

Maui Invitational presented by Novavax

Monday, November 25, 2024

Lahaina, Hawaii, USA

Lahaina Civic Center

Michigan State Spartans

Coach Tom Izzo

Szymon Zapala

Jase Richardson

Postgame Press Conference



Michigan State 72, Colorado 56

TOM IZZO: We got the ball really well, and that kind of translated into the rest of our game. You know, guys, I'm not making fun of it, but to think we were up 13 in the first half going on a pretty good run at the end and we were 0 for 9 from the three.

I'm telling you, today I thought we took some good ones. I'm going to just end it at that as far as our productivity, but we shot over 70 percent from the two. We're executing. We're getting our running game going.

I thought both these guys played awfully well. Jase gave us a big lift early, slithering through those defenses. He has a knack for that. I think Szymon rebounded pretty well and guarded a guy who's pretty physical down there.

We played well. That's a very well-coached team that's been rebounding the ball real well, and tonight they didn't rebound as well or we did. But we've got a lot of work cut out for us tomorrow when you look at the other disappointing stat, we had four turnovers in the first half.

In the second half I thought we turned it over too much. Tomorrow we'll rely on that to score buckets.

Q. Jase, did you feel 100 percent out there, and just start with that, if you would.

JASE RICHARDSON: I definitely felt 100 percent. Just getting work with Richie and then coach's plan, keeping it cool before we came out here and once we got out here, keep practicing on it, see how it felt before the game and keep getting treatment on it, so I definitely felt 100 percent.

Q. Do you start to feel your role is in some ways when you come in taking the lid off the basket, providing offense? Do you see where the team isn't getting something maybe when you come in?

JASE RICHARDSON: I mean, when I come in the game, my main mindset is just try to help the team in any way I can, whether that's defensively or offensively, so just going in there and trying to make an impact on the game.

Q. Jase, 0 for 14 before you hit that one. How did you it feel to know there wasn't a lid on the basket?

JASE RICHARDSON: It was definitely good to see a three go through during the game. It took a while with but we got it.

Q. Szymon, can you talk about the inside work when the ball is not going in from deep and what you had to do?

SZYMON ZAPALA: Yeah, we really had to fight. We knew they were physical so we were trying to fight, bring it to them before, hit first, be the more physical one on the court.

Q. Szymon, your rebounding, you felt like there was a presence there today for you. I'm just wondering, for you, obviously seven feet is seven feet; how important is it for you regardless of matchup to show that aggression and to make that be to your team's benefit?

SZYMON ZAPALA: I think it's very important to me. It's a strictly effort related play, so that's all I can give to the team. I will never take away from their effort. Offensive rebounds is me showing that I care and I want to win. It's a winning play that I can do and help the team.

Q. Szymon, you looked like you had a lot easier time getting into that chair than your coach did. Talk about that.

SZYMON ZAPALA: No comment.

Q. For both players, I talked to Coach Izzo last week about the importance of this tournament to Lahaina



with all that's happened. Can you just talk about what the message was and how good did it feel to help bring this community back a little bit today?

JASE RICHARDSON: It's super important. This has been a tournament pretty much all of us grew up watching, and then just the community would come out and watch these games, so it's definitely really important to get the whole community back out, and I'm glad to be back in Maui.

SZYMON ZAPALA: It's amazing. I'm obviously from overseas, but I still know a lot about this tournament. It's very popular. Just seeing the community out, it's amazing.

Q. When you were scouting Colorado, what did you see out of them, and what did you specifically set out to try to take away today?

TOM IZZO: Well, first, Tad to me is one of the better coaches. The job he's done developing some players the last couple years, three pros last year and every one of them weren't household names.

So I think number one, I knew he was going to develop. I knew they run their offense really sharp. They missed some shots, too, like we did, but I thought defensively we did some things - give my staff credit - that we wanted to do. We took some chances on some things.

When we weren't turning the ball over, because their length can cause some turnovers, and we really spent a lot of time on our rebounding because they've been out-rebounding teams pretty good, too.

He'll get that team back. That wasn't their best game, either. We all know what that's like. We've all been there. It wasn't like we were great, and it wasn't like they were awful. They just missed some shots, and I thought we executed and did some things with our fast break that bothered them.

Their size was going to bother us, so we got in the open court a little bit more. Now tomorrow we turn around with the exact opposite in some ways.

Q. To what degree are you beginning to really trust what Jase gives you game in and game out?

TOM IZZO: You know, I've always trusted Jase because even watching him in the summer a year ago, he rebounded better than you think he would. He passes the ball. He's got that -- he's got a very high, high, high basketball IQ. We call it catch and go, go and catch. He has the ability to see things before they happen, so he decides to catch the ball already on the run, and that helps

him get in that paint area.

When he gets in there, he makes really good decisions. It's either that short little flip shot or it's a driving lay-up or it's a kick-out. He's very, very good at it, and he's gotten better and better defensively.

You put those two things together, and he was a big part of our resurgence there when it was a close game, and we blew it open before halftime. A lot of it was him.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Jeremy, as well. He had one of those beginnings of the second half where Tre is off the bench in a hurry, but he seemed to settle in and take control of things pretty well.

