

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday March 9, 2017

Tom Izzo

Joshua Langford

Miles Bridges

Michigan State Spartans

Michigan State - 78, Penn State - 51

THE MODERATOR: We'll ask Coach Izzo to make an opening statement, then questions for Miles and Joshua.

COACH IZZO: I felt like we played one of our better games, if you looked at it in all aspects. I thought defensively we were very good. Offensively I thought we executed well. We shot well the first half. I thought we took a few bad shots the second.

Only complaints I had, I thought we got a little complacent the second half, which you sometimes do. I thought the first half we defended well, but we fouled too much. We let them go 10 for 11 or 9 for 10 from the line.

I also think it was a tough game for Penn State yesterday. I've been really impressed with the job that Pat has done. When I look at Rutgers, Penn State, Nebraska, I think these teams are going to be really, really good next year.

I feel fortunate to win. I thought these two guys played pretty well. Josh got us going early. Miles got us going later. We're ecstatic to have a chance to play Minnesota tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the students.

Q. Coach Chambers talked about what he's seen from Miles and Nick, how they've been vocal. Miles, what you have seen from Penn State, how have they changed? How has this team changed since the last time you played them?

MILES BRIDGES: Lamar Stevens, he has really improved a lot. Tony Carr, he's gotten better, too.

They're going to be great. They talk a lot. They communicate on defense, too. They're going to be a really good team.



Q. Josh, one of the things Mike Garland just said is these are one of the games you played, it wasn't just grit, athleticism, it was intelligence, too. Does it feel like you're a smarter basketball team on the court today?

JOSHUA LANGFORD: Yes, I feel like we were a whole lot better. I feel like we executed well. I feel like we've grown a lot since the last time we played Penn State as a whole.

Really, the freshmen, we aren't freshmen anymore. We're really sophomores. Everybody has been stepping it up, giving 120%.

Q. Miles, the game against Minnesota, was it important for you, the one in January? Seemed like it got you going this season.

MILES BRIDGES: Yeah, that was my third game back, I think. I struggled against Penn State the game before. That game really got me going.

I was at home. My teammates were behind me, too. I give all the credit to my teammates for that.

Q. Miles, both games against Minnesota were during the holiday break. Compare the team's mentality to now in the heat of March.

MILES BRIDGES: They really improved. They're one of the hottest teams. They have two great guards in Mason and Briere. That's one of our main goals, is to have the same defensive mentality that we had today, rebound the ball really well against them.

Q. Up next, a team like Minnesota. Having beaten them twice already, does playing them a third time kind of make you a little wary? Things can kind of change.

MILES BRIDGES: Yeah, I mean, it does. We want to have the same defensive mindset we had the second time we played them. Like I said before, we want to rebound the ball and execute.

JOSHUA LANGFORD: I think the biggest thing for us is to make sure we don't get nonchalant about it because we beat them twice already. We have to come in with the same focus we had in today's game, make sure we follow the scouting report. Minnesota is a good team. We have to make sure we play like we did tonight, play as a team.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

We'll continue with questions for Coach Izzo.

Q. What did you say to Pat Chambers there? Seems like a guy you like as a coach. And was this one of the more intelligent games your team played?

COACH IZZO: As far as Pat goes, you feel bad at the end of the game. I don't know what was said. Officials are pretty good. They're not guys that go off for no reason. I don't know if somebody said the wrong word. I've done that once or twice in my career. I guess I can appreciate it.

You hate to see a game end that way when a team is already down. I told him that.

You know what, I like his team a lot. When I watched these games yesterday, watched them and Nebraska, I watched all the young guys. Then when I watched some other teams that I think are going to be really, really good next year.

I told him he just has to keep that team together. Watkins was getting better. We did a pretty good job on him. As Miles said, Stevens and Carr are really good players. They can play on any team in this league.

I just told him, you know, I thought we played our best game. He didn't play as well. Maybe the fatigue from yesterday, who knows.

But I love his team. I think he's lost some games that came right down to wire. Today the roof fell in. I've been there. That's what I told him.

As far as the intelligence of our team, I thought the execution of plays was the best it's been. At the break Tum had nine assists and zero turnovers. The reason is we broke well, we defended well, rebounded well. The first time they out-rebounded us by 10. We out-rebounded them by 15.

I think that's the energy level. The ghosts of Palestra really helped them. Great playing there. Love the venue. I didn't love the outcome. I think we've gotten better and smarter.

I said in the last 10 games our team is much, much better. Didn't always show up with four of those losses. I stuck to what I said. We're not great yet. We still have our moments when we do some things, but we're making some progress.

Q. Miles is playing in his first post-season. Where

have you seen the most growth with him?

COACH IZZO: He's just such a good kid. I don't know. You can get on him and he doesn't waver. A couple times he didn't rebound well enough. A couple times he wasn't ready to shoot.

You don't have to say, Miles, will you please do this? Pamper him like a superstar. You can coach him, talk to him, tell him.

He was jacked before the game started. This means a lot to Miles, as it does our other guys. Everybody else is growing in their game. He's growing with his leadership, too. I told him it's going to be very important for his present, his future, his long-time future.

