

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - New Mexico vs Michigan State

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Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Rocket Arena

## Michigan State Spartans

## Tom Izzo

## Jaden Akins

## Tre Holloman

## Jase Richardson

Media Conference

**Q. I'm curious, when you have such a quick turnaround, what's the -- I'm not asking for the details, but what's the start of the scouting report for you guys when you're introduced to New Mexico?**

JEREMY FEARS JR.: You know, obviously watched a little bit of the Marquette game yesterday before our game. They've got a lot of good guards, athletic, good big man, kind of all-around team, and it's kind of going to be a little bit like Bryant, just in some different areas.

JADEN AKINS: Yeah, we saw it was a talented team yesterday when they played Marquette right off our game. We went to the hotel and started watching for film on them, so I feel like we're pretty familiar with them.

TRE HOLLOMAN: They're a transition team, so we're going to have to get back. They just play fast, and they go to the boards.

JASE RICHARDSON: We know that they've got an all-league guard. He was top in his conference, so we know he's going to come in and play super hard, and they've got six, seven other guys that can do a lot of things. So, it's going to be a task, but we've got to be up for it.

**Q. Jaden, this is a different matchup for you, Dent versus Tonje or more of a physical specimen like Earl Timberlake, in what ways can that be more difficult, adjusting on such short notice to a faster, quicker guard?**



JADEN AKINS: Like you said, he's a quicker guard, really good with the ball, really good at speed, pace. That's why he's top in the league. But I'm confident in my abilities and I'm just looking forward to it.

**Q. People always talk about Coach Izzo's intensity. Have you three seen him coach with more joy this season?**

JEREMY FEARS JR.: I mean, I guess you can say that since we're winning a little bit more this year. Yeah, I guess the intensity picked up definitely when starting games, he kind of let you know what it is before the game no matter the opponent, what he thinks, and he's kind of blunt. He's going to tell you what it is.

JADEN AKINS: Yeah, I feel like he's been having a lot of joy with us, like you said. We're winning, so that definitely plays a part in it. I just feel like we're a good group to be around.

TRE HOLLOMAN: Yeah, I mean, we're just winning, so you know, Coach just laughs, jokes with us. Yeah, we're kind of close with Coach.

**Q. Jaden, even yesterday your shot wasn't falling but you were able to impact the game in other ways. As a veteran on the team, how important is it that sometimes the ball isn't going to go in and you're able to impact the game defensively like you did last night?**

JADEN AKINS: Yeah, I feel like that's been a story a lot this season. I'm just trying to impact the game other ways if I'm not scoring the most or shooting the best. I feel like that's always something I'm going to try to do. I'm going to play hard regardless.

**Q. Jaden, how different does this tournament feel just because you guys are a 2 seed, be it the way Coach Izzo -- his own expectations? Can you feel a difference because of where you are, your hopes for this tournament versus the other tournaments you've been in?**

JADEN AKINS: Yeah, it feels a little different. I feel like just the team that we've got this year, all season it's felt different. I feel like we have a chance to do something



special and everybody knows that, so we're just trying to take it one game at a time.

**Q. When you think about this panel, it's no bigs allowed, and in the league this year, there were teams with two dominant bigs, the leading scorers were all bigs. What does it say that you four are up here doing so much to carry the team at a time when guards matter the most?**

JASE RICHARDSON: We know when it comes to March, it's going to be a lot of guard play. A lot of teams around the country have a lot of guards that can do a lot of things, but when we go out on the court it's a full team effort. We've got four guards that do a lot of things, but I feel like our whole team, wings, bigs, we all contribute a huge part to the game.

TRE HOLLOWMAN: I think guards win you games in March. Yeah, just being a guard, guarding and scoring, and then just being the leaders, I think that just plays a big part.

JADEN AKINS: Yeah, I mean, I feel, like they said, when March comes around, that's when guard play is the most important. I feel like we've got one of the best guard groups in the country, and we just continue to try to show that.

