmen are going to make freshmen mistakes. That's why they're freshmen. There is a process, and the process means that you learn from it and you get better if it matters enough. I think to my freshmen it matters enough.

**Q. You talked about playing with desperation. Is there a line between desperation and out of control? And when you see you have every game going on from here is going to be an elimination game, do you think -- are you concerned about the lack of energy, or have you seen -- you've been doing this for a long time. Have you seen teams that can come back from something like this?**

TOM IZZO: We haven't been as good defensively, but I told you that's been skewed a little bit. We were pretty good down at Purdue and pretty good at Indiana and actually pretty good at Michigan. Rutgers, we had a 19-point lead, and Coach screwed that up. Maybe the coach has got to do a better job.

I don't look at that. We played 31 games and played with energy most of them. No, no, I'm not going down that rabbit hole. That's ridiculous. It's for some reason on this stage we did not bring it, and the credit goes to UCLA because they did bring it.

You know, when you get beat by 30 and you're Mick Cronin -- I know Mick well. I bet it was hell week there. I give him credit for that. I love that about him. I really do.

**Q. I'm wondering about Trey Fort and the game he played and just the building block that might be for him going into the postseason, and maybe some of the other little things that you can use, like Jordan getting some time at point and Kur continuing to just keep shooting. How do you use those going into the next couple weeks?**

TOM IZZO: Well, I think, first of all, we've got to start doing a better job defensively. When we do a better job defensively, we get our running game going. If there was a

couple things we did do a decent job of, Coen rebounded better, especially on the offensive end. Cam Ward had three offensive rebounds early. We had 16 offensive rebounds, which is a ton, especially shooting 45 percent. It wasn't like we shot 10. So that was encouraging.

Fast break points wasn't. We didn't do as good a job on the defensive boards. When you do a good job on the defensive boards, you do what Michigan State does, and that's rebound -- defend, rebound, and run, and that running game is a big part of our offense just like it is for some teams.

They're a little different on that, but they do their thing and we do our thing, and they did their thing better than we did our thing. That's the truth.

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