

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Bryant vs Michigan State

Friday, March 21, 2025

Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Rocket Arena

Michigan State Spartans

Tom Izzo

Jeremy Fears, Jr.

Jase Richardson

Coen Carr

Media Conference

Michigan State 87, Bryant 62

TOM IZZO: Well, the score was not indicative of the game. Let's be fair to them. They came out and punched us right in the mouth, hit some shots early, got some rebounds early, turned us over. I thought they did a great job. Then I thought our bigs let us down a little bit, if I'm honest with you.

Even these two weren't really up to par at first, and then Coen came in and really ignited us, and then Jeremy started pushing the ball, and Jase finally looked at the basket, take a few shots, and Tre Holloman did, also. Those four guys, it wasn't our night for some of our bigs. They did bounce back a little bit later. Jaden struggled, had some wide-open shots and can't get him any better shots. He knows it. Not that he's going to do anything about it because they were wide open, and he took them. He took the right shots, didn't force any.

I was impressed with them. They had a couple guys that could really shoot it. They put a lot of pressure on you as far as to guard things right. As I always do when I evaluate, I evaluate our staff, too, and I think we had these guys a little confused on the switching and everything just because of the number of different lineups they brought in.

We've got to do a better job, they do, but the biggest thing is the first game of the tournament. For all 27 years I've been in it and all the Big Ten tournaments, and any other tournament I've been in, the first game is the most important.



Sometimes you just don't feel as good, and I know what they were playing for, but I was so impressed with Jimmy and the job he did. I'm happy for him, and the score was not indicative. Proud of these three guys, too. They did a hell of a job.

Q. Jeremy and Jase, I want to ask you about the guys sitting next to you. What kind of energy did he bring? Jeremy, I know you said yesterday you feel like you have two starting lineups. Is Coen an example of that?

JEREMY FEARS JR.: Yeah, definitely. I think everybody on the second unit, you never know whose night it might be, and there's strength in numbers. I think that's where we're different than a lot of programs. But at the same time, Coen ignited us on offense, especially when things wasn't going our way, he got a lot of offensive rebounds, tipped dunks, fouls, he was a big piece in getting this win today and helping us pull away.

Q. Coen, in particular those first couple buckets, the post-up lay-up and then the one in transition with the finger roll, usually those are dunks for you. How did you draw some energy off of those plays, and where was the energy coming from on the glass from you today?

COEN CARR: I mean, I was just trying to run the floor, be aggressive. I know they're a tough team, so I wasn't trying to -- you can't be soft when you go down there with them. So, I was trying to be aggressive and run my lane. They had me playing the 5 a little bit more a second, so I had to run my lane, run to the rim, so that's all I was trying to do. I just felt like I get to make those plays and my teammates feed off them every time. So, I just try to keep doing that and I feel like that's kind of my job on this team.

Q. Coen, can you talk about the mindset when the other shots aren't falling, and you've got to carry the load offensively and what happened on the basket everyone wanted on that alley-oop that didn't go down?

COEN CARR: Well, the alley-oop I missed it, I should have made an alley-oop on that one. I just tried to get second chances for my teammates, whether I'm getting a

rebound, putting it back on myself or I'm getting it and passing out to open teammates. That's it. Just trying to get extra possessions for my squad.

Q. Jeremy and Jase, I want to ask you about the second-chance points that the guys were creating for the backcourt and for everybody. Season high offensive rebounds today. Your thoughts about the way they were battling on the offensive glass and how big that was for you guys to get some opportunities?

JASE RICHARDSON: I feel like that's one of the things we emphasize as a team, trying to go to the glass. And I think our bigs and Coen did a great job going to the glass and getting those second-chance points for us. I mean, they were putting back dunks, kick outs for threes. I feel like that's a big part of our game because it gives us more chances to get buckets.

JEREMY FEARS JR.: Just the fact that we got up a lot of shots. We didn't really make all the shots, so just for them to give us second-chance opportunities, just another chance to win the game and help us extend the lead. I think Jaxon, Coop, Szymon, they did a great job, Coen, obviously, just giving us second-chance opportunities, and we capitalized off that.

Q. Coen, kind of piggybacking off of what he said, New Mexico is a team you're going to play. They have a ton of length. How important is that glass play going to be on Sunday and how much are you going to have to bring it right from the start?

COEN CARR: Oh, yeah. We know, we know they're a great team, so we know we've got to come in right from the jump. But our mentality always is crash the glass, so we're just going to come in and play as hard as we can to crash the offensive boards as hard as we can.

Q. Coen, obviously not a better time to have a career high and you obviously want to do this in March Madness. What did it mean to come out tonight, give the team a spark and have this March Madness moment for you?

COEN CARR: It meant a lot. We've been saying all week that this first game is the hardest, and I just made it up that I wasn't going to let my team lose today. I just tried to play as hard as I can, tried to get every rebound I can and just make the most of my opportunities out there.

Q. Question for Jeremy. Early in the second half, I think Jaden hit that three and then you hit that one at the top of the key, give you guys a nine-point lead, back-to-back threes. Did you think that was maybe a

confidence booster, something to get you guys going early in that second half?