JEREMY FEARS JR.: You know, it's different. We have a full overall team I would say, and we've got about six, seven guys that can do a little bit of everything. It's a team effort. Us four, we guard, control the game, make sure we do all that, but at the same time, we wouldn't be where we are without the bigs rebounding and scoring inside and creating opportunities for us. Overall, we just have a great team.

**Q. With the depth that you guys have at guards, how much of a challenge is it going against New Mexico's pair of Richardson and Donovan Dent?**

JASE RICHARDSON: As we were watching them on film, we knew it was going to be tough super because they had such a huge piece of the game to them. They push the tempo and they're really the main scorers for their team. We know us four, we have a tough task at hand, but we're able to handle it.

TRE HOLLOWMAN: Yeah, I just feel like throwing different guards at them is going to frustrate them, so we've just got to guard and then make them guard.

JADEN AKINS: Yeah, I mean, they've got really good guards over there, as well. We saw that on display last night. I feel like we're confident in our abilities, and we're

going to do our best to slow them down.

JEREMY FEARS JR.: Watching the film, obviously Dent is an honorable mention All-American, so he's a great guard, lead his conference. And the other guards have shooters and wings that do a little bit of everything, so we know that we've got a tough task at hand, and they're a great team with some great guard play and can't wait to play them.

TOM IZZO: Well, we're excited about it. Any time you advance in this thing, it's a good thing. I know Richard. I know his style a little bit. But he's done an incredible job.

I thought personally that, like a lot of coaches, he got a bad deal at Minnesota because he had done some good things there.

But he landed on his feet. He took advantage of it and did something I didn't do; he's beaten USC and UCLA, and that's something we didn't do. I know how good his team is. He's got a point guard that's electric, gets a lot of things done, both with the pass and with the scoring. Big kid in size. He's got bodies -- we were prepping for two teams like we always do before the game, and Marquette was smaller, and then the other team was real big with 6'9" wings.

It's two opposite preps, and we ended up with New Mexico, and they played very well, and we know we have our work cut out for us.

**Q. Richard was in here buttering you up, saying wonderful things about you. You were just doing the same for him. I am curious what you've seen growth-wise from Richard from his Minnesota days. He said you would take younger coaches and go to bat for them when you didn't have to do that. I'm curious where that came from, but I'm also curious what you've seen in Richard's growth since that time?**

TOM IZZO: Yeah, the problem with you guys from New Mexico, you're so far away that I don't get to see you enough. But I thought he did a hell of a job there. It was a tough situation he was in. I did stick up for him. If Jud Heathcote, my old boss, who's looking down right now, is mad at me that we don't play more zone, I always said if you don't stick up for coaches, who's going to?

So I looked at that as one of my jobs, especially if it was coaches I respect, and were doing it the right way, and he did. Of course, I know his dad. But when he was in the league, it was fun to talk to him.

How do I think he's grown? I don't know on a day-to-day thing, because I know this, he's winning more games, and I

mean at a high level. He's been consistent with that.

So yeah, I don't think buttering up is a good word. You never want locker room material. But I would never talk highly of a guy I didn't respect or like. I just wouldn't talk about him. So, he's easy to talk about him because I do like him, and I do respect him.

But come tomorrow from sunrise to sunset, I don't like him at all, and don't let him kid you, he doesn't like me, either. As long as there's respect, that's all that really matters.

**Q. I'm wondering about the ability that this team has shown, like a lot of your older teams, to play in the half court the way they do and as physical as they do but also get out and run at the pace they do. Over 30 years, how rare is that combination been to get at this level on both ends?**

TOM IZZO: Well, you know, I don't know that. It's been pretty natural and normal for us. I'll never forget the first -- the only championship, the only National Championship. We did play that football game against Wisconsin, that was 19-17 and halftime, and then we played a 90-70 game against Florida two days later.

I've always said that I'm not as big on imposing my will on somebody else. I want to be able to adjust and adapt to just about anything. I think we've done that. Some of it's with the personnel we have, and some of it's with the philosophy we have, that we're not going to try to overwhelm you with anything, we're just going to try to take what you give us.

