

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

Sunday, March 30, 2025

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

State Farm Arena

Michigan State Spartans

Tom Izzo

Jaden Akins

Jase Richardson

Jaxon Kohler

Elite Eight Postgame Media Conference

Auburn - 70, Michigan State - 64

THE MODERATOR: Welcome back to the NCAA South Regional. Michigan State is on their way.

TOM IZZO: For the 30th year, I'm not sure I've ever been prouder of a team. There's so much coach speak and things that go on in programs all over, but these guys gave me everything they had. I drained them of everything. They should take a week off. There's nothing left in them.

That's kind of the way it was in the locker room. It was a tear jerking locker room because they knew they spilled it all, and yet we thought we started out poorly, which we've had that little bit of a problem lately. We just couldn't recover from that 17-0 run.

It wasn't through lack of effort. It wasn't through lack of anything except we played a good team. Broome hurt us early. We made some adjustments, did a little better job on him after he hit those first, I think, six or eight points.

I thought we missed some good shots in there, but maybe some of it was their defense too.

All in all, you don't get defined -- unfortunately, your last game wears with you. I'm asking these guys that, if it does, make sure that you do something about it in your life. For Jaden, he's not done playing basketball either.

All in all, the most unbelievable year I've had, the most connected year I've had. I just appreciate what these guys



did for myself, our program, our university, and our community. So questions for them.

Q. For the players, Coach talked about it being an unbelievable year. When you look at the year, you think about it, what are some of the things that took you all from where you were maybe when you went to California and had that trip that you all got to get to this point today? What are some of the things that took you all the way?

THE MODERATOR: Jaden, why don't you start, please.

JADEN AKINS: I would just say the talks and meetings that we had with each other as players and with the coaches after that trip to California, we lost two back to back, and we didn't want that to stop how our season was going. I felt like we just turned it around after that.

THE MODERATOR: Jaxon, you want to chime in on that?

JAXON KOHLER: Yeah, what Jaden said. When we went to that trip in California, that was our first time when we realized that, even if we don't bring our best game and if we don't bring it first thing, to what Jaden said, that's when we came together as a team and really told each other, hey, if we don't bring it every game, then they're going to jump us.

That's when us players really made a choice that every game we have to start out as best we can.

Q. For Jaxon and Jase, they took the lead double digits, but you guys kept coming back, kept coming back. Can you describe your emotions in the final couple of minutes when it didn't look like there was going to be another comeback to overcome it?

JAXON KOHLER: When they got a big lead early, there's something about every player and coach in this program never gives up until there's nothing left on the clock. Obviously we didn't get off to a great start the way we wanted to, but we just kept fighting and fighting. That's what's so special about this group of guys because no matter how bad it may seem, we never give up, and we never let our minds go down that hole of, oh, this isn't going to work out.



No, we kept fighting and fighting and fighting. And in the last minutes, it's very emotional, but it's -- you know. I'm sorry because I love every person in this program, and it's been a really hard journey. I love these guys to death, and I wish we could have had a different outcome, but we couldn't get it done today.

I love this group of guys more than anything.

THE MODERATOR: Jase, you want to add to that?

JASE RICHARDSON: It's what Jax said. We're never going to just lay down and give up. That's not the Spartan way. When we got to those last couple minutes, we knew that we had to fight because we weren't trying to get embarrassed. That's not what we came here to do.

So just fight until the end, final buzzer. Unfortunately, it didn't go our way tonight.

Q. Thank you for coming out and answering questions. We appreciate that. Jaden, are you able to have a feeling of accomplishment now? If not right now, when do you think you will and feel really good about this season? When do you think that will happen? How are you feeling about it right now?

JADEN AKINS: I don't know when that will happen. It's fresh in my mind right now to be honest. It's going to sting for a while. So I just got to deal with it.

Q. Jase and Jaden, it seemed like Auburn was really trying to take the drives away from the guards when you guys were trying to get to the basket. Was there anything in particular they did that you thought made it tough on you guys in particular?

JADEN AKINS: They got versatile defenders. You know drive, and they're coming over the hill. I feel like we missed some easy looks at the basket early.

JASE RICHARDSON: I think it was just tough. They were icing the ball screens on us, and then when we drove, we see four or five guys coming at you. So you've got to try to make a play. They rotated really fast. They rotated well. They were defending really well, and it was tough for us.

THE MODERATOR: Time for one more for the student-athletes or I'll let them go.

Gentlemen, you guys can go. Thank you very much.

Let's continue with questions for Coach Izzo.

Q. Coach, you've dominated the SEC like few others. I think that's the first time you've lost to an SEC team in the tournament. I think you've won 7 out of the last 9 that you played them in the regular season. What would you say about that league and Bruce Pearl? You ran into him when he was at Tennessee.

TOM IZZO: The league's been great all year, there's no question about it. They had the top teams. They competed every week against each other. I think it's amazing that they were picked 1 in the country early, and they survived most of the year.

