

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Final - Michigan State vs Auburn

Saturday, March 29, 2025

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

State Farm Arena

Michigan State Spartans

Tom Izzo

Jase Richardson

Jeremy Fears Jr.

Jaden Akins

Tre Holloman

Coen Carr

Elite Eight Pregame Media Conference



6 of your top 7 players are perimeter players. How are you anticipating their defense to change in terms of what actions they're going to try to disrupt?

JASE RICHARDSON: Most definitely, I think a lot of their guards are going to try to put pressure on us. From the Ole Miss game, I think they will probably try to pressure us, try to be aggressive with us. I'm just ready for there defense to change, a lock-guard mindset in my opinion. I think they're going to try to throw different guys at us, but we've got six, seven guards that can really do a lot.

Q. Question for Jase. You've been matching up against Tahaad Pettiford you said this week since middle school. Similar to you, he's also left-handed, which could present additional challenges when you're guarding. What do you anticipate additional challenges this week in defending him from kind of an opposite angle that you may be used to?

JASE RICHARDSON: It's pretty difficult. He can go both ways really well, especially with that right hand. I feel like he's really solid with his right hand, so he's kind of ambidextrous in a way.

We've got to lock in and watch a lot of film, just on his favorite things that he likes to do. His step-back is one of his favorite things that we kind of keyed in on. We've just got to find different areas and ways that we can stop him.

Q. Jaden, you guarded a lot of elite scorers in your career here. I'm wondering how can you prepare, I guess, for a team that's this deep across the board defensively?

JADEN AKINS: Watch a lot of film and trusting our coaching staff that they're going to put a game plan together. And be ready to go out there and give max effort and energy and lock in.

Q. Jeremy, obviously you are an emotional point guard, and it's been an emotional year or so for you. I wonder what this moment feels like to you to get to the point where you're at the Elite Eight but also the chance to play for a Final Four after everything you've gone through?

THE MODERATOR: As I mentioned, everybody is fair game for the first 20 minutes, but the student-athletes are only here for 20 minutes. As much as possible, please direct your questions specifically to them.

Q. Jaden and Jeremy, Tom obviously talks a lot about family and former players, the way they talk about your program, they come around the program. How does that help you all as players that former guys stay so connected to the current team?

JADEN AKINS: It helps a lot. I feel like that was really one of the biggest reasons that all of us are here, just the family atmosphere that we have. The alumni always come and reach out to us, whether it's text or in person, just giving us words of encouragement. I feel like that motivates us during the season.

JEREMY FEARS JR: I would definitely say it was big for me coming here in this process. I still remember the day Cassius Winston called me, and we were just talking about the program and what's it about. Just stuff that stick out, I talked to Draymond before I came here. Just to this day, they come out and still support. It's just a family.

Q. Jase, this is for you. Defensively Auburn yesterday had to contend with two inside players who were averaging a lot of points in rebounds, but for you guys,



JEREMY FEARS JR: This is special, you know. Got to thank God and just grateful for this opportunity.

A year ago I was rehabbing, getting right, and hoping and praying for moments like this. So just to have a great group of guys and a great coaching staff and being able to do something special this year, I couldn't ask for nothing more.

Q. For any of the players, you're the last Big Ten team left in this tournament. Does that matter to you at all? Do you have conference pride, like the SEC teams seem to?

JEREMY FEARS JR: I wouldn't say it matters. We wanted to see all the Big Ten teams do good, obviously same conference, but it's just great that we're still standing. We've got a goal to do.

THE MODERATOR: Let's take one more answer from one of you guys.

TRE HOLLOWMAN: You know it like kind of is a privilege to be the last Big Ten team representing that conference. Then just going out there and then trying to do big things. Yeah, win.

Q. My question is for Tom. I want to ask about your matchup in 2010 against Bruce Pearl. You guys won that game on free throws, obviously, but is there any traits you see from that team that you also see in this team to allow them to pull out close games there in the end?

BRUCE PEARL: Boy, that's 15 years ago, but I do remember the game. It was an important game, as you know. When you get to the second round or second weekend, all those games are more and more important.

I think he's got different players. I've got different players. I think he probably coaches a little different. I probably coach a little different.

I don't know if there's a lot you can get out of it except what you just said. Free throws are going to be important. It's one of our special teams things. We kind of had dipped for a little while. In the last couple games we're shooting better from the line again. Last night there's no question it helped win us the game.

