

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

Sunday, March 23, 2025

Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Rocket Arena

## New Mexico Lobos

## Richard Pitino

## Mustapha Amzil

## CJ Noland

### Media Conference

Michigan State 71, New Mexico 63

RICHARD PITINO: Well, I sit up here extremely proud, certainly disappointed that we didn't get the win. Did so many great things all year. To win a title back to back years, to go back to the NCAA Tournament, go to the round of 32, we don't do that without these guys. Michigan State is a terrific team, physical, tough, foul trouble for us was very, very difficult. They had 19 points to our five from the free-throw line. But give them credit; it's a championship program. It's a program that we're trying to build towards.

But very, very grateful for those guys in the locker room, our fans. It was a special, special season.

Disappointed it never ends well, only for one team, but really, really proud of everybody.

**Q. Nelly doesn't foul out, he picked up five fouls, first time he's fouled out since the middle of last season. How much of a factor was it to have him be on the bench as long as he was?**

MUSTAPHA AMZIL: It's a big part, Nelly be a big part of the team. It sucks. That's it.

**Q. I want to get your thoughts. This is the end of the college run for both of you guys. CJ, just one year here. Thoughts on choosing New Mexico. I know right now it isn't the best time to reminisce about it, but it seems like you probably got out of it what you wanted; is that fair to say?**



CJ NOLAND: Yep, yep, that's fair to say. I came here to go to March Madness, and that's what I did for sure. That's what we did.

**Q. Staph, two years at UNM, an interesting journey for you from where you started and then you became more of a back-to-the-basket guy. I'm curious if what you want out of UNM in two years is what you expected and if you're happy with your decision to come?**

MUSTAPHA AMZIL: I'm happy Coach gave me an opportunity to come here. We were able to win championships. I had some great teammates, great coaches here. I had a good time. I enjoyed my time. Wouldn't be in a better place to finish my college career than here.

**Q. Michigan State obviously feeds off of its defense. How much could you sort of sense as they were getting stops, especially there in the second half, sort of an emotional swing as much as anything as they were sort of building off of those stops?**

CJ NOLAND: Well, it's basketball, so there's games of runs. We just tried to sustain that run as much as we can. It was loud in there. Definitely felt like a home game for them. It was fun.

MUSTAPHA AMZIL: Yeah, they had a lot of energy from the fans. Obviously, we're closer to their school than our school. But we had some turnovers, kind of gave it to them at the end.

I think we had the game in our hands, and it just slipped away. We should have finished a little bit better. But yeah.

**Q. When Nelly picks up two fouls in the first half maybe you didn't think it was that big of deal, but when did you start to realize the Nelly foul out situation was going to have an impact in this game?**

RICHARD PITINO: Yeah, I think somebody said he hadn't fouled out since last year. I thought third and fourth were pretty questionable, could have gone either way. I don't know if that's why we lost the game. But yeah, he was certainly a very good option down there. The two games



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this year that he's been in foul trouble; one was San Jose, and then this one, we certainly didn't win either one of them. Kind of 50/50 plays that could have gone either way and didn't go our way.

**Q. It's 29-20 after Staph hit a bucket late in the first half, and then you went seven-and-a-half minutes without actually making a field goal. What did they do defensively to take you out of your rhythm?**

RICHARD PITINO: They're big, they're strong, they're athletic. They had some blocked shots from behind that I hadn't seen all year. Certainly, there's another level of athleticism that we're not used to.

We knew they'd make us earn it. I was wishing we could get to the foul line a little bit more. We did not. Making five free throws versus a very, very physical team is hard.

But they're well schooled. They're tough. They're physical. They made us earn everything.

**Q. I know it wasn't the result you wanted, but what did it mean to you to have your dad in the stands watching?**

RICHARD PITINO: Well, it meant a lot to have my whole family. Certainly, families go through a lot, tough profession. Great profession, but a hard profession. Very grateful to have my kids, my wife, my brother, and certainly my dad were able to be here as well as some friends.

He had a tough one yesterday, and very grateful that he was able to make it and everybody was able to make it.

