Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 13, 2026

Chicago, Illinois, USA

United Center

UCLA Bruins

Mick Cronin

Donovan Dent

Trent Perry

Postgame Press Conference

UCLA - 88, Michigan State - 84

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by UCLA coach Mick Cronin as well as student-athletes Trent Perry and Donovan Dent.

MICK CRONIN: Tremendous effort by our players. Michigan State obviously a great team, great coach. We matched their physicality and played unbelievable first half.

Guys never flinched, kept knocking in big shots, both these guys next to me and Skyy Clark. Four guys in double figures. Obviously to win this game with Tyler only playing 10 minutes is monumental for us, monumental for us.

Brandon Williams, big night, nine points and four rebounds. Obviously we've got to get more out of Xavier Booker and Steve Jamerson next couple days. Let you guys bang out your questions.

Q. Trent, how do you make six free throws in a row in 36 seconds in high pressure situations like that.

TRENT PERRY: Just staying calm and trusting the work and having the trust in my teammates. Even Coach, we're in the huddle they're saying you're going to knock these down. We're going on the other end.

Q. Do you have a breathing routine that goes through your head?

TRENT PERRY: You see at the beginning of my routine, I'm just kind of looking at the basket, breathing, taking everything in, and staying true to myself.

Q. Trent, the guy next to you, Donny, hits big free throws late, two steals late in the game to seal it. What can you say about your teammate there?

TRENT PERRY: He's all right. I'm playing.

(Laughter).

Four steals, 12-2 assist-to-turnover ratio, he's amazing. He's amazing, though. That's our PG, and he's finding everybody.

Q. How do you guys feel about this kind of statement after the Michigan State game in East Lansing, kind of a low point. To come back tonight with such a strong statement, what does it say about the way you guys have responded and played this month?

DONOVAN DENT: I talked about it yesterday. We have a whole different mindset on our team. We've always been able to score the ball, that's not the problem, but we changed our mindset on the defensive side, and we were able to showcase that tonight. The first game they lit us up from every aspect. Like we were turning the ball over unreasonably. Today we got to show the chance of our real defense, and we did a good job of that tonight.

Q. Trent, it seems like the offense has taken a big step forward, especially since that Michigan State game. What has it felt like the difference has been, even just maybe as a team as a whole?

TRENT PERRY: Coach has always just said offense is going to come. Again, it's all about defense. Michigan State is a great offensive team, great defensive team, just a great program in general. We've got to worry about our defense, and I think we just executed that tonight.

Q. Donovan, when you talk about responding, I wonder how much in this game the fact of just sort of responding, what was the difference in this one? It seemed like you guys found answers a lot in the second half. What can you stay about the stick-to-it-ativeness of this team?

DONOVAN DENT: For sure just our attitude. We didn't ever really get down on ourselves. They went off on a run, and we responded right back. We were talking about it in the huddle, we just have to keep answering the punches. You can't go down without a fight, and they were fighting hard, so we just kept fighting back. We just never quit on the game really. It was really a test of our fight and will.

Q. Coach said unbelievable first half. Tyler goes down. Air kind of felt like it was sucked out of the building a little bit. What was the feeling amongst you guys? What did you guys want to do to respond to perform for Tyler?

TRENT PERRY: My initial reaction, I just really prayed that he was okay, and I'm glad that he's okay. Again, like I said, it's a team effort. We had guys step up. Brandon Williams had a great game, big game for us. Eric Dailey again, offensive rebounding, defensive rebounding. Just doing it all our there, both of those guys. Tremendous effort from both of them. Kudos to them.

DONOVAN DENT: Even Eric Freeny stepped in and got two offensive rebounds. With this team, it was very unfortunate that Tyler went down, but we have so much depth to where the next man can step up any time. It was big time for us.

Q. For either of you guys, what does it say about this team that last night you guys win a game with your defense playing as well as it did. Tonight your offense really steps up. To be able to win both ways on two consecutive nights, what does it say?

DONOVAN DENT: It's big time. You want to be able to win games any way you can, whether it's offense or defense, whoever you need that night. It just shows how good of a team we really are.

MICK CRONIN: Can't win the dance contest if you can only slow dance. You've got to be able to tango too.

Q. Donovan, last night you had a triple double. Tonight you had 23 points, 12 assists. It feels like you just picked up where you left off last night. How were you able to get in such a good groove. What were you telling yourself leading up to this game?