If we can -- the first half, we didn't run very well. In the second half, we ran very well. Did we wear them down a little bit? Was the rebounding that much different in the second half? I don't know. The only shame about the tournament when you play at midnight is I don't even get to watch our game from last night. It's just move on to New Mexico.

I hate to talk about what we did or didn't do, but I will talk about it over the years. We've been able to adjust. We've been a little more versatile. We can play big. We can play small. I think it's helped us.

**Q. Saint Mary's is the best rebounding team in the country. You've always had good defensive rebounding teams. What makes a good rebounding team beyond size and strength?**

A. Well, I think toughness and aggressiveness helps more than size. My first couple years, we weren't very big at all, and I remember one time, my second year I think it was,

we had 26 offensive rebounds against Arkansas when they were really good, and we upset them. In fact, unfortunately, that coined Jud Heathcote to say my best offense was the missed shot. I think one thing rebounding does for you is it shows an aggressiveness, a toughness. Size helps sometimes, but I've had big teams that rebounded really well with Zach Randolph and guys like that, but I've had smaller teams that have rebounded pretty well. Like really, the one we had yesterday on the floor a lot was a smaller team.

I think it's just the culture you build there. Randy has built an unbelievable culture. They've been so solid, so good defensively, and this year was one of his best. I watched all three games when they played Gonzaga. They were great games. In fact, last time I talked to him, I was at a game of Draymond's a couple years ago and he was there, and we sat next to each other, so it was pretty cool. I have a lot of respect for him, too.

I think it's just how you coach. But there's not many soft teams that are good rebounding teams. I think it's a mentality.

**Q. Since you mentioned it earlier, how much do you look at those USC and UCLA films from New Mexico since it's common opponent --**

TOM IZZO: Not much. Only reason not much, it was so long ago and everybody was different. You've got so much you can do, and I did it all. We look more at the last five games, unless there's really something we want to see. We did look at a little bit of UCLA because we think we play a little similar to how they play defensively and everything.

But it doesn't matter who you watch them against, they've been a damn good team, and they've won consistently, and they've won the same way, and they've got a quarterback. If you look at the NFL, you've got a quarterback, you've got a chance. They've got a quarterback, and he's very good. He not only, like I said, can score it, but he makes other people better. Some of those passes he throws are magnificent. He really does.

We're just going to worry about the last five, six games mostly. Looked at a little film of the UCLA game, but it was so long ago, everybody was different back then.

**Q. Richard was talking about the consistency of your program and how it's the same every time he faces Michigan State, praising you for that. What's the key to maintaining that level of consistency for so long?**

TOM IZZO: I think culture has something to do with it.

You recruit to the culture. I think the players that you've had before and the players that you get now. I always try to compare people to players as I'm recruiting them; who does he remind me of? Who is he like? How did I do with that guy? What didn't I do a good job with that guy?

I think there's been -- what there isn't much of right now, there's been consistency with the team and there's been consistency with the coach. When you see all these programs firing guys after two years or three years, I mean, if I was now in this era, there would be no Tom Izzo, there would be no Hall of Fame, there would be no National Championship. I'd have probably been fired in year two and a half. Talked to Mike Krzyzewski once, I think he said that. I talked to Roy Williams, he told me about Dean Smith, it took like three or four years. It's almost like those things are illegal now.

So consistency within the staff, consistency in the players because players are your best recruiters from other players, and I think that's what's -- that was the number one thing I wanted when I won a National Championship. Okay, you know, we did something in five years. It was a quick fix it seemed like. Can we stay consistency.

Well, I haven't won another one, but we have been fairly consistent over the years, and I think it's because it's really important to me, too.

**Q. Tom, after Purdue's win earlier, the Big Ten is 9-2 in the tournament. What do you think stands out about that to you, that you bring them to March Madness and they're doing well?**

TOM IZZO: Yeah, I like to brag about it because I think sometimes the Big Ten just takes hits that -- like we're slow, or they think of what's happened 20 years ago. So you guys either don't do a good job or we don't do a good job, or somebody is not doing a good job because the league is really good. It's really good, and we've got really good coaches.

