

March 20, 2014



Michigan State – 93
Delaware – 78

An interview with:



THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with an opening statement from coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

COACH TOM IZZO: Well, it was a strange game. First, I would like to give a lot of credit to Monte. You watch them on film and those three guards, they do a lot of things. It's amazing how much they get to the free throw line. They have done it all year long. And that was one of the things we talked about, these three guys up here, in order, Branden, I thought he played well, not his best. I thought that Travis had one of his best games and of course had an off the chart game and yet we made enough mistakes and fouling like we did and the turnovers, stepping out of bounds, it just didn't feel as good as you should after a win like this.

But, I guess that's the place we're at. When you're a team that is contending to move on, you got to play well for the whole 40 minutes and we didn't tonight, we survived, but I think we learned something and I think we'll grow from it.

THE MODERATOR: Take questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Adreian, obviously a big night for you. But did you feel anything different earlier

in this game that you knew that maybe it was going to be your night?

ADREIAN PAYNE: No, I didn't really feel like I was going to have a game like this. I just came out just trying to play and win. And coach said he was going to come to me early and that's what he did and my teammates did a great job at getting me the ball so I can get baskets in easy ways.

Q. Adreian, I know a lot's been made of the young lady that you've befriended, does that motivate you when you're out there?

ADREIAN PAYNE: For sure. I talked to them yesterday, I talked to Lacey and her parents yesterday and it's hard and it's like having a family member that's really sick and ill. The only thing you can do is just play basketball and you can't be there with them. And just knowing that when I play well it makes her happy, it feels like I'm doing something in a way to help her feel better.

Q. For Travis and Branden, have you guys seen Adreian play like that and what is it like when he gets it rolling like that?

BRANDEN DAWSON: Well, honestly, this is not the first time seeing Adreian having an impact on a game like this. It goes back from the Texas game. He had great game and he came out and made shots. Tonight he was 17-17 from the free throw line and it all starts with our guards. They find him in rhythm and he just made shots. So, I think as a Senior, we're not surprised at his performance because as a Senior you should come out and play like this and Adreian just showed the world that he's not ready to go home.

Q. Travis you didn't have a bad night yourself, 19 points. Talk about your mind frame coming into the game.

TRAVIS TRICE: My mindset really was just come in and do whatever the team needs me to do. But any time you got a guy like AP who has a game like that, you just got to try and find him.

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And I think that's what we did early on and it really helped open it up for everybody else.

Q. Travis, you've taken it upon yourself to get into the lane a little bit more. In the key moment in the second half you put the ball on the floor and got to the basket, is that something you're concentrating on doing more?

TRAVIS TRICE: My job really as a point guard is really to read the defense and take what they give me. And the play had broke down and the guy, my guy, was close up on me so, I think, I was thinking just to go and drive. But, coach did a great job tonight of putting us in sets where we could attack and we could get into the lane.

Q. Adreian, I got to ask you again, there was an especially a stretch where you made like three 3's, you threw up a left hander, made a 3-pointer, was there a time today where it just sort of felt like you were in some sort of other world?

ADREIAN PAYNE: Yeah, when you're scoring like that and your game's coming so easy to you, and you make a lot of shots, it feels like you're in a rhythm. It feels like you can't be stopped. I just wanted to continue to just thank the players and my coaches for being able to get me the ball in situations like that.

Q. Adreian, coming into the game, Delaware's not a team with a lot of size, did you see that as a potential way for you to really have a big impact?

ADREIAN PAYNE: I didn't look at it that way, but coach had a scout report and I just listened to it and just tried to go with it. And that was to go inside and play inside out and that's what we have been doing the past month. And that's what we're trying to continue to do, because when we play inside out it opens it up for the guards and it makes things much easier.

Q. Adreian, you broke Greg Kelser's NCAA single scoring record against Notre Dame in '79. What do those kind of things mean to you or what do they mean to the team in general when a player goes off like that and is going to be in the record books now for all time?

ADREIAN PAYNE: I would say that leaving a legacy. I talked to coach about that. The other day I sent him a text and we're just trying to

continue to win games and we played this weekend and we are here to win the weekend and that's the main goal.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll excuse you to the locker room and take questions for coach.

Q. There's been a lot about Branden Dawson the last weekend and Keith Appling the last month. Is there ever a point where you take Adreian Payne for granted in what he can do?

COACH TOM IZZO: I'm like BJ, I don't think so. I'm really proud of AP, but what I'm proudest of him about, and he did send a text and he's going to do this and do that, you know, he didn't take that many shots. He took 15 shots. But he did what he -- if he would do it all the time, he established himself inside, got to the free throw line where he's very good and got some confidence there. And then, like it was with Keith earlier in the year, when he was passing and not turning it over, his shooting went up. When AP starts inside out all of a sudden his game goes up.

I don't think I take him for granted. I think sometimes he's got to realize that he's really a good player and if he just plays inside out, let's the game come to him, which I thought he did tonight, figured out what they could do, he's right, our scouting report was that's what we were going to try to do.

He doesn't always follow it, not in a negative way, necessarily, but you know, he followed it and good things happen for us, good things happen for me, good things happen for the players and great things happen for him. So, it was a good deal.

Q. I saw you kind of nodding about the text. I don't know how much you can share but what was the message?

COACH TOM IZZO: Adreian is not a guy that sends long texts. He just talked about the things he learned and he wanted to finish strong and it was kind of a deep text for him about how he's going to just try to stay focused and do whatever I need him to do. Ironically, when he makes that decision, I think him and I work well together. And my staff -- and tonight was an exceptional night. Let's give him credit. I wouldn't give any blame to Delaware, I mean, I think it was you that said it, was he in another zone? Yes, that

wasn't even in the Ozone, he was in Pluto and beyond. I mean, he was way out there.

