

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

Friday, March 28, 2025

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

State Farm Arena

Michigan State Spartans

Tom Izzo

Jaden Akins

Coen Carr

Jase Richardson

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference



JADEN AKINS: I feel like, if you go back to summer, ever since we got all our guys on our team, we always hang out off the court and do a lot of things off the court. That leads to our chemistry on the court really. Everybody just wants the best for each other.

Q. Jase, it looked like you heated up in the first half. Can you just talk about that run you got on there?

JASE RICHARDSON: I just felt like my teammates was putting me in position to be successful today. I told them after the New Mexico game that I owe them a game because I felt like I wasn't that good in that game. So I knew I had to come out here and make one up for these guys.

Q. Jase and Jaden, what did it take physically and mentally to finally break the paint against that defense? And how difficult was it in the first half when you weren't able to do that?

JASE RICHARDSON: I think for us in the first half we weren't being as aggressive as we should have been. I feel like they were kind of just punking us in the beginning. We couldn't get to the paint. Shooting decent shots, but not great shots.

I think second half it really opened up for us. We were being more aggressive, getting downhill and getting driving kicks. I felt like we were at our best in that second half.

Q. My question is for Jase. Jase, Tom mentioned yesterday that the game you guys played here against Kansas was when he really saw what you could do against veteran guards. Was there any bit of that game in your mind today? Have you ever had a 20-point performance like that in as big of a game like this?

JASE RICHARDSON: Coach brought it up, the Kansas game, yesterday he was kind of talking about that was the first time he really felt me kind of be myself. It was kind of in the back of my mind, but I knew just coming into this game it was a huge game for us because we knew Ole Miss was going to be a really tough team.

For me I just wanted to come in and try to make a positive

Michigan State - 73, Ole Miss - 70

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started. Coach, if you could give us a couple of quick opening thoughts. Then we'll open it up for questions.

TOM IZZO: First of all, that team was the toughest, most physical defensive team that we've played in years. It reminded me of the old Gene Keady, Clem Haskins teams when I started in this profession. They did a good job. I didn't think we did a very good job. We got stymied a lot.

I love these guys because they kept grinding. They kept grinding. Getting close before half was very critical. At halftime we felt like we could drive the ball a little bit more. Tre drove it. These guys drove it. Jase made some big shots. Coen, a couple big blocks. And Jaden made a big 3 and then those free throws at the end.

It's hard to believe that two days we're playing for a chance to do one of the all time great things in any basketball player's life, and that's play for a Final Four. I'm proud and happy for them. They've earned it. They deserved it. They did it.

Q. Jaden, Coach has called this one of the most connected teams that he has ever coached. What is it about this team that has allowed you all to have the chemistry that we saw out there today?

impact and make big plays.

Q. Coen, take me through that last five minutes. Defensive-wise, what did you guys do defensively to slow them down on that side of the ball?

COEN CARR: We were just trying to play tough, rebound. We gave up a couple of crucial rebounds in that segment. We were just trying to make sure we're in our gaps, not let Pedulla get open 3s and Murrell. We were just trying to burn them out on defense and get some key stops because the offense was rolling at that time.

Q. Coen, I wanted to ask you about your energy levels pregame. You seemed pretty amped up. Obviously a lot of friends and family in attendance to see you play for the second time this season. Were you a bit more amped up than usual because your family was here to see you play, and do you think it made you play better down the stretch?

COEN CARR: Yeah, I definitely was amped up. To be honest I think it made me play a little worse, especially in that first part of the game. I definitely was hyped. I've got a lot of family that hasn't seen me play in forever. So, yeah, it was definitely a great time.

Q. Jaden, this one is for you. What was the biggest difference maker defensively after the first half? It was a plus 8 for them in paint points. How was that a big challenge for you defensively to take away the paint in the second half but also scramble out to Pedulla from 3?

JADEN AKINS: We knew they had five guys that could drive it, so I feel like they were doing that at will really in the first half. We weren't in our gaps how we should have been. At halftime we talked about that a lot just trying to keep them out of the paint and slow Pedulla down.

He still had a good game, but I felt we kept him out of the paint a little better in the second half, and that's the reason why we won.

Q. For the three players, how do you balance the energy you need to bring in for this stage, this game, with the focus that you need, especially to close down the stretch putting your best foot forward?