Man, I'm pulling for them all. I'm going to have to go in the closet when I do it, but I'm going to pull for Michigan today, too. That's not normal.

But I really mean that. It's good when our conference does well. I think it helps our conference in a lot of ways.

I'm a Big Ten guy through and through, so I'm excited that we're 9-0.

Now, I will say this: Don't get fooled that it's this, that and the other thing. This whole tournament is about matchups more than it is about who's the best team. Sometimes you

just don't match up with certain teams, and it causes problems no matter what their seed is, and sometimes teams get hot. It's not like football where eventually you wear somebody down. The ball has got to go in the basket. The puck has got to go in the goal. Our two sports are different in that respect.

But I'm happy for our league. Like I said, I'm a big Big Ten fan.

**Q. You've coached a lot of great rebounders over the years. You've emphasized rebounding as well as anybody in the history of the game in recent decades. You're going against a good one tomorrow, Nelly Junior Joseph. When you see him on film, I'm guessing you're impressed. What do you have to do tomorrow for him?**

TOM IZZO: I am impressed. He's a bull in china closet. He's tough. He's strong. At least that's what he seems on film. He reminds me of the Johnson kid at Illinois, and he's more experienced and a little better offensively, but I think that kid is a hell of a player, too.

When you've got a body and he's got good post moves, they've done a nice job with him. I think we've got our work cut out for us.

The nice thing about our depth is we can throw more than one person at him. Last night, we played small. Tomorrow night, we might play big.

But they've got the two things you want right down the middle of your team. You've got a quarterback and -- a point guard and a center. That's a good place to start when you've got those two things in your program.

**Q. It seemed like your guys were almost overly amped up at the beginning of yesterday's game. I'm wondering, for a team where guys haven't been in these roles and main stays on a team with a real chance, how important was getting through that, and have you been paying attention to where they are in that in terms of ability to focus and just do the job at hand and not be overly caught in the moment, so to speak?**

TOM IZZO: Yeah, I thought we were. I thought Jaxon Kohler was fried. He was tired so quick, and I thought Szymon was. I've never seen J shoot like a four-foot ball that didn't draw iron. I mean, we were a little bit. That didn't bother me. The missed assignments bothered me, but that didn't bother me because it's really what you want out of guys, that it means so much to them that they are in that state now.

That's why I've always thought I'd be a better football coach because you can go beat the hell out of somebody, and they don't let them do that in basketball.

But I thought our guys did handle it pretty well. They talked about it in the huddle. I talked about it in the huddle. I thought the experience of all those tough games would help them, and you know what, that's the beauty of this tournament. I mean, we've played eight games in a row against good people, on the road, at home, in front of some of the best crowds that we've played against in years, and it really didn't seem to totally help them in the March Madness moment. That's what makes March Madness one-and-done so critical and so important.

That's why you hear coaches, I'll bet you Richard said it, I'll bet you his dad said it yesterday, I'll bet you Mike Krzyzewski and Dean Smith said it, and Bobby Knight and Adolph Rupp, when you go into a tournament, the first game is the most important. I tricked my guys. I told them that I said it. Last night after the game I said, now, the second game is now the most important, so I lied just like everybody else.

But that first game, you don't know how people are going to respond, no matter how much experience and how much calmness they have.

I remember my first couple tournaments I was awful, so I can appreciate it.

**Q. I asked your players, too, but do you feel like you're coaching with more joy this season?**

TOM IZZO: I mean, when you win 27, 28 games, yeah. I think winning helps everybody enjoy something. But I've made it pretty well known that I was disappointed in the direction everything was going. I was on every board to try to correct it. I realized that the coaches had no say, and they don't, and it bothered me. I let it bother me, and I don't think I did as good a job.

Just like I asked them to look in the mirror once in a while, I had to look in the mirror, too. I don't feel any different about most things, I just don't have to deal with them on a daily basis. I pull for our organization. I pull for all the younger coaches. But I think I've spent a little more time just worrying about my team, and I've got great guys. I've really got great guys.