JEREMY FEARS JR.: I definitely think it was. Obviously going into half, we didn't do the things we needed to do first half. We missed open shots, free throws, and they were just playing tougher than us at that moment. So just going into the second half, Jaden hit that three and then I made my open shot. It's just kind of a boost for everyone, got the energy going, juice flowing, and from there I think we kind of extended the lead.

Q. Coach, you talked about Cinderellas yesterday. I'm sure you weren't paying attention across the tournament, but there weren't a ton of huge upsets. I'm curious if you had any thoughts on why that might be this year.

TOM IZZO: I pay attention to everything, to be honest with you. But I mean, I guess what do you call an upset anymore? If you mean did any 2-15s or 1-16s -- those don't happen that often anyway. It's not like this year is different. And there were more 5-12s I think that were upsets. There were some strange games.

But it's the new world we live in. I think there will be more of those, to be very honest with you.

Q. Tom, I'm wondering about the job these guys did on the offensive glass. I think at one point late in the half -- not just the offensive glass, both sides. They had 17 boards just before halftime, and I don't think they finished with many more than like 10 in the second half. What was the difference for these guys to start crashing the way they did?

TOM IZZO: Well, we did talk about it a little bit at halftime, if I'm being very blunt and honest with you. I think some of my big guys, they're lighter right now than they were before halftime, and should be. I just didn't think we did a very good job, and I thought they did a great job.

But half this stuff is mindset. We are a good rebounding team. We're not this good a rebounding team against a team that is a good rebounding team. They led their league with 13-and-a-half offensive rebounds a game. That was the challenge all week.

So I just think Coen led us and then Coop and Jax started getting there a little bit better in the second half.

But I thought we got pushed around a little bit in the first half, and maybe that was me. I don't know. But we did a better job the second half.

Q. Tom, you started out 3 for 8 at the line, made 12 of the last 13. How did you get them refocused on that?

TOM IZZO: You know, halftimes are sometimes fun, and sometimes they're not as much fun. But we did talk about these things. I went through what I think are the key points in teams advancing in this tournament. One of them is turnovers. One of them is giving up fast break points, and one of them is making your free throws. Shooting the ball, Jaden couldn't have had better shots. I don't know what he was, 4 for 15, but he had 14 good shots. That's going to happen. But we should be able to make our free throws.

I've been a little disappointed in that lately. We're really a good free-throw shooting team. But I will say this: We're starting to shoot the three a little better, if Jaden hit any of those, the last five games now we're probably shooting near 35, which we hit 10 threes today, I think we're averaging nine in the last six games.

That kind of stuff will help us, as long as we don't think we're an offensive team now or a three-point shooting team and forget to guard people and rebound. Because at the end of the day, defend, rebound and run, we had 15 fast break points, I believe, which was 15 to none, I guess. That was a big stat. We had 31 second-chance points to their six. That was a big stat.

But I'm telling you, man, it's funny when you play these different teams from different areas. I know Jimmy -- Jimmy is his brother. I know Phil through his dad more than I know the other one. It impresses me that he's the younger version. So don't call me old school because he's young school unless his dad threatened him, but his toughness, his team's toughness, his rebounding, what they've done, they execute their stuff well. I give him a lot of credit to be honest with you.

Q. Even though you didn't like a lot of the things in the first half, ultimately, did this turn out to be an ideal way to start the tournament because you certainly got a few teaching points out of it, as well, a little bit of an eye opener maybe for your bigs?

TOM IZZO: Maybe. Maybe. I just think with the schedule we played and the way we played the last half of the season, there should be no eye openers in that, I don't think. We'll talk about that tonight when we get back there.

But in this tournament, as I told you, the my bads or those things, they don't work. You have to know, you have to trust what a coach tells you and you have to trust what other players tell you because -- it wasn't looking real good there, and I think if it would have kept close, the way those three guys could shoot it, Withers and Pinzon, they were tough to guard. I wouldn't have liked for that thing to come

down to the nitty-gritty, and I think our team will learn that.

No, I'm sorry, I would rather have started out better and shot better and played better early and felt good about it because I don't think -- we're not cocky in anything, but we've got to do this in every game in those last eight games to win a Big Ten championship. We know what it's like to show up every night, and we'll have to do better.

Q. How much do you know about the guard from New Mexico Donovan Dent and what you remember from Richard's time, what things he likes to do from his time in Minnesota?

TOM IZZO: Well, I was a good friend of Richard's when he was there because he went through some tough times that I thought were unfair, if I was to be honest with you. But he's done a hell of a job down there. I've talked to him a couple times periodically. I do know a little bit about the guard. I do know a little bit about their team since I did spend a couple nights watching them along with Marquette. Tonight is when we'll really dive into it.

Good coach, another team that -- this team has some size inside. This team had size everywhere. It's a good team, and I think they beat a very good Marquette team. Shaka is a good friend, and those guys played hard as hell, too. So, when we break down the film, I'm sure we're going to find out that Dent is a hell of a player, he gets in the paint. I think he had a few more turnovers than he normally has tonight, but he makes things happen, and the big kid inside is good. That's a good team. They beat UCLA, they beat USC, those teams beat us, and I know Richard, and I know Rick. Damn families ruining my life here.

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