

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

Sunday, March 23, 2025

Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Rocket Arena

Michigan State Spartans

Tom Izzo

Jaden Akins

Tre Holloman

Coen Carr

Media Conference

Michigan State 71, New Mexico 63

TOM IZZO: We're going to Atlanta, and all the meals are on you, right, guys?

Well, opening statement is another team that really, I thought, played well. The first half of that game, that was as good of a barrage as we've had hit us. It wasn't that we were down a lot, 10 points, but it just seemed like we weren't guarding, and they were making shots. Give them credit. I thought from about the nine-minute mark on, we did a better job in the first half, and I thought the second half, even though they shot a pretty good percentage, I think -- yeah, 48 percent, I'm not sure anybody has shot that against us. They're talented. They're good. They had a kid Amzil played out of his mind. I thought he had 12 at halftime. He's making threes; he's doing everything.

I thought Jeremy and Jaden and Tre all did a good job on Dent, and Dent is a hell of a player. But I thought we got our break going when we got our defense going, and we rebounded the ball pretty well. I don't know what the final total was, by six, but that's a talented, well-coached team, and I'm just happy we got the win. I'm happy we showed a little character after we got down and weren't playing very well.

Q. What is it like, Coach always talks about an ugly win over a pretty loss. You guys had to grind it out. J, talk about what it was like grinding it out?

JADEN AKINS: Yeah, definitely, a win is a win. I feel like



good teams find a way to win, and that's what we did. We started ugly. They got on us in the beginning, but we just tried to stay solid throughout the game.

Q. I think it was one field goal in the last nine minutes of the first half. How much pride do each of you take on the defensive end in winning this game that way?

COEN CARR: Yeah, a lot. We felt like we was getting punked in the first part of the game, so we made the decision to get stops, and I think that helped us get offense going.

Q. Jaden, New Mexico had their last lead with 14:31 in the second half, and then you hit that big three to take the lead with 7:07 left and then, of course, you guys held on to the lead the rest of the way. How big of a shot was that, not only for you, but for the rest of the team to put you guys in front and then keep that lead as well throughout the rest of the game?

JADEN AKINS: Yeah, I feel like it was pretty big just giving us the lead. It gave us some momentum. I think they called a time-out, so that just gave us a lot of confidence. It felt good. I ain't been shooting good, so it just felt good to be efficient today.

Q. Jaden and Tre, it felt like the veterans stepped up for you guys tonight. You two and Frankie, it felt like the upperclassmen showed out today. What motivated you in that half to will you guys to the win?

TRE HOLLOMAN: You know, we started out slow, so I was just trying to bring some juice off the bench with my scoring and then my defense. Just like being a leader, being a point guard out there, being the captain, just trying to go out there and just play hard for my teammates.

Q. Jaden, as a senior captain, what did you have to say to Jase? He had a slow game, really didn't get it going until late. What was the advice that you gave him?

JADEN AKINS: I mean, yeah, this is just like an anomaly game for him. He never does that, but sometimes that happens. But as you could see in the last six minutes of the game, he came in clutch with a lot of big plays, free



throws, had a put-back. That's just the type of player he is. He's going to keep playing. Everybody knows how talented he is, but he's definitely for the team. He was going to do anything to help us win.

Q. Jaden, how uncommon is it for a freshman who struggles all game and then when it gets down to crunch time under the bright lights for him to show up when it really matters?

JADEN AKINS: Yeah, like I said, I always tell him the truth. That's just what he does. It don't matter how the game going. I got faith in him. Everybody got faith in him on the team that he going to come through. It got us this far.

Q. You always hear about defend without fouling, and there was only 10 fouls for the whole game, half as many as they did, and you shot 18 more free throws. Was that a concentrated effort? How did you do that?

COEN CARR: I mean, yeah, we felt like we kind of fouled a lot the last game, so we just had to be solid. And I felt like we went for a lot of pump fakes, things. We were just off our P's and Q's a lot on the first game. So we had to bear down and focus on the little things.

TRE HOLLOWMAN: Yeah, that was one of our keys, defend without fouling. So we were just trying to keep them out of the lane and then just get out and run.

JADEN AKINS: Yeah, I mean, that was definitely a key. When we got the lead, we didn't want to foul. We wanted to keep the game clock going, so that really was our goal.

Q. Coach Izzo, this is your 16th Sweet 16 appearance. What do you think is the key to your success and longevity in the tournament and throughout these multiple eras of college basketball that you've coached in?

TOM IZZO: Yeah, I don't know. I still think for my whole career, starting my first year when I think we grabbed 26 offensive rebounds against Arkansas, who was one of the toughest teams in America, we've kind of built on that and we've kind of stuck with it, and we still defend and rebound, and Jeremy is starting to really push the ball. We're getting our running game going a little bit.

That's kind of what we are. We defend, rebound and run. Yet for the year we've scored almost 78 points a game. Where we let down a little bit is our free-throw shooting hasn't been as good lately, and that has to be addressed this week because in a tournament that's how you win games.

