

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal - Ole Miss vs Michigan State

Thursday, March 27, 2025

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

State Farm Arena

Michigan State Spartans

Jaden Atkins

Coen Carr

Jeremy Fears Jr.

Jase Richardson

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with Michigan State student-athletes.

Q. Coen, Coach joked about -- I don't know if he was joking or not, but he talked about how he was saying, since you're all going to be in Atlanta, he gets to save money because the food is going to be on you, that's what you said. I'm going to ask you, being able to be here in front of family and having a chance to advance to the Final Four, how does that feel?

COEN CARR: It was great. He was joking, though. That wasn't for real. It's good, though. I haven't really gotten a chance to play back home. I went to high school out of my state. So it's going to be fun being able to play back here again.

Q. Jeremy, I'm wondering if your coaching staff showed you guys any film from the Michigan State-Texas Tech game against Coach Beard to see your guys' offense against their defense a little bit?

JEREMY FEARS JR: No, we haven't watched any of that game, but we have watched definitely film on them and how they play and their defensive scheme and what their strengths and weaknesses are.

Q. What do you notice about them specifically defensively and how they try to affect the point guard?



JEREMY FEARS JR: They're a tough team. They switch. Everybody's physical. They guard and play defense.

Q. Kind of a follow-up for you, Coen. Do you expect a lot of people, family, friends, mentors in attendance for this weekend? And what's the last week or so been like trying to organize everything for that?

COEN CARR: I expect a lot of people here. As far as trying to organize all that, I haven't really been doing too much. It's mostly been my mom taking care of all that. I try to stay away from all that.

Q. Jase, has there been any difficulty this year matching up against veteran guards as a freshman? It doesn't seem like it, but I was wondering if you thought there may be. What has led to your success as a guard in the Big Ten as a freshman?

JASE RICHARDSON: I think when I first came in, a little bit of difficulty. But I was going against these guys every day, so it was kind of getting me better every single day. As the season progressed, I felt like defensively I kept getting better and just kept working.

Q. Guys, I want to ask you about being recruited by Michigan State and Tom Izzo. Izzo's done things a certain way for a long time. You kind of know what you're signing up for. How do you get introduced to that before you go into a program like that, with the sort of practices that you guys have, the intensity, that sort of thing? If you could each maybe share a little bit about your recollection of making that decision to play for Tom Izzo and knowing what you were signing up for at Michigan State.

JASE RICHARDSON: I think coming in last year on my visits, just watching these guys work and how Coach was pushing them to be better players, better men just overall, I think that was the most important thing to me kind of seeing what the coaching staff was doing and how they were developing everybody.

JEREMY FEARS JR: I would definitely say watching some game and film when I was younger, just watching Michigan State basketball and seeing how he coach, and obviously that they were winning and playing in big games every

year. So it's just something I wanted to be a part of.

COEN CARR: Just kind of seeing how he develops his players, how he cares about them. If you don't want to get coached, then it's not the place to go. But if you do want to get coached and get better, this is one of the best places to go.

JADEN AKINS: Same thing all these guys said. You can see games. You can see practices. Coach gets after it. But it's for the better of the team and for the better of the individual. You come here, you're going to leave a better player and a better person.

Q. Jase, I believe you and Tahaad Pettiford were Jordan Brand All-Americans last year and your brother Jaxon is a five star recruit in 2026 who got an offer from Michigan? How close are you and Tahaad, and who the heck is Jaxon going to cheer for if you end up playing the Wolverines?

JASE RICHARDSON: I've been playing against Tahaad since middle school. We've been around, playing around the circuits, and I know him pretty well.

As for my brother, I hope he's cheering for us. You always want family to cheer for us. I know he's taken his visit up there. I don't have anything to say about it, but if that's the team he wants, I can't stop him.

Q. Again, talking about Coach Izzo, who started his career before any of you guys were born, how does somebody 70 years old who's been around this long who's been through a game that has changed a lot over his career still relate to you guys, to this generation? And what did you see in a guy who's old enough to be your grandfather that made you, again, want to coach for him, that you could relate to him?