DONOVAN DENT: I really wanted to redeem myself from the first time we played. I think we all did. We didn't really show the our full selves, and we went there and got embarrassed. Coming into the game tonight, we all got fired up. Coach got us fired up in the shootaround. These are the type of games you have to win. These are the heavyweight matchups we talk about in the preseason, and you've got to come out and perform.

Q. I wanted to ask about your defense in the first half. It seemed to really rattle Michigan State to an extent. What did you do well to really put yourself in that good of a position?

DONOVAN DENT: We were just communicating and scrambling. We were playing like our life was on the line. That's what you have to do in these type of games. We had 25 deflections in the first half. We always talk about having 40-plus deflections. We were just out there hustling and playing hard.

Q. What was the deflection total?

MICK CRONIN: 40. I think they said 25 at half. We've got really smart kids on our team. We watched film in the first half of some things we did well, some things we need to adjust at halftime.

Then Coach Savino goes over that. As I come in to talk to them, before I said anything, Trent goes, guys we'd better be ready. You know Coach Izzo is killing those guys right now. You know they're going to come out in the second half and give us everything. They played great in the second half.

Q. Will you rest Tyler no matter what the evaluation is?

MICK CRONIN: It would take literally a miracle for him to play tomorrow, meaning that I would let him play. Right now I'm just -- you know, I don't want to speculate, trying to stay positive that he's got some sort of sprain, you know, for him. But it would take a modern miracle for him to play tomorrow.

Q. I just was curious, you kind of ramped up the three-guard usage with Trent, Donovan, and Skyy. What does that lineup give you?

MICK CRONIN: Hard to guard. I will say this to you, my friend, when you play small, you have to be hard to guard because you get destroyed on the backboard. 23-6 second chance points. So you must make up for it with shot making and play making because you're smaller. Especially against a program like that. Especially with Tyler out.

Book fouled out, and we're playing two forwards and three small guards against them. We can't block them out when we're healthy. But you have to -- if you play three small guards, you have to be really good offensively, or it doesn't work because you're not going to rebound great.

Q. It seems like throughout the season you guys have responded each and every time that adversity has arised. You see it tonight with Bilodeau going down, Michigan State going on several runs, and like you said Trent and Skyy responding. What does it say about your team and the resiliency behind it?

MICK CRONIN: The guys didn't flinch, and I was proud of that. Offensively they were rolling, but we kept answering them. We showed a lot of poise and made big shots. Saved our shots for tonight. We didn't need them last night. Saved our shot making for tonight, made 13 3s. Which we're capable of. We're the leading 3-point shooting team in the Big Ten statistically, percentage-wise.

It all evens out. Last night we were 7 for 22. Now we're 20 for 49 in the tournament, if my numbers are right.

Q. On that, I'm wondering about in particular the drive and kick aspect of that. How does that stretch and strain Michigan State's defense there?

MICK CRONIN: Well, anybody's really. All three of those guys, they can beat you off the dribble and they're good passers. So when they help, they find the open man and shoot it in.

We had obviously very short prep for this game. So thanks to my friend Gary DeCesare, we were over at De La Salle this afternoon going through some stuff on how we're going to have to score on them. They're hard to screen because he's such a great coach, they're so physical. I think spacing is paramount when you play Michigan State because it's so hard to screen them because they just fight so hard.

Q. Mick, what's your concern level about Tyler going beyond tomorrow and into the NCAA?

MICK CRONIN: My concern is for him, for him. If I didn't have bad luck, I'd have no luck at all, my friend, since I've been at UCLA with injuries. It could have cost us the National Championship. We lost two NBA players in March three years ago.

My concern is for him and his career and how it affects his teammates. Because I don't base my career off wins and losses. Legacy is the most overrated thing in life, Jeff Van Gundy. I'm worried about impact on my players. That's teaching them basketball and teaching them how to be a better man.

Q. What are you thinking --

MICK CRONIN: I know nothing about his injury, my friend. I'm a little bit busy. They're taking him somewhere to get imaging. I don't know how long that will take.

Q. I'm wondering the second half, the way your team was able to respond to the Michigan State push, how do you get guys to sort of respond and find winning plays in those moments? It feels like this time of year those are magnified.

MICK CRONIN: Players win games. Like you were talking about the effectiveness, somebody -- about the spread offense. You still got to beat your man and kick it and find the open man at the right time, and you've got to make a shot. That's players.

Trent, Skyy, Eric, and obviously Donny, they were great. Those guys played great. You're not winning high level games if guys don't perform. You're trying to get guys, coach them all year to get them to perform at the right time at the highest level.