But, he really did play under control. There was hardly a bad shot. I thought the worst he did was the first three shots of the second half. We said we're going to go right back inside and he is jacking shots. But, he doesn't take that many, he's not a selfish kid. You're happy when you get a text that kind of says, coach, I'm going to be with you, and then when he has some success, everybody's happy and it works out.

Q. You killed them on the boards tonight, 42-24. Knowing how good Delaware was in the back court, was the game plan coming in to pound them on the boards and with your big guys inside?

COACH TOM IZZO: It was. We thought we had to go inside. We said we have to stop penetration and not foul. We didn't do that part of the game plan very good. We said we had to rebound well. I thought we did that part very well for us. But, we're getting better at rebounding the ball and it's not one of their strengths. But, we're getting better because we got Dawson and Payne back and those guys are 17, 18 rebounds out of our lineup for eight or nine games.

So, I think we made some progress in a couple areas, but we took some steps backwards too, don't kid yourself. We were not very disciplined, we did not play as intelligently as I think we could with leads, and it will give us something to work on tonight.

Q. Was this a discouraging game for you in terms of how it was called?

COACH TOM IZZO: You know what I gave up for lent.

(Laughter.)

You know, put it this way, there's been games that have been very discouraging for me that are not even my games that I watch other teams. This one -- there were some, but it was discouraging the way we reached and Valentine's got two fouls and he goes and reaches and tries to get a steal. So, I would have to blame a lot more on us, as you know, I can only say I'm not a fan of the new stuff. Because of the length and the things that happen and the great players on the bench, I'm not a fan of it, but I wasn't a fan of the way we played tonight. So, I was more disappointed than the guys in the numbered shirts than the striped shirts.

Q. Couple times during the game you went down to the bench and had some skull sessions with some players. Is that going -- was that along the lines of teaching to play smarter and things like that, and can you remember a NCAA tournament game in which you had a chance, with a lead, to teach some lessons? Is that frustrating, beneficial and were you teaching at that point and can you expand on that a little bit?

COACH TOM IZZO: That's a polite way of saying I was chewing somebody out, but I guess if that's what it is, I guess that's what it is.

Teaching? Yeah, that sounds better. Moms like that better. But we made some ridiculous plays. Our bigs, our subs did some poor things. I was really disappointed. Zel did some things he hasn't done all year, he's been my most consistent player night in night out by far and he was uncharacteristically -- and I don't know if it was the two early fouls that just kind of knocked him out. So those are the parts that were disappointing.

And I did not think we played very intelligently. The game plan was not give up dribble penetration, and not foul, and there were a lot of them, 39 free throws, that's two games worth. So we didn't do a good job of that.

Our bigs I thought jogged up-and-down the court, other than AP and Branden. Our other guys -- and they said, you know, like Gavin gets in, gets two fouls so fast that he can't even get loose. And Costello did the same thing and maybe I have a little understanding for that.

It's frustrating. I think we're all, we all think that this is going to be the better way, but I would be all for it if we got six fouls.

Q. When Adreian's having a game like this or at Texas or anything, do you ever think back to last April when he was making that decision, it came down to the wire. You were grateful, I'm sure; and also can you talk about how he's married the two aspects of his game the inside and out and understanding when to do it?

COACH TOM IZZO: I think that's the million dollar statement right there. I think two things: He made the right decision to stay. Yes, he made the right decision for me and everybody can write that; he made the right decision for him. He is a much better player. He's much more

cerebral player, he's a much stronger player. He is starting to marry the insight outside, put them together, you know. And if he does that on a consistent basis, I see him as one of the best four men in the whole country.

I know there's freshmen that are good, there's this and that, that are good, but the guy can do a lot of things. What he doesn't even show, he's got a left hand. He didn't make that one, he's got a better left hand than any of the, than anybody around the country, if you ask me. And he can rebound. It hasn't been something that's doing as well, he got eight tonight. So I think, is it a blessing for me and Michigan State? Of course. But I still think his high school coaches did the best job of all, they tried to be the mediators in between, figuring out that the coach is going to want to stay for himself, which never was true; and the player is going to want to go, because every player wants to go. And I thought they did the best job. And when he got injured it looked like it was -- but there's no question in my mind, no matter -- I'm sure he's moving up, but no matter if he does or doesn't, he is a better player, better ready for that next level now than he was a year ago.

Q. Including the Big-10 tournament is Trice playing his best basketball of his career, in your opinion?

COACH TOM IZZO: Yes. Travis has been really good. He's been good in practice, he's making shots, and it's been more than just the Big-10 tournament. I think he was Sixth Man of the Year worthy and he is a guy that comes off, he knows he's going in three, four minutes into the game and he's turning himself in, he's a better defender than people give him credit for. He is playing very well.

Q. I was going to ask about Trice too. It seemed like he really is getting into the lane a little bit more and that's something he's not done a lot in his career, but is that something you need him to do now with Keith maybe not doing it quite as much?

COACH TOM IZZO: Well, every game is a little different. One thing we said in the scouting report today is we had to attack the ball screens. With Baptiste, we had to get into the paint. And if we got in there we thought B.J. and AP could live on the offensive glass a little bit. I thought Trice did a great job. In all honesty, I thought that Appling played pretty well too. He just didn't score as much and didn't do -- but as far as running our

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team, those two guys did a heck of a job. Those other guards got to get better.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you, coach.

COACH TOM IZZO: Thank you.

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