JADEN AKINS: Coach is still a fiery individual. I feel like he still has a really young spirit at heart. Every day in practice, he always brings the energy. I don't really feel like we think about his age that much. We just try to listen to everything he has to say, and his experience just makes us want to listen because we know that he's gotten to the promised land before.

JEREMY FEARS JR: I would just say the fact that obviously the experience, but the personal connection, like he cares about you off the court. You don't really think about basketball. He talks about family life, and that's that. He's just a family person.

Q. For the three guards, last game Jase saw a lot of doubles, and what you guys maybe learned from that,

the extra attention on Jase. For Jaden in particular, how that helped you get the shot going and you and Tre on the outside and you and Jeremy getting downhill a little bit?

JADEN AKINS: Yeah, Jase is a great player, so he's going to garner a lot of attention. I feel like it definitely made it easier for the other guys. I feel like he played the game the right way, tried to make winning plays, and came through in the clutch.

JEREMY FEARS JR: I'd definitely say I think -- I don't know about Jase getting double-teamed, but I think he has great looks, great shots that he usually makes. Just the ball didn't drop. Other than that, he came back when it mattered. Like the last five minutes, he made some big time plays and winning plays.

So just being able to help us out any way he can.

JASE RICHARDSON: I just got to give credit to my teammates for the last game. Last game I wasn't hitting shots I usually hit, shots weren't falling, kind of felt disconnected from the game overall.

But I knew coming into the stretch I had to make some plays because these guys were carrying me on their backs for 38 minutes, so I had to come in those last two and make something happen.

Q. I know all focus is on Ole Miss, but if you win, you could potentially play Michigan. Would you be rooting for that matchup? What are your thoughts on a potential third meeting with your rival?

JEREMY FEARS JR: I say win the first game, and whatever else happens happens.

Q. Jaden, usually when you're at this level, the guards that have the most experience come up big, whether it's scoring or just leadership. How have you approached this responsibility? And has Coach said something to you or pulled you to the side and talked to you about this responsibility?

JADEN AKINS: Yeah, I feel like it's definitely a big responsibility, one that I don't take lightly. I feel like I try to just help lead by example with these guys. Also, if they need any help, they can talk to me about anything.

I try to make whatever play I can on the court to help us win.

Q. I wanted to ask the guards in particular about your guys' 3-point perimeter defense in the country coming



in. You guys have the best mark in the country. Playing against an Ole Miss team that they've shot over 50 percent from behind the arc in these first two games. What has the coaching staff kind of shown you guys on film, highlighted in terms of stuff you kind of want to take away to slow them down in that regard in their game?

JASE RICHARDSON: Ole Miss has been playing great. Their point guard is the straw that stirs the drink. So he's kind of just starting the game, he's hitting a lot of shots as of lately, and he's been a big player for them. We know defensively we've got to hone in on him and some of the other key guys that can really go out there and hurt us.

JEREMY FEARS JR: I would definitely say that everybody's been making shots on their team, from their guards to their big. You have to respect everybody. You can't really give any dare shots. They play hard.

You know going into the game, they're going to play hard, they're going to push the pace, and they're going to guard us.

JADEN AKINS: From the film that I watched, they pushed the pace a lot in transition, and sometimes they got a couple of open looks in transition. So we've got to be able to take that away if we want to be successful.

Q. I wonder, Jaden, what do you remember from the last time you were on the stage in the Sweet 16, what're the lessons from that game, and how did the game sit with you into the off-season, the way things played out there?

JADEN AKINS: It was a tough game. It didn't end how I wanted it to. Definitely feel like I learned a lot from it, just game management, time, score management.

It was a close game, so going into the off-season it definitely stung, and it's still with me.

Q. You guys said you had an opportunity to watch some of the Michigan State practices. Obviously you were well recruited by a lot of other programs. Was the Michigan State practice noticeably different to you, and if so, what did you take note of?

JEREMY FEARS JR: I would definitely say when I came up for a couple visits, unofficial and then official, just the fact that it's like a family culture. All the players and the coaches would come up and greet themselves to the family, to me, some of my friends that came with me.

And just how Coach coached, he got on players when they

made a mistake, but at the end of the day, it was just to learn and get better. That was really big. For me, I just seen somewhere that I could find home.

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