I have had fun coaching this team. I've enjoyed the progression of this team. It's not been easy. If you think it's easy to play 10 guys, you're crazy. You've got a lot of people mad at you when you're playing 10 guys. But as

long as the guys buy in, and they have, that's what's been important.

**Q. Tom, Jaden was in here earlier talking about affecting the games in other ways when his shot is not falling, and he hit the early bucket last night, a pretty big three, and then the motion to calm down. Talk about him finding the value of that as a senior?**

TOM IZZO: You know, Jaden Akins, is -- I've said it to our media a million times, he's a 37 or so, maybe even higher, three-point shooter over his career. He struggled for some reason. If you were with us on a daily basis -- it frustrates me because I know how good we'd be if he was hitting -- he hit some great shots last night.

What I've really appreciated about him, number one, is he works on it morning, noon and night; and number two, it means something to him morning, noon and night; and number three, he said, I've got to do more to impact the game. He made the all-defensive team. That's not where he was. You've got to give him a lot, a lot, a lot of credit for that because he gets frustrated, too. Never gets down.

But the day is going to come. I've been saying it, and has come a few times, and if we get him consistent with the other guys, I think our good team turns into a great team. Whether that can happen, we're going to soon find out.

**Q. As the tournament has evolved and I think you were asked about it last night how there have been so many upsets so far, but does it still shock you how you look at any seed like New Mexico a 10 seed and they always have one or two great players like Dent in the center? Is that different for a 10 or a 16 seed to have those type of players that probably strike a little bit of fear into a high seed?**

TOM IZZO: You know, it's funny, my assistant, Doug Wojcik, says to me every day, there's a lot of great players out there everywhere. And I think that's right. I had two players that got drafted, it was the third round at Northern Michigan. I had centers that were better than some guys I've had here. There's a lot of good players in Division II, lower Division I. I don't consider New Mexico in that frame of lower of anything. But two things have happened. I think one of them is everybody wants to go somewhere where they're going to play immediately, and two is we're getting so many transfers and fifth year and 24- and 25-year-olds that they're better, too, so you're going to see a lot of teams with better players.

When you think of -- I just think of this, New Mexico or, you know, here's a Marquette who was top 10 earlier in the year. Here's Kansas, who was No. 1 earlier in the year, it's

just crazy what's going on.

My media knows that I predicted that at the beginning of the year. I said, there's going to be so much this and that because of all the things that are going on, and there has been that.

I think what I'm proudest about, we've been pretty consistent. We've been different a little bit. Even our losses, they've been close losses.

No, it doesn't surprise me there's good players. There really doesn't. What's worse is when a player isn't great. Like Middle Tennessee had a couple guys that just shot the daylights out of it on that given day and they shot, like, 53 or so percent from the three, and you lose that way. I don't think -- I'm looking at Gonzaga is an 8 or 9 seed. I've been to more Sweet 16s than any of us in a row.

If they want parity, I think parity is here. I think there's a lot of good players out there, and New Mexico, unfortunately for us, has a couple really, really good ones.

**Q. A year ago, Blake Lampman was on the Oakland team that pulled an upset in the first round, was in this spot as player. Now he's here as a GA. I'm curious, what impact has he made on your team this season?**

TOM IZZO: I've had a lot of GAs over my days, and in fact I had one, Jordan Ott, who's the No. 1 assistant here with the Cavs and I've had some guys work their way up in the NBA. I've had Drew Valentine who's done a hell of a job at Loyola and everything, and there's just been a bunch of guys. But I think Blake has a chance to be one of those.

He's been really good with our players, and he's been there, done that, and yet he's young enough to know, and now he's seen the other side from the coaching side. He's been somebody that's really impressed me, can still shoot the ball and he can still do some things. He relates really well with players, and I think he gets credibility for what him and Coach Kampe and the rest of that group did on their run.

So he's been right up there with some of the best I've had, and I've had some damn good ones. I'm pleased for him.

I think down the road it's going to get better and better, and he's helping us a lot because the players respect and enjoy him, and he works. I mean, he works relentless hours. He works.

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