TOM IZZO: Yeah, Jeremy did. Jeremy is getting better, like I said. He is not where we need him to be because he's not -- there's times athletically that I just don't know if he trusts himself yet with his leg. We're kind of running into screens. That's what happened the first two plays of the second half.

But I'm going to keep pushing him, and he keeps digging.

Now, the beauty of it is he bounced back and really did a nice job pushing the ball and getting some things open. I thought Tre did a good job pushing the ball. But sometimes getting a little bit -- be quick but don't hurry. He was being quick and hurried.

But I thought all three of those guys at times looked good. I thought Jeremy and Tre at times, just a little too quick and a little out of control. We'll work on that. We'll talk about it, and we'll get better.

Q. You've been all in on this tournament for a long time, 33 years ago winning as an assistant, playing a game with Tennessee to help. What did it mean to be here, to come back to the islands, and what did it mean to have it back here at Lahaina?

TOM IZZO: Well, the best thing for me tonight was to turn around and see Magic there and know it wasn't a two-point game because the sweat that ran down my face that night against Chaminade, I had Jud who was probably looking down and Earvin, it was pretty cool. So it brought back some great memories.

I talked to Dick Vitale a little bit by text today, and he gave one of those unbelievable lines after we beat Chaminade. The next day we were playing North Carolina, and when you win by two against Chaminade and I think North Carolina was ranked in the top five, and I think it was Bill Raftery came over before the game and said, Dick wants

to talk to you. He's back in the studio.

I said, I can't do that. We're going through warm-ups. He goes, come on, you're in Maui. You can do different things in Maui. So like an idiot I went over there and sat down and put on the headphones and Dick said, hey, Tom, congratulations on the first one. I said, thanks.

Then they ran a stat that says Dean Smith, I want to say it was 853 wins, Tom Izzo wins, and he said, "good luck tomorrow," and we were 20 down the next day quick.

There were a lot of memories at this place for me, being here with Judd and being here my opening game of my career. And you're right, last year Rick Barnes, who's been here a lot, too, we decided to play this game and donate all the money to the people in Maui.

I will say this: I know it's something we don't talk about because it's hard on people, and I never, ever, ever like saying I know what you're going through when I haven't been through it.

But I just want all the people in this community to know that we back in the home land there were devastated with them and support them and pray for them that things are going to get better and back to some form of normalcy.

I think it will. I think this tournament helps that. I mean, this is a, as Szymon said, a worldwide tournament. It's not just a United States tournament. It is a special place for me, the number of times I've been here.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about what you saw from Frankie Fidler today?

TOM IZZO: Well, Frankie, after a rough start I thought played well, too. He came back and started attacking the rim a little bit and gets to the free-throw line. But what he really did I thought was rebound the ball. He had six rebounds. I thought they were all important rebounds. He didn't turn the ball over. He made some big plays at the basket.

Like all these guys, when they come in, it's going to take a while for them to feel comfortable in what they're doing. He and Szymon I thought both took a little step tonight.

Q. You've got Memphis in about 24 hours. That's a team that's shooting about 48 percent from three-point range, and you as a team right now are shooting 20 percent, so it's the biggest statistical gap --

TOM IZZO: We moved up.

Q. Ken Pom has updated in the past 10 minutes, so yeah, perhaps you have, 362 out of 364. I'm curious as you get ready to prepare for that game, is that obvious statistical difference, too, the biggest focal point of attack for you prepping for them tomorrow?

TOM IZZO: You know, when you talk about it, and I don't mind talking about it here because I feel comfortable that the last week and a half we've been shooting it better, yet when you talk about it to your team, then does it become an albatross on you.

So I talk to people that are more understanding in that area, and how do you deal with a team.

I'm going to go back to being who I am and say, would you make the damn shot, please.

You know, there's something to be said that we're averaging 80 points a game and not making any shots. Today we shot 70 something from the two. When we do start making shots, our defense has been better.

I thought in some ways they shot 37-21, so if we can rely on our defense right now when that shot comes -- it's not going to happen all year. Do I have a reason why? I don't know, you tell me. Some people say, well, bad shots. I asked my staff, I asked a few people up there, we thought like 16 of the 21 were good shots and probably 12 of the 21 were great shots.

I'm not greedy; I just hope to make three or four of them and feel a little bit better and we'd be scoring 85 points a game.

I can't harp on it. Is it a concern? Of course it's a concern. So our defense better knuckle down and get better, and we'd better find a way to start making some shots.

It's going to happen, but I'm not trying to talk myself into it. It's going to happen. I look at Tre, 42 percent last year, Jaden, 36, 37 percent for his career. These aren't just sample sizes, these are large sample sizes. I've got faith, and in the meantime, you defend, you rebound and you run. Then by the theory -- Jud Heathcote said, your best offense is the missed shot.

I've said, anyway you've got to win. We were 6-2 in the Big Ten at the time, and then I started worrying about the shot and we were 2-6 the second half. We're going to keep defending, keep rebounding. Earvin said it today in there, and just hope sooner or later they start falling.

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