Our defense hasn't been as consistent, and some of that -- we've got a couple guys wearing down a little bit, a couple of our big guys, and we have a couple guys that -- sometimes matchup problems. It's not the best teams that win. It's those teams that play the best, and sometimes it's not who you play, it's the matchup. I shouldn't say it's not who you play, but it's the matchup of who you play.

I think we've had a few problems with that, and that's why we've adjusted, going small a little bit. Coen's really come on big. Frankie has helped a little bit. When they were talking about defending without fouling, that was one of the major keys because Dent is unbelievable -- I think he gets eight and a half free throws a game, and he had zero.

So we had what we call our six-eye approach, when he had seen six eyes every time he had it. It wasn't perfect, but it was pretty good, and yet it cost us a little bit early with the other guys hitting some threes.

Q. The pace seemed to really favor them early. How did you guys flip that?

TOM IZZO: The pace favored them? We want to run, they want to run, to be honest with you. I think what hurt us was we didn't guard and they did guard.

They had a couple guys hit some shots that normally don't hit those kind of threes. So they played good. That's a good team. Don't kid yourself; that is a really, really good, well-coached team.

I told you, our margin for error is not great. We're not going to sit there and walk up and out-talent anybody. It just doesn't work that way with us. They know it, I know it, and most of you know it. That's not insulting; that's a fact of life.

Q. What did you see out of Frankie Fidler tonight. He gave you some important minutes in the lift here and there. That's a senior, I'd imagine, enjoying an NCAA Tournament appearance for Michigan State for the first time. What did you see from Frankie tonight?

TOM IZZO: Frankie plays a little more physical, a little tougher, and probably our fault we tried playing him at the 3 a lot. He can play the 3, but he's more effective at the 4 when he can -- do some things against guys not maybe bigger than him, but maybe not quite as quick as some of those wings are.

I just thought he made some muscle plays. He has the ability to get fouled. He was shooting 90 percent from the free-throw line for most of the year. He missed a couple,

too. We had a lot of guys miss some free throws that are really good free-throw shooters, so we've got to home in on that and do a little better job on that, pick up our defense for 40 minutes instead of for 30 or 26, keep our rebounding where it's at.

I think Frankie and Coen help in that respect because they just give us more athletic people at that position --

Q. Down 10 in the first half, Jase isn't hitting anything, that's a problem. How much solace and comfort do you always take in those situations knowing your defense can turn it on in the second half like it has the first two games of the tournament so far?

TOM IZZO: Well, a little solace in the fact that I still think at the end of the first half, I thought we were wearing them down a little bit. We were getting some of those breakaway dunks and breakaway lay-ups. But I didn't feel very good about their defense. At least 10, 12 minutes of that first half.

They were driving around us. They were shooting over us.

Listen, we were poor. I mean, we've got to take that. We got a lot better, and yet we've had some of those stretches now, and I think sometimes -- how many threes did we make tonight? Four only? Maybe that'll get us back to normal because we were making nine and ten threes. I think we forgot how to guard people. We get back to four, maybe we'll go back home and start guarding people again.

Q. You tied Jim Boeheim tonight for fourth most tournament wins. Just the thought of achieving another milestone.

TOM IZZO: Well, Jim Boeheim is a friend, too, and he's won a lot of games, man. He's won a lot more games than I've won in the tournament. I've been fortunate. But anytime you can accomplish something with your team and your coaches that some of the most respected guys in college basketball have achieved, I guess it's a privilege and an honor.

You know, I see it on Bobby Knight's and that was awesome, but I just never see any kind of banners hanging for those kinds of things, and I'm not kind of a banner guy. So until that happens, I'll enjoy it, but I won't do cartwheels over it.

Q. Before you get out of here, I was hoping you could describe Tre's progression in your words through his three years, coming up big when it mattered most in the tournament?

TOM IZZO: Well, that's what captains do. We usually pick captains -- the team votes on some guys and this and that, for some reason this summer I said Tre is going to be a captain, then I didn't start him, then I did start him. He's a starter, he's just a sixth starter. He's as valuable to us in a lot of ways, it just helps our rotation the way we did it. It has nothing to do with his exact skill. He's gotten better every year. He's starting to shoot the ball better. He throws great lobs and he's really throwing some really nice lobs, and he can really get into people defensively.

I thought tonight it was interesting, I had three different players ask to come out of the game because they were tired. That for me was the greatest thing that happened because that means they're spelling it, and that's what I asked them to do, spell it.

I think we got a little bit nervous or maybe too excited. That happens to Jaxon Kohler sometimes and you burn up your energy that way. But Tre has been solid. He's been a good leader. He's accepted things. He embraced them, shooting it better, passing it really well, and he can really defend.

I see this as getting better and better and better, and hopefully for a great senior year, but we've got some games left.

As Jeremy Fears said, I told him the greatest thing that happens in these games is when the last game of the weekend, you try to win the weekend -- when the last game of the weekend is over, if you still get to practice, that's a good thing. First thing Jeremy said, hey, Coach, we get to practice Monday. I said, you're damn right, and I'm going to be excited about it.

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