All of those special teams things, out of bounds plays, free throws, free throw blockouts, they matter. I think they mattered back then. We had a couple big plays that I remember, and they matter now. So those things are the same.

Q. For Jase, in college basketball history, there aren't that many high level players who have sons that are high level players at the same school. How do you handle the weight of that and the pressure attached to that at Michigan State?

JASE RICHARDSON: Definitely just try come in and try to play as confident as I can. My mindset, when I came in, we're two totally different players. There's not as much pressure on me to go out there and try to do things that he did because I know I can't jump 40 feet in the air.

BRUCE PEARL: You're right.

JASE RICHARDSON: So for me, just go out there, play with as much fun, play with joy, and just go out there and have fun.

Q. Coach Izzo, this is for you. With their trifecta of that of scorers that combined for 62 yesterday, Broome, Jones, and Pettiford, what defensive challenges do they pose with how they were able to manufacture that level of offense?

TOM IZZO: They're all different of course. Broome is an incredible player, but the other two guys can make shots, and they can make shots from a lot of different places. To get 62 of their points, these guys are going to be challenged a little bit.

We're going to have to do some different things with Broome because he scores it in so many different ways, and we've got a couple different things we'd like to do with him.

But the other ones are just defend, defend, defend from long range, short range. They can put it on the floor. They can shoot it from the logo. We've got to make sure we try to contain them. We're not going to stop them, but we're going to contain them. If we can do that, we can get some rebounds, we can run, and I think that's a big part of our game too.

Q. Coen, wondering with last night being your first career start in your hometown in the Sweet 16, what kind of lessons did that teach you heading into the bigger stage?

COEN CARR: I think I had a lot of excitement going into that. I didn't really play how I wanted to the first half. So just staying with it. Listening to my teammates, staying with it. They helped me a lot through that. So just staying with it, listening to my teammates, and just keep having fun.

Even though you might not be playing as good as you want to, just stay locked in and be ready when the opportunity comes.

Q. Tom, Bruce said Michigan State can't play the underdog role because you're at the Duke, Kansas, Kentucky level, and Auburn hasn't been there historically. I want to know your response to that. He also mentioned the SEC's recent success against the Big Ten has been an edge in athleticism. I wanted to hear your thoughts on that as well.

TOM IZZO: I don't know. Every team's different. Bruce has done a helluva job at a couple different SEC schools, Tennessee and of course Auburn. I'm just grateful for who I have and what I have.

We're different teams in a lot of different ways, we're similar teams in a lot of different ways. I don't know what's an underdog. You get to this point, and there are no underdogs. If he wants to make us a favorite, I'm cool with that. If he wants to make us an underdog, I've been in that role before too.

I think that's the advantage of being where I've been. We've been a 1 seed and gotten to the Final Four. We've been a 7 seed and gotten to the Final Four. I don't know if the seed matters. I don't know if the underdog matters. I think the players matter and how they play the game. Coaches get credit, the players play the game.

So I look at it as, if we win, I'll take the credit. If we lose, I'll blame the players. That's what good coaches do.

Q. My question is for Jase. Building off the earlier question about your matchups with at Tahaad, thinking back on that when you guys were on the AAU circuits, what's that feeling like now matching up in the Elite Eight? Is it kind of surreal to think back and think, wow, we were in the AAU and now we're here?

JASE RICHARDSON: Definitely. When you get to play guys that you've grown up with and just played the AAU circuits, camps, it's super fun to get to play them at the highest level. So just to have that matchup in the Elite Eight is special.

Q. Jaden, this is for you. With regards to being a senior on this team, a leader coming into this game, outside of the schematics and the tactical side of basketball, what is it going to take for you to kind of be that leader in the emotional way for the team to understand what it's going to take to start tomorrow's game the way you finished and that surge of

momentum in yesterday's game?

JADEN AKINS: I feel like it's going to take full focus, full effort from the tip. Like I said, I'm a senior. This is my last go-around. So I'm trying to extend my season. That's really the only thing that's on my mind. And trying to help my brothers do that as well.

Q. Maybe for Jase and Jeremy. You guys like to play at a fast pace. Some people don't even realize that. Auburn is frenetic, all over the place. It's a little bit daunting, but is it also enjoyable? Do you guys look forward to this type of a game?

JASE RICHARDSON: Definitely. I think when we get out running, and Jeremy is pushing the ball at the speed that he pushes it at, it's really fun for us because it gives us easy transition shots. We can get easy buckets inside, driving kicks. So when you play a team like Auburn who also like to run, you've got to make sure you're staying poised when you're doing those things because you don't want the game to get hectic.

