

State Farm Champions Classic: Duke vs Michigan State

Tuesday, November 14, 2023

Michigan State Spartans

Tom Izzo

Press Conference



Duke - 74, Michigan State - 65

TOM IZZO: Well, there's some things I liked and some things I didn't like. I really was happy with our ball movement in the first half, our defense the first half for 15 minutes, and then Malik went out. Our freshmen just aren't ready yet.

But as A.J. said it, and he said it best, if he's going to go 1-8, and Jaden, we're 5-19 with those two guys, it's not going to win any games, not going to win enough games. Malik played a lot better. I felt like our centers did an unbelievable job the first 15 minutes on those ball screens and then for some reason did not get up as much.

I give Jon credit. He hardly played -- the Foster kid in the last game, he didn't do much, and you know, he has a big game. I mean, 7-8, 4-5. He was the best player. We did a pretty good job on Filipowski. We did very good job on Roach, who I absolutely love. We did a very good job on Proctor. But eventually, when you have wide open, wide open, wide open threes, they got to go in, and they didn't.

So, questions.

Q. The team is 8-50 after three games from three. What can be done about that? How do you change that?

TOM IZZO: Well, I don't look at it as -- you know we had a bad game. We didn't shoot great tonight, but we shot better than Duke. A lot of teams aren't shooting it as good right now from three. I just have to worry about are we getting good shots.

I didn't think in our loss before we took enough good shots or we moved the ball. Those corner threes that we had, I thought we moved the ball very well, did some really good things.

So I don't look at it the same way. We didn't get to the line enough. We fouled them too much. That was another key to this game, I thought. I mean, what am I going to do?

I'm not going to do anything I didn't do all summer. We've had a hell of a summer and fall shooting the ball and right now, we're not shooting the ball that well. So I'm not going to sit here and cry about it. I'm going to say we got to play better, we got to make better shots. We did a lot of good things tonight. We just didn't make shots.

Q. Speaking of not making shots, level of concern when your big men are 2-8-down low?

TOM IZZO: Well, if I listen to you guys, I might as well just call it a year. Level of concern, level of concern, level of concern. I mean, we lost the game, you know? The last game that we lost we had some problems shooting the ball, but that was also the game that we were in a lot of foul trouble and Malik and A.J. were cramping up the whole second half.

It's funny how everybody just picks out the negative things. I mean, I'm really good at that, and if I'm not -- but you guys are beating me out tonight. You guys are doing a better job than me. So all I can tell you is I like the fact we didn't quit. I like the fact we walked in the locker room and the first thing A.J. says is, If I don't play better, you should bench me. This is ridiculous.

You know what? Those are positive signs. Malik was a very positive sign. He did it inside, outside, he guarded pretty well. The other guy you got to give credit for them was -- we had a game plan on the Mitchell kid, thought we executed to the T, except we let him drive and then fouled him. There was no reason to foul him. There's no reason to let him drive the way we were supposed to be covering him. So a couple mistakes there and some of that was with our young guys.

Q. Obviously your freshmen are talented, but there's a huge disparity between those guys and such a veteran group that you have. How can you close that gap obviously without the ability to change time?

TOM IZZO: Yeah, that's one of the negatives that you have right now. I was excited about Coen Carr tonight. Second half I thought he played a lot better. They just need to get reps, and you don't get reps in games that are



tougher games. He's going to be fine because he's tough enough.

Jeremy, you know, what he is, is he's a very good defensive player. He too, first half, made some really good plays offensively as far as driving and kicking and making some plays, but we missed some shots. He was the one that threw a couple of those great corner passes and we missed some shots.

Book, he's just got to keep getting stronger, you know. That's going to take some time, as it does for a lot of big guys.

Q. You had double the attempts at the rim in the second half compared to the first. How important is this team like getting to the rim?

TOM IZZO: Yeah, I think one of the encouraging things is we got 63 shots up. We're trying to get over 60 shots, so we did a decent job of that. I thought we did get to the rim. I thought we offensive rebounded pretty well. But we didn't get fouled tonight, and when we did, we didn't shoot great from the line. I would invite you, if anybody really wanted to come, I'll even have a party for you, feed ya. But every night before a game we shoot free throws, and as a team and we haven't been under 89 percent yet. And, so, I just can't complain about that. It's not that they haven't done it before. Some of these guys, like Walker, has shot very well in his career. So we just got to keep working at it. It's not going to get any easier because our schedule is still, you know, I mean Butler is playing really well, scoring a lot of points. Right down the road we got Arizona. You saw what they did to Duke at Duke. So we got to get better and get better quickly.

Q. The stretch that Tyson had there around the 10-minute mark, a little after that, where he kind of had the two threes and the lob to Coen. Did you feel like he was starting to take over the game at that point or did you think the guys were maybe standing around watching him?

TOM IZZO: A little bit of both. But I was disappointed in Tyson. I told him that. He can't wait. Cassius used to do some of that, where he would wait until the second half. I mean, you got to love 'em for not being so hungry, but then you got to be mad at 'em for not being more hungry than he was. I think the first half he was very hungry. I thought they did a good job on him. I mean, they held on to him. It was a physical game. I thought they did a good job on him. We didn't do as good a job, but A.J.'s got to realize that he's got to get Tyson some shots. There was a couple huddles I said, the next guy, Tyson's getting the next shot, no matter what. So some of that falls on Tyson, some of

that falls on the players.