You know, I felt good how he played. Nick is playing better. Josh played really well. But Miles is a special guy. You interview him, you'll love him.

Q. Tom, every year you guys have a struggle during the regular season, and when it turns March, you turn the calendar, become some different team. What do you do to get to March? Look like a totally different squad.

COACH IZZO: Are you an alum or what? Are you from Lansing or what? Last year, we won a zillion games. We didn't just turn it on at the end.

This year, I mean, we're a work in progress today. We're still working on the progress. We still went over two hours for every practice this week, which is a joke. But we did remove the diapers when the regular season ended, now we're trying to move forward from there. We're still looking at fundamental things.

This year, I'd say we've had some success in March. I mean, what basketball coach doesn't like March? Everybody loves March.

It was, like, Matt Costello and Denzel Valentine texted me at 2:00 in the morning, which I chewed them out for why they were up that late. It was, Coach, it's our time of year.

I think there's that mentality at our place. We won 27 games for five straight years up until this year. We weren't bad in those other ones.

Your degree will be in the mail.

Q. You talked so much about guys getting that one-and-done mentality. This is the first post-season game for so many of your guys. How encouraging was it to see them take that kind of mentality?

COACH IZZO: It was very encouraging. We

hammered on that in practice. Every missed ball, every screw-up. Every player in America says, My bad. You say 'my bad' in this tournament, you're usually going home.

We just hammered on that for days. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, that was constant hammering. I just don't think freshmen do understand it. I wanted to have my seniors tell them. I looked around them, and Alvin was the only guy around. I wanted to tell my juniors to tell them and Tum was the only guy around. I had Eron Harris, Gavin Schilling.

Like I always do, I called some former players to make sure they are texting or calling my guys to inform them of the difference of the regular season and one-and-done time.

Q. You've been talking all year about getting maybe McQuaid going, Langford. You get both them. You get stuff from Kenny today. How difficult was it getting those role players to buy into their roles?

COACH IZZO: I said if our wings could just shoot it like they shoot it in practice, McQuaid especially. But Josh Langford was a lot more aggressive today. Had five rebounds. You can just kind of look at his stats and figure out how hard he's playing.

I thought Alvin Ellis did a great job on Carr. We changed that matchup early. He didn't shoot it as well. He forced a couple shots. I think my guys think, If I guard better defensively, that gives me a license to take bad shots offensively. I had to straighten that out in a couple huddles.

I really thought all three of them did a good job in what they needed to do. With Nick and Miles, Kenny played better, better defense. Give my staff credit. I thought they worked hard on the scouting report. Give us credit, but understand, too, we had three days. You take a chance when you do this. But we looked at how Nebraska finished, and we guessed that Penn State, so we probably put 75/25 into that. It almost changed.

We had a leg up on what they could do, too. Understand that it was a little easier for us than it was for them.

Q. A couple games in a row the defensive effort has been better than we've seen. Has this been something you've sensed has been coming?

COACH IZZO: I did. Other than that first half when we fouled a little bit too much, those drives. Not having Eron Harris, who is a guy that's athletic enough to stay in front of people. We're mismatching a lot of things to try to cheat those coverages.

But I thought it was one of our best defenses. I'm sure, at the same time, they had some shots they felt were good enough, and they just didn't go in. I can't reiterate enough, that is going to be a really, really, really good team. Kind of sad to see Ohio State, Nebraska.

We have ADs coming out because of my favorite sport, Twitter, that everybody is tweeting about this and that. We got to give guys the green light.

Hell, I'm nervous. My AD hasn't called me, tweeted nothing. I'm nervous right now.

I think some of those teams are going to be really good. There's a lot of young teams in our league. The veteran teams, like a Minnesota, like a Michigan, are really playing well. Michigan played extremely well today, too. Unbelievable what they went through. My hat off to John and his team, to handle that adversity, and come back.

Of course, Purdue is just solid as a rock. Wisconsin I think is bouncing back. Our league is better. Got to get my pitch in for our league. Our league is a lot better.

I don't know if they're talking heads. I don't know what they are out there. But it still bothers me that the perception of our league isn't what it needs to be.

I'm telling you, there's some good teams in the league. I've been in it 30 years. There's some very good teams.

Q. This is the first conference tournament outside of Chicago or Indianapolis in a century. Describe what changes to your preparation you had this year compared to years past.

COACH IZZO: I like it, but being a guy that's from the UP where you can go from one side of the UP to another in about an hour. Getting to practice is a little more difficult because the traffic out here. I mean, God bless you people, I don't know how you do it.

That planning was different. Is it going to be 20 minutes? We talk in miles. You guys talk in minutes or hours, I should say, to get somewhere. You'll agree with that? God bless you.

That's probably the biggest adjustment, trying to figure out when to leave, when to be places. The venue was awesome. It's different.

I wish I had more time. I did do something. I got my players in the African American Museum. That was only two hours. That was like the most awesome thing you could do. I wish we had more time to go do some

of those things. Two hours was like you got in the front door. But it was still good. It was good for them.

I think there's some great, great things to do here. I know my wife's happy. I might not be with the travel, but she is.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thanks very much.

COACH IZZO: Thanks.