JEREMY FEARS JR: I would definitely say good thing they play fast paced and good thing we play fast paced. It's going to be an up-and-down game. We're able to get open transition shots and layups and dunks. But also at the same time we've got to make sure we sprint back and not give up those open dunks and shots too.

So I'm really trying to capitalize on one side and stop their side.

Q. Coen, how is just the physical style in the Big Ten help prepare this team for the run that you all are on right now?

COEN CARR: Especially for me, I kind of guard the perimeter, and I go inside too. So just be able to have both sides of that to be able to play physical and guard perimeter players, it helps a lot.

Q. This question is for Coach. You mentioned you're shooting better at the line as of recently, but this is the third game in a row at the tournament that you guys have more than doubled the other team in just free-throw attempts. Has getting to the line as much as possible been something you guys talk about before every game, or does it kind of just depend on the opponent?

TOM IZZO: I think it's something we talked about this summer and fall. I think in my program we've done a good job of that over the years. We haven't got to the line.

I think Frankie Fidler helped us a little bit early. He was a guy that got to the line a lot. These guys picked up on some of that. There was a lot of times where people have made more free throws than we have shot, and now there's times that we have made more free throws than other people have even shot.

So it's definitely helped us. We said we had to be a good free-throw shooting team for most of the year. We were in the 80s. These guys have done a great, great job of getting fouled and then converting those free throws.

That's what wins you games down the stretch, like the ones Tre hit down the stretch were critical. And Jase and Jeremy, they all hit -- Jaden hit a couple. Coen hit some early.

You've got to give them credit because some of them weren't good free-throw shooters, and they made themselves. I didn't do that, they did it. That's one of the things I really appreciate about the team.

THE MODERATOR: Five more minutes before I dismiss the student-athletes. Do we have any more questions for them?

Gentlemen, you guys can go.

Q. Tom, getting back a little bit to the underdog thing, Bruce said not only was he not going to let you play the undercard role, but he said they're the underdogs with all the talent, top overall seed. Do you buy that? Is it Bruce Pearl coaching mind games? Where do you stand on that?

TOM IZZO: Well, I remember Jud Heathcote used a term -- Kevin Willis was in our locker room, my first year I was a GA. I remember him saying one day, Kevin, I've been conned by the very best in the world, so don't try it. I think Kevin was trying to get out of why he didn't go to a class or something, you know.

Listen, Bruce and I are friends. We've been friends since he was at Iowa. He's done an incredible job there. Like I said, if -- I don't care where I am. I've been through so many of these. I've been a 2 seed that's been beaten by a 15. I've been a 1 seed that hasn't gotten out of the first weekend. So I don't buy any of that stuff.

But if it makes him feel better, I'll be the favorite. I'm cool with that. Whatever they want me to be, I'll be, but the game will be won by the players, not the betters, not the media -- no insult -- not even the coaches. The game will be won by the players who play the game.

Q. I was going to ask you about Carson and Jaxon and just sort of, when you brought those guys in a couple years ago, wide eyed freshmen, you stayed with them to let them develop, not brought in somebody to recruit over them. Can you speak to that decision a little bit and to where they are now? Is this what you sort of saw for them a couple years ago?

TOM IZZO: Well, they have made great progress. Sometimes I wish they'd make even more progress. Some of that is my doings too. I've got an obligation to make players better. I mean, that is our job.

I think we've done it somewhat. They have to buy in. We have to do our job. But I think this run this year has really helped them understand that getting better -- you know, one of the things I like, I think we're still getting better. We have not played our best game yet. We have not been as consistent as I would like to be in these last four or five games as far as from one half to another.

But we have learned how to win, and we've learned how to win in different ways with different players. Those guys that develop within your program usually are playing for a little bit more. They have some ownership, and that's what I greatly appreciate.

We still have some young guys. We have some middle aged guys. We have a few older guys. In fact, Bruce's team is very mature. I won't say old. I'd prefer people call me mature instead of old, so I'll do the same thing for the 23, 24-year-olds.

I really believe that those guys have kind of withstood the process. I'll never forget Draymond said he kissed the Spartan head because he survived the four-year process, and that's pretty good. That's life lessons. I still got those guys for another year, so they're growing. They're getting better. I think they're going to take another big jump like he did and some other guys that maybe took a little longer than some people would like.

But those guys, I wouldn't trade them. Wouldn't trade them.

Q. Go back to 1999. I think we were in St. Louis for the regional final there against Kentucky. Is the excitement level the same from 1999 to 2025, and is the preparation the same? Not necessarily the actual Xs and Os, but the method?

TOM IZZO: That's a great question. It's one of my favorite ones because I think we think so many things are different, and there are different things in our profession right now. But the meat and potatoes of things are the same.

I'll never forget, we started with our 20-minute prep before dinner, after dinner, before breakfast, after dinner. That was the first time in '97 when we played Princeton. Then '98, then we just used that. That's been the same. You've still got to defend, rebound, and run. That's been the same.

You have to talk to players differently. You have to make adjustments. You've got more people. But when it gets down to that locker room before the game, it's all the same.

Thank God I had the Mateen Cleaves of the world. Had Antonio Smith that almost killed me in the huddle because we were down 17-40 to Kentucky. Once in a while I have guys that do that now. It's the same two. So it's awesome.

Q. Tom, you take a lot of pride in connecting generations of Spartans. Former players come back to East Lansing and talk to your guys. How important has that been to your ongoing success. In this new turbulent climate, how difficult will that be for teams to recreate that going forward?

TOM IZZO: I don't know that, but I just know this, it is the most important thing for me because you've got to understand that, if -- like Jason Richardson. I mean, none of us like anybody more than our kids, no insult to wives or parents now and this and that. Your kids are the most important thing you have.

When you have former players that feel like their experience here was good enough that they'll send their kids, that's pretty awesome.

But like last night, it was funny because Smitty brought in a bunch of guys, and Kevin Willis was here. He gets back once in a while. He's got a son that lives in Grand Rapids. But my guys are just enamored by how big, strong, and in shape he still looks, and he's 60 years old or whatever.

You know what I enjoyed? I watch Kevin act like a 20-year-old. He was picking players up. He was laughing with them. He felt so connected. He picked me up. He just got caught up in the fever. I think, if we lose that, to me that will be a shame.

I don't know how you consistently do it if you're moving parts, but I guess I'll learn to do that like I've learned to do everything else. I'm sure as hell not going to worry about it now. But those former players, and there are going to be a slew of them here tomorrow, they can speak to the current players differently. They can tell them -- even the guys on my staff, I have Austin and TK, DJ and Monte, guys that have been to the Final Four, guys that have been to the

Elite Eights both as a player and as a coach.

That helps me stay connected, as people think you get older and lose connections with your players. Those guys are saying almost the same things. Hell, when Draymond calls or Mateen, those guys say it worse than I do, you know. I love that. I really do.

Q. So much has been made of the Big Ten's national title drought, but do you take pride in being the last Big Ten team standing? Then if you don't mind, a second unrelated would be about Zapala who didn't play last night. Do you expect him to be back in the starting lineup or at least the rotation?

TOM IZZO: I don't take pride in it, I take blame for it. I've been there seven other times and haven't won it, so I'm part of the problem.

I don't think it's a problem. I've heard some of you even write articles and speak about it. It really comes down to matchups sometimes. Everybody talks about style of play. I'm going to tell you something, a Big Ten is supposed to be a physical league. We were like three yards and a cloud of dust because of Woody Hayes and Bo Schembechler. That's how we were. Last night we were in a fist fight that we didn't win so good, and we're supposed to be this big, tough team.

I'm proud of the teams in the Big Ten. I watched the end of the Purdue game. I watched the Maryland game. I watched a lot of games that Big Ten teams are in. I watched Michigan play these guys last night. I think -- bother me, pride in it, if somebody breaks that record, that's a good record to be broken.

I would be hoping that a lot of the Big Ten teams would, and now we're left to carry the flag and hopefully change that. But we'll see what happens. I really don't look at it like some people, like the Big Ten's bad or some other conference is so good just because they win a National Championship. I think I've had three teams that were better -- not than my National Championship team, but better than a lot of my Final Four teams that didn't make it out of the first weekend or the second.

So it is what it is. As far as Zapala and Booker now, they haven't played in a couple, but I expect to play both of them tomorrow. Zapala's thing was more about just the matchups that we had because of the personnel of the other team, which is going to happen sometimes.

Q. Obviously you've been at this stage a lot over a lot of years. You're mature, as you said.

TOM IZZO: Or old, either way.

Q. And I know there's always urgency when you get to this moment, but does this feel different in any way than any of the others because you've been doing this for so long? Is there more of a sense of urgency?

TOM IZZO: If I translate that, it's do you feel more urgency because you might not have that many more chances? Well, let me tell you how I feel about that.

You're laughing because you're thinking the same damn thing. You guys are not in much different boats either, by the way. You don't get to do your job forever either.

Jud Heathcote taught me something in 1986. We were playing Kansas in the famous clock game. We did an unbelievable job against Kansas. They had Danny Manning. They were really good. We had Scott. We were good, but we weren't that good. We led the whole game and missed some free throws down the stretch and lost the game, and we went in the locker room.

I said, we're losing Scott and a couple other guys, but Jud wasn't happy at all. I said to myself, wow, kind of like -- forgive me -- but what a jerk. We played our butt off. We played as good as we could play. We took a great team right to the wire, went to overtime.

Later on I asked him, Coach, didn't you think we played very good? And he says, you don't understand, those guys, some of them will never get that opportunity again, and who says anybody will?

My good friend Gene Keady, who I think is one of the greatest coaches to ever coach, never been to a Final Four. Every time I get to one, I feel almost guilty because of so many good coaches -- John Chaney, you know. I don't look at my age or the end of my career or the beginning of my career.

There's times -- look, I won the National Championship five years in. 25 years later, I haven't won another one. Every time I play, I don't look at my end is near. I look at I have an opportunity to do something that you may never get another opportunity to do again. That's kind of the way I approach it.

So I don't feel any pressure that, wow, you might not get -- the pressure is you might not get another chance, having nothing to do with how old you are or anything else. It's just a fact of life, you might not get another chance.

Q. The eight remaining teams in this tournament are the top eight teams in KenPom. I know you've had

thoughts about the portal or the urinal, as you call it, redistributing talent. I wonder if you think maybe that speaks to that at all, but more specifically to your program, you said you wanted to get back to this point last year. How proud are you of the fact that you are in that group?

TOM IZZO: I'm really proud of these players. They've done a lot more than a lot of people know. You ask them to sacrifice a little bit, it's not like somebody should have played a bunch more minutes, but three, four minutes here or there they sacrificed. They sacrificed -- there's been nine different leading scorers on our team. That doesn't normally happen.

But as you go through the year, and people get upset about he didn't get to play as much, his average isn't quite as high, his this, his that. It just depends what's important because we're still playing, which means we're relevant. People are talking about our guys, and that exposure helps them.

I really believe that these kids have learned how to sacrifice, and some of them had to wait their turn a little bit. Some of them will play at the next level maybe, and when they get there, they're probably going to wait their turn again. They're probably going to sacrifice again.

That's what I love about what I do. I think these are all life lessons. I think this is the way it's going to be. I think sometimes right now we're leaning towards Disneyland and the real world's not Disneyland.

I am proud of every one of them. I mean, every one of them. Frankie Fidler was starting at the beginning of the year. He played eight minutes in some games later on. Zapala, as you said, didn't play a minute yesterday. It wasn't all his fault. It was a different concept in sports. We had to do whatever we could do to win a game.

To me, that seems like a pretty good concept because Zapala is still going to benefit. He didn't play last night. He'll play tomorrow. But more importantly, we're still playing. He's still relevant. That's what I think is cool.

There's a lot of guys that haven't played -- a lot of good players didn't even make the NCAA Tournament. There's some good players that didn't even make the Big Ten tournament. This has been a cool experience for me too.

We said we're going to be a little different, do a little different way. We have. The only way it works, your staff and your players buy in. Our players bought in better than most older, older adults do. So I'm proud of them.

Q. Coach, you've been in this spot before, playing the Number 1 overall seed in the Elite Eight twice before, '09 and '19. I know you've been prepping for Auburn a little bit coming up to before week, but what does it take in this 48 hours leading up to the game for you, your staff, and your players come out and actually win the game on Sunday?

TOM IZZO: I think it takes focus, it takes mentally getting past being fatigued. Physical fatigue, you can get through, but mental fatigue gets a little harder and there's a lot going on right now. I think it's going to take that.

Then the little things. It's not going to be the big things. You're going to make shots. You're going to miss shots. Last night we blew a free-throw line cutout. Now that's sacred in our place. We don't want to do that. We gave up a 3 and an out of bounds play. We don't want to do that.

There's certain things that we really try to steal points. I think to beat a team -- I guess they're not -- I guess Bruce doesn't think they're that talented, but I do. So to be the team that got guys that can shoot it from everywhere and got maybe the National Player of the Year on their team, we're going to have to do all the little things. We're going to have to get the loose balls. We're going to have to capitalize on free-throw shooting. We're going to have to capitalize on our out of bounds plays and hope they don't capitalize on theirs.

The shots and the defense, I think both teams will do well. It will be the little things that I think will win or lose the game for you.

Q. Jon Scheyer said yesterday that this round is the hardest to win because inevitably you play against a team that's won three in a row and you are on the doorstep of a great accomplishment. So I just wanted to ask you, do you agree with that assessment? Does this round feel different?

TOM IZZO: It's more exciting. Press conferences are longer. The attention, I mean there's eight teams left. That attention is awesome. It's a privilege. It's an honor, and it's something that I talk to my guys about since we started the tournament and every round you go.

Appreciate where you are and take advantage of where you are. I don't know, like in '18, I think Jaren Jackson and Miles Bridges were in Detroit, and we won 30-some games, and we lost to Syracuse. I guess it was an upset. That was in the second game. I didn't even get to the second weekend.

So when you get in this tournament -- after interviewing for

a couple NBA jobs one time, I asked some former NBA players of mine, what is different about the NBA? I asked some other people. They said the greatest thing is the playoffs, they're best of seven. You can afford that one bad game and still survive. We can't.

So Jon's right, and he's done a helluva job. I love what he stands for. But if he would have lost the opener, that would have been the hardest. If he lost the last game, that would have been the hardest. Every game you play when it's one-and-done time, that's the hardest.

Is there more pressure? Is there better teams? Hell, I've been in it where the reason I got to a Final Four was somebody got upset. So maybe the third game, I think the year we beat Tennessee, I think we played Northern Iowa in the Sweet 16 because they upset Kansas. I think, when we got to one in '05, we played Vermont in the second game because Syracuse who was rated a lot higher -- Pat, you know them all, man. You're old.

Anyway, sometimes I say you've got to be lucky. Most of the time, you've got to be good. But there is more excitement right now. I mean, when we won last night, the only thing I could think about was we have one game left. National Championships are great and you do dream of those, but we made such a big deal of what a Final Four is. It's almost like get to a Final Four.

Sometimes I think maybe I'm wrong because I got there and then didn't finish it. But there is something about getting to a Final Four, and you say you're one game from doing that is probably, as he said, more pressure, more excitement, more fear, more everything. Yeah, it's the greatest.

Q. Tom, when you look at a team like Auburn with its explosiveness and its athletes and its speed, you guys don't shy away from that, but is there a danger in getting caught up in that? Like playing their game -- I know their game is like your game -- but how do you counsel your players on handling what Auburn brings?

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TOM IZZO: Yeah, they bring it a lot of different ways. As you say, they can be frenetic in a way. They come at you. They have athletes. They have size. They're big guards, 6'2", but then it's 6'6", 6'7", 6'7". They bring in waves of people like that.

I think that's one of the advantages of playing in these major conferences and playing good schedules is you get to see a lot of people and have to develop different ways to

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

win games.

I think for the most part what I learned, again, early in my career playing Wisconsin and Dick Bennett. We had to play him four times in one year. I was thinking about that if we would have had to play Michigan again. The fourth time, as I'm sure Pat remembers, was in Indy, and it was for semifinals. I think -- now, I'm not positive on the score, I think it was 19-17 at halftime.

Hey, hey, hey, it was good defense. Some of your columns are brutal.

Anyway, 19-17, I came walking up, and an old friend of mine Kevin O'Neill was doing something, and he looks at me and says, what was that? I said, you know what, we've got to do what we've got to do. After the game, everyone was like how are you going to stay with Florida? We beat them 90-70, or 89, whatever it was.

I learned early in my career that you'd better be able to adjust and play big, small, fast, slow, fist fight or prom date. You can do a lot of different things, and that's kind of the way I try to approach my guys. We've got to be prepared because we're not just trying to win the league, you're always trying to go deep into the tournament.

So I looked at it then early on, and I haven't changed much. We're not going to get caught up in what they do. I wasn't going to change Dick Bennett. He was one of the great coaches, and his teams are so tough and disciplined and they were going to be so patient. I wasn't going to speed them up. So if I had to play smash mouth, I learned how to play smash mouth. If I had to play race horse, I think my team can play race horse.

I do think my team can't shoot the 3 like his team can, and we don't have an inside player like his, but we have ten guys that are on a mission, and the mission is to get to San Antonio. We're going to try to make that happen.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, that's all the time we have.

TOM IZZO: Appreciate it.

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