JASE RICHARDSON: For us, we always say we play better when we're having fun, but we know that you've got to come in with a mentality. We try to have as much fun as possible playing, but we've also got to be locked in because we've got to key into our defensive things, key into our offensive things, but we have to have as much fun

as possible because that's when I feel like we're at our best.

Q. Jaden, kind of take yourself back to earlier in the season where it was pretty clear there were some shooting struggles, there was some criticism that was coming with some of that. Now as a senior, you know what it means to be a senior in a program like this. Kind of talk a little bit about stepping up to those challenges and hitting some big time shots on a big time stage when they matter the most.

JADEN AKINS: It's a long season. With my shooting struggles, I stayed in the gym, still believed in myself, still confident. I feel like the team needs me to make plays down the stretch for us to win. I'm looking to do that. I'm not really worrying about my shooting and making sure they go in every time.

Q. Jaden Akins, along those same lines, the score was tied with 1:20 left, ran a play, ghost screen, I think, got a switch, you drove, scored in the lane, game was in the balance right there. What did you read? Can you take me through that play? I think you got it to rattle in going down the lane. Tell me about that play.

JADEN AKINS: We were in a play, it broke down, and I was at the top of the key, and I just tried to make a play on to be calm. I saw an opening, and I took it. Thankfully, I made the shot.

Q. Tom, you mentioned earlier in your opening statement about what it means to play for the right to play for the Final Four, to have that on Sunday. This is your eighth Elite 8 appearance as well. Do you put any stock in that, or have you only focused on the Final Fours, the big achievement ins your career when you talk about those banner moments?

TOM IZZO: Elite 8s are great too, but go back to my statement from the beginning, we don't put up any banners for great 8s. We put up banners for championships and Final Fours and National Championships.

But I've talked to these guys about it. I guess it's the one thing I do have some experience on. Thank God I got a couple players, ex-former players -- I've got a whole locker room full of former players right now. I've got Kevin Willis beating up my guys because we weren't as tough and he's tough.

I thought that our -- I thought the coaches I got on my staff that have been in Final Fours have talked to them. I mean, we've all talked to them. Believe it or not, we've got to play better, but so proud of them. I mean, we're not a team that

can just go out and play and win, and boy, we did a helluva job second half.

Q. Question for Jase. You've been kind of the go to guy on the team for 3-pointing. I talked to your dad a bit, and he said your shot at the same age is a little bit better than his. Pretty high praise. Kind of referring to what you said about you owed your teammates one after last Sunday. What did you do over this last week to get back in a rhythm and find your shot from deep tonight?

JASE RICHARDSON: Never leave the gym. I felt that was the biggest thing for me when I got back. I was in the gym constantly trying to get my shot back because I don't think I ever shot that bad in a game before in New Mexico. So I knew I had to make it up to these guys and hit some shots today.

Q. Tom, down 10, 30-second timeout --

TOM IZZO: Go ahead.

Q. Thanks. Down 10 early on, what do you tell them in that 30-second timeout to settle them in that situation?

TOM IZZO: Asked them what the hell they're doing. We went out dirty. We went out not doing a good job offensively. They hit slips. The real killer was the turnovers. We had turnovers, and they were kind of ridiculous turnovers, would you guys agree?

They always agree with me after the fact, but we had turnovers. I think they had 9-2 points off turnovers. That was the difference in the game. We gave up a missed cutoff free throw. We gave up out of bounds plays. They're supposed to be a poor rebounding team, and they kicked our butts. They had 12 offensive rebounds to our 5.

What you should do is give them a lot of credit, and yet give us a lot of credit for bouncing back in the second half.

Q. This is for Coen. If you could take me through that dunk, what was going through your mind? Was it more of what am I going to do? Was it not miss it? Can you just take me through that moment?

COEN CARR: I really didn't think Fears was going to get the steal. He jumped up and got both hands on the basketball. I took one dribble and dunked it. I knew D was coming. I didn't know if he was going to jump or not. I didn't really think about what dunk to do. I just went up and made sure I made it.

THE MODERATOR: Got time for one more if anybody has

one.

Q. Jaden, I know you're going to celebrate this one, but you know the game coming on Sunday. Talk about the mentality that you have to lead the team and for the team to have to get ready for Sunday's game.

JADEN AKINS: We got the best coaching staff in the country, I feel like. They're going to have us ready to play. We're going to do a lot of walkthroughs and get ready who we have to play.

I'm going to tell the guys to go out there and play with no fear and we're going to have no regrets, and we're just going to play as hard as we can.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, fellas.

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