

State Farm Champions Classic: Kentucky vs Michigan State

Tuesday, November 18, 2025

Kentucky Wildcats

Coach Mark Pope

Press Conference



Michigan State 83, Kentucky 66

MARK POPE: Congrats to Michigan State. Congrats to Coach Izzo. He's one of the best. He's on The Mount Rushmore of coaches. They played really tough, physical, strong, dominated the game pretty much from the tip, and played a great game.

We're really disappointed, and we've got a lot of work to do.

Fire away with questions.

Q. Obviously they were one of the worst teams in the country from three-point shooting perspective, only three games, but coming into this one were you guys willing to give them that early in the game?

MARK POPE: No, we just played poor. It was poor, poor attention to detail on the defensive end.

Q. It's just been more than 45 minutes since the game ended from you emerging here. What was the message? Obviously you took some time with the guys in there. What's the communication with the players and what did you need to get across in the immediacy of this loss?

MARK POPE: We're far away from the team that we hope to -- aspire to be. We can't waste a second on trying to grow into that. We're disappointed and discouraged, and completely discombobulated right now. We have work to do, so there's no time like the present.

Q. A game like this could you tell the difference between one team that's brought a lot of guys back and another that's obviously trying to become a team and how challenging it is when you have new rosters every year?

MARK POPE: I don't know. I can't answer that. I know there's one team that was really, really well-coached and one team that was really poorly coached. So that's

probably my best answer to that.

Q. Just 13 assists. I know you talked about it some last season, when you hit adversity, come together. It didn't feel like that was always what happened tonight. How do you get your team to that point?

MARK POPE: It's a work in progress. I've got to do a better job. I'm not -- my messaging is not resonating with the guys right now. That's my responsibility. We're not playing like our teams play, and that's my communication issue, so that's a place we've got to work.

Q. You said Friday Jaland would undergo second and third opinions. Do we have any update on that?

MARK POPE: I don't. I don't have anything new for you on that.

Q. With Lowe's absence, how much is not having guys and even Trent for a little period, how much is that contributing to it not seeming like there's the continuity you need on offense?

MARK POPE: I think that's not contributing at all. I'm going to take the hit for this. I've got guys that are skilled, talented players. They care a lot, and I just haven't been able to put the pieces together quite right yet.

Q. You said the stuff you said about the Louisville game and you talked about being discombobulated and disorganized. What do you think is missing? What are you going to try to figure out here?

MARK POPE: Yeah, that would be a long answer. That would be really long.

Q. What specifically have you either seen from these guys in practice, seen from this team in practice or think is there that just is not resonating in these big game situations that you need to come out?

MARK POPE: Again, it's a long list. I think that we're in the process of learning and growing together as a team. I think this team has a terrific future. I think that -- I believe

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that this group can become something.

I think in this early part of the season, I feel like the identity that we felt like we carried has been stripped away and maybe we're facing some reality right now, and that can be -- that's an incredibly, incredibly painful process. It's a terrifying process.

If you treat it right, it can be a galvanizing process. That comes down to an issue of the character of your organization. I think the character of our organization is terrific, but it's being tested in a big way right now. We'll either answer the bell or not. That's the beautiful thing about sports. You either get it done or you don't. Right now we're not getting it done.

Q. After the Georgetown exhibition you said that you were thankful they picked on you because it put it on film for you guys to see. Are you a little surprised you haven't shown that physicality that you're looking for yet?

MARK POPE: Yeah, I'm disappointed in myself on that. We have the right guys. We have the right staff. Right now I'm falling a little short on that.

Q. Mark, with like five minutes left, we saw Mo got a little bit rattled, had to leave. Is there an update on him? Second, as you're trying to find your identity with this team, how difficult is it when it feels like the team makeup keep shifting and changing with these injuries?

MARK POPE: It's not. I think the identity of the team is completely separate from any individual player. I actually think -- I'm going to temper my words right now. I actually think our identity should be -- if you build an organization the right way, then your identity is not about an individual person. Your identity is about a collective group, and it shouldn't matter if we had built a great organization and a great culture, which I have clearly failed to do up until today.

But we won't fail this season. We just have failed up until today. We will build an organization where it won't be disrupted every time someone steps in and steps out because we'll have a team identity, not an individual identity. Until we get there, we're going to really struggle. That's my job. That's why they brought me here. I'm doing it poorly. I won't do it poorly for much longer.

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