Q. Looking at Malik and looking at Jaden, was it something that you saw in the last couple of practices or was this just shooters shooting their way out of a slump?

TOM IZZO: Well Jaden didn't shoot his way out of a slump. He got one three and then everything else was a layup.

Q. Four baskets.

TOM IZZO: Yeah, three offensive rebounds. No insult, but if you watched the game, he did not shoot very well. Malik shot very well. But I have all the faith in the world in Jaden. I mean, he might have been our best shooter this summer. So, at least he's playing harder, he's playing better defensively. We made one of the things, after the first exhibition game, that he's got to go to the boards harder. He has relentlessly done that. So those are the things I'm going to build on.

A.J. did have eight assists and two turnovers. I'm going to try to build on that.

Those shots got to go in, guys, you know it and I know it. I don't look at it like we're 3-150. I look at this game, you know, everybody always accuses me of being too negative. Hell, we shot nine percent and then we shot 18 percent and now we're up to 32 percent. So we're making a hell of a jump here.

Q. Caleb Foster kind of broke the game open there in the second half for Duke. What was the scouting report on him coming in?

TOM IZZO: Well, that he was a great player that didn't play very well. I talked to Jon about it after, I give him credit, because he didn't play very well, they didn't get him a shot in the first game, and yet I think a couple of our young guys made some defensive errors and he got going, and then he made some shots. He was the difference in the game.

If you look at their superstars, we did a hell of a job on most of their superstars. But give them credit, somebody rose up and made some plays. That first half was going pretty well and then we just had that one stretch and he got a little bit there, but he really got going in the second half.

Q. You're 3-14 against Duke. Why does it seem like they always have the upper hand?

TOM IZZO: I'm just trying to think here. Probably because

their players have played better and their coaches have coached better. We've had battles with 'em for a lot of years. You know, there's not many people in our league that will play 'em 15, 16, 17 times. So I'll flip that too, since this is -- I mean, I deserve what I'm getting. You know what, and ask me the question again, how is your team? I think we got a damn good team. I really do. We haven't played very good. We haven't played very good. We're going to play good. But why am I 3-14? It's probably 12 times more -- I would like to know what their record is against a bunch of other people. They're good, you know, give 'em credit, they're good. Give me blame, because I've had different players and still lost so it's got to be the coach. I would accept that. I sent Mike a text the other day, I miss you on the bench, but, you know, he said something back about, you know, me being a favorite and a good guy. I said, Hell, yeah, anybody that I beat as much as you beat me would be my favorite too. You know? So I understand that.

But I don't like that. I don't like that question because I don't have a good answer, but I'm playing 'em. And guess what? After I leave this frickin place, I'm going to play 'em again. Another question? Oh, come on. Let's have some fun.

Q. You missed some shots, but you executed well to get to open shots. Did you see some progress?

TOM IZZO: I don't know. Some of you guys got all the answers, and I'm not insulting you, but did you think we had good shots?

Q. Really open shots.

TOM IZZO: Well, is an open shot a good shot? I can't blame players for missing open shots. My job is to get 'em open shots, which I didn't think I did very good job of against James Madison. I thought we had some great looks. I thought they had some good looks the first half, too.

I mean, guys, they didn't shoot so well either. I'm sure he's disappointed in that. They shot 27 from the three. We shot 31.6. I don't know. Is it in their head? Maybe it is. But I know this: I'm going to get it out of their head. I don't know how I'm going to do it yet, but I think the players know. I think they took some blame. I'm going to try to make sure that I do a better job beating Duke, but that's not on the top of my radar. I got a lot of Big Ten teams that I play all the time. Although I almost play Duke like a Big Ten team, it seems like. I got to do a better job. I got to do a better job. We'll do a better job. The world hasn't ended. I'm not trying to make light of it, I'm not trying to, we made some progress today at some things. Getting Malik Hallin

at the four man is a big thing. I mean, listen, A.J. took it like a man. He took it like a man. So you take it like a man, don't make excuses, I got no problems.

A year ago in that room, that same exact room a year ago, got beat by Ohio State and it wasn't very pretty. Today there was a lot of progress made. I mean, anybody -- some of you have come to my practices. Some of you have. We don't shoot it like that. We're shooting it like that right now.

So, I'll try to correct it, guys. Call Jonny tomorrow, schedule Duke again. I really am. I don't mean that against him, I just mean it for you guys, I'm going to try to do a better job of that. If you were around here, you know what the glass half full is? I think we've beaten them two out of the last three or three out of four?

Q. Three out of the last four.

TOM IZZO: That's probably a better record than most people have had against Duke. Sorry for being sarcastic on that, but I don't know what you want. They beat us because they have been better, and they beat us because they're better coached. I mean, I got no problem saying that. Tonight, I give Jon a lot of credit. I think he did a hell of a job. I think he did a really good job with that freshman. Whatever he said to him, whatever he did to him, he did a really good job. He said he responded. What does that mean, I don't know, but I would agree with him. So hat's off to him. He's had a good mentor, he did a good job and Michigan State's still in good shape, we're just not playing as well as we can.

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