**Q. The pace early seemed to really favor you guys, and I know you mentioned they kind of slowed down, but did you come out wanting to beat them up-and-down like that?**

RICHARD PITINO: We did, and we just couldn't get that run game going. We got it a little bit towards the middle part of the second half, but we didn't want to get bogged down in the half court with them. They're bigger. They're strong. They're quick twitch. They're athletic. We kept harping, let's get out and run, let's get out and run. But there were some plays, fouling the three-point shot at the end of the clock. They made a three-point shot less than a second to go. Those plays certainly hurt us.

But yeah, we really wanted to get out and run and weren't able to do that.

**Q. Kind of the same question I asked the players, when Michigan State is getting those stops and**

**building off it, is there anything you can do -- obviously, besides put the ball in the basket to slow down maybe the energy, the emotions, all of that, to kind of quell the run?**

RICHARD PITINO: You know, I mean, it did feel like a home game for them, but they earned that, getting a 2 seed. So kudos to them to be able to do that. But we tried to keep them out of transition. Some of it was turnovers.

But they just were a little bit quicker to the ball, whether it was an offensive rebound, whether it was a loose ball, and then they were able to get out on the break and they've got some athletes who can make some unbelievable plays.

You've got to try to score so that you can set your defense. We were decent; we shot 54 percent in the second half and 48 for the game. But didn't get to the free-throw line enough.

But when you allow them to get out on the break like that, it's hard.

**Q. How much of a factor was it when Nelly picked up his fourth foul with 8:35 left, and as a second question, when did you find out your dad was going to be here tonight?**

RICHARD PITINO: Yeah, the Nelly foul was a game changer. When I found out my dad was coming is when he requested tickets. So I don't know, yesterday at some point, he asked for six tickets.

It's not like he was coming home from war or something. I do talk to him a lot and see him a lot. I'm grateful he came, but he flew on a private plane, as well. So let's not crown him father of the year just yet. He is a phenomenal father, but it wasn't like a surprise. I knew he was coming, and very, very grateful. It was a devastating loss, and I was very appreciative he came. It wasn't a surprise. I knew he was coming.

**Q. Two Donny questions. For the second time all year against D-I opponents, he didn't attempt a free throw. Are you surprised that as much as he did drive to the basket that he wasn't finishing like he normally does and wasn't able to draw fouls like he normally does?**

RICHARD PITINO: My only gripe really was the fourth foul with Nelly. I thought that was the only call. But Donny was going in there, and maybe he could have gotten one or two more. But other than that, they were going to be really physical with him.

**Q. And then just on Donny, he just had one of the best**

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**individual seasons in Lobo history, and now that it's over, can you talk about where that ranks with individual players you've coached?**

RICHARD PITINO: Yeah, I don't think I've ever had a Player of the Year. He earned it. He deserved it. We were 17-3 in a four-bid league. Statistically did some unbelievable things.

The trajectory of our program -- I said when we signed him, he'll win us a championship, and he did that. So he's got a lot to work on, like we all do, but just an absolute phenomenal, phenomenal season and very, very lucky to have coached him.

**Q. I know the come-down from this is going to be difficult for you, the players and the fans, but you head into an uncertain off-season because everyone is on a one-year contract, every job that comes up has your name attached to it, and the transfer portal starts tomorrow. What does the next two, three weeks look like for this program?**

RICHARD PITINO: Yeah, it's amazing just the conversations that we're having that you would never have had before, but we were talking, as a staff, about it already.

I don't really want to have meetings with the players tomorrow. I want everybody to take a little break. But I'm going to have to.

I told all of them in the locker room, like, I'm not bringing anybody in that can come back, and telling them they need to leave. We want them all to stay. They're a huge, huge part of what we do.

But you also want what's best for them. You really did. All we ask is just transparency. That's for me, that's for the players, that's for everybody. That's for my assistants. That's all we all ask is, just let us be a part of the conversation.

You've got to do what's best for you in this world, but just let us give our opinion, as well, why we think New Mexico is still a good fit for you.

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