I give them guys all the credit because those are big time plays off the dribble, scoring and finding the open man, and banging in shots. When Michigan State's crowd is roaring, they're making shots. Those guys -- it's easy to make them when you're up 20, but when the other team is on a run and you silence them, which we did a lot. Those guys did. Big time players.

Q. Trent obviously had the big free throws tonight, big rebounds in the last game, big shots in both. What's he just meant in general, just his confidence as this team gets closer?

MICK CRONIN: Trent did the same thing at the foul line to lead Harvard-Westlake to the state title. I watched every game, I saw him play a lot, guys. I don't know if I've ever seen him miss a pressure free throw. I'd have to ask Dave Rebibo, but I know that's how they closed out Salesian in his senior year up north.

Literally, we were just talking about how we were going to play defense. He's not going to miss. Donny is like, are we going to foul if we're up three? I said, well, we're going to be up four. Trent's at the line. Then he walked away to shoot, and I told Donny, we're going to foul at half-court.

In all seriousness, I've never seen him miss a big free throw, and I saw him play a lot of high school games.

Q. After the Michigan State regular season game, you changed your lineup, and it's worked really well. What was the genesis of that? When you reflect back on that decision.

MICK CRONIN: Getting Skyy back to health. That lineup was coming before Skyy tore his hamstring. I mean, it was coming, getting our best five players on the floor because Trent was growing every day and his confidence was growing. So that lineup, it was -- I just couldn't go to it until we got Skyy back.

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Michigan State Spartans

Tom Izzo

Jeremy Fears Jr

Coen Carr

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THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Michigan State coach Tom Izzo joined by student-athletes Coen Carr and Jeremy Fears Jr.

TOM IZZO: Really disappointing how we played. I give a lot of credit to UCLA. We beat them by 30 at our place, and Mick, like he should do, he got his team ready, and they played harder, tougher. It doesn't happen to my team very often, but for some reason we didn't answer the bell coming out. We miss some shots, but they probably missed a play or two. They definitely kicked us from start to finish. They deserved to win the game.

We almost made a valiant comeback, but that would have been too little, too late, the way we played. I think they made us play that way. They came at us. They punched us in the mouth, and we didn't respond. That doesn't happen very often. We'll figure out why, and then we'll move forward.

Q. How did you think you guys approached this game, your mentality coming off the regular season finale and knowing what you have ahead of you with the NCAA Tournament and all that?

JEREMY FEARS JR.: I think we approached it with the mindset we wanted to win the whole tournament. Obviously we didn't come out and do what we needed to do. That's credit on my part, like I didn't do my job today. It starts with me. If I don't do my job, I can't expect anybody else to mess up.

I definitely hurt the team, and I take responsibility, but overall, it's definitely going to sting for a while, and we've got to watch it and understand that next time is your season.

COEN CARR: Yeah, we didn't bring the energy we had in practice to the game. They started off and punched us in the mouth. Then we didn't respond. By the time we responded, it was too late. Yeah, I definitely think we're going to look back at this game and reflect on it a lot and see how much things that were so preventable in that game that we could have done a way better job.

Q. Jeremy, I wanted to ask you about the difference between Donovan Dent in the first game and this game and how much his penetration helps set them up around the arc tonight.

JEREMY FEARS JR.: I think it was huge for them. He played great tonight. Overall, he's just got to spots wherever he wanted on the court. He got his guys open shots, and he did what he needed to do to help the guys win.

I didn't do my job in trying to contain and make it hard for him. So he was able to be successful tonight. Credit to them, they played great. They made a lot of open shots and got whatever shot they wanted. So we didn't do our part on defense.

Q. I'm wondering in the second half, when you guys had 6-0, 7-0 runs and they matched them right after that. I wonder what you can diagnose as some of the reasons why things flipped like that with them and some of those extra stops didn't happen?

JEREMY FEARS JR.: We had some possessions where we'd get two or three stops and chip away and get it down to striking distance, but then they hit a big time 3, or drive and kick and they get it and one. Those moments like this, it's heart breaking. Oh, you're so close, and they score again. Just understanding that, if we didn't put ourself in that position to start with, those big time shots is just part of basketball.

We got down early too much, and they made us pay.

There's just something that we can prevent.

Q. Tom, I'm wondering about the second half tenacity that you guys have shown this year and the ability to get back into it. Also, kind of what I asked those guys about the 3-point looks they had. It seemed like they had a lot more open looks maybe than some teams have had in recent weeks.

TOM IZZO: It's hard for me to talk about it from a standpoint of I do not want to take anything away from UCLA. I love what Mick has done. I like what he did after our game. He went at 'em, and they won 5 out of 