They went through a little bit of a down spout there, and part of it was Broome was hurt there for a little bit. I think they had one other kid out for a while.

We did most of the things we wanted to do except guard Broome a little bit better. It wasn't the points he scored that got us. We're used to giving up points and making sure they don't get 3s. Pretty good 3-point shooting team. We held them to 28 percent. It was just he was 10 for 13. That's why he's an All-American. That's why he's a Player of the Year candidate. Did a helluva job.

I thought that stretch early, they went 17-0, and we just turned the ball over. It's been a problem for us a little bit. Not the turnovers, we had nine for the game, which is phenomenal against a team like this. But it was in the spurt that's we had them.

Boy, that stretch we had at the beginning. At one time we had four or five offensive rebounds and kicked it out and had shot after shot after shot, it just didn't go in, and that happens.

I'd say Bruce has done a great job because it's hard to keep a team, as I remember back to those days, from start to finish. The fans were great today. I mean, I don't think it affected us, and I say that because we played in some of the greatest venues. But they were great. I mean, they were great.

I don't think that's why we lost. I think we lost because they played better than we did. They didn't shoot so well, 42, but that includes his 10 for 13. So the rest of the guys, we did a good enough job on. We just didn't score it enough ourselves, and we didn't -- the turnovers were at critical times that led to layups.

Q. Tom, I spoke with Jaden, Jase, and Coen yesterday. Whether it was Jaden with his injury, Jase as a freshman, or Coen getting his first start in the Sweet 16, they all said your trust in them helped them gain confidence. What is it like helping them grow in

their game, and is that something you'd agree with?

TOM IZZO: Oh, yeah, it's the greatest. The greatest thing is players coming back, but the second greatest thing is watch people trying to reach the goals. I always tell them you've got to dream it, and they dreamed it early. You've got to work for it and have a goal. They had the goal, and today they lived the reality of it.

They were -- it wasn't like the game was that close that we felt like we could have won it. I say we felt like we should have won it because we didn't. Could have won it, I think we could have. And yet you never know, man. You never know if you get another chance.

I think that's the hardest thing when you're talking to a team after. You just want to say remember this moment so next year -- because Cleaves taught me that and some other guys. You start somewhere, and you get to a Sweet 16, next year it was Final Four, next year you won it. The problem is you've got some guys that don't get that extra chance. It's hard to say that in the locker room. It's a really unnerving thing.

All in all, God, it's going to be really hard to beat the connectivity and the camaraderie of this team. We were young, you know. We more or less started two freshmen, and our two guards were freshmen. We got some work to do yet, but I love the guys I've got in the locker room.

Q. You talked about this team coming a long way. What are some of the things your staff, the team did to really make that curve because not all of your teams, you felt like you've been able to pull as much out of as this one.

TOM IZZO: Yeah, there's no question, this was probably the number one. But as far as pulling out, what I thought when we left this building against Kansas, back in November, I think it was, there were a lot of questions on a lot of people's minds, but some in mine.

I thought my staff did an incredible job and the trainers. We had no injuries all year. I think part of that was playing a lot of people and not wearing people down. But I also -- it's not easy to play a lot of people. It's not easy to accept it as a player, and it's not easy to do it as a coach.

I felt like it reinvigorated me to realize there's still people out there that care about winning and care about getting better and care about playing for the school they're at and care about playing with the players they're with. In this day and age when it's getting a little more selfish, that is rewarding, that is exciting, that is invigorating.

I usually try to stick to four letter words and under, but I'm going way out of my line right now, and it was invigorating.

So who knows? Who knows what the future brings, but I guess for the first time they got four 1s in the Final Four. Is that true? Second time?

When we went in Minnesota, my third one, I think we had three 1s and a 2. That means that people that get all the criticism, besides the coaches and the media, the selection committee must have done a pretty damn good job. Give them credit.

I do think in watching, I watched some of that Houston game today, and ironically I was hoping to get there. I took Kelvin Sampson's spot at Michigan State, as weird as that sounds as a GA, so it would have been nice to get there with him. Jud would have been looking down complaining to both of us that we don't play any zone.

But I think of Rick Barnes and the job he did. There's so many people who did a good job. Guess what, somebody's going to go home sad. Today it's the Spartans. Next Saturday it'll be two more teams. Next Monday, it will be one more team. I don't want to make it as trite as it sounds because it's not.

If you've been in the locker room, there's some locker rooms that people are bitching and complaining, and there's some locker rooms where people are crying and hugging. It was a crying and hugging locker room, and that means we had something special.

I'm going to appreciate that. I'm sure it will feel better in a couple days. I give a lot of credit to Auburn. I think they're well coached. I think they did a good job. I think Broome is the real deal, does things kind of effortlessly.

And I thought those guards didn't play as well as they've been playing if you want the truth. Did we have something to do with it or not? But you know what, as you say, when your Number 1 guy brings it, and you know he's been around a few years, they deserve to move on.

Thank you very much. Atlanta was great. Appreciate you. I'll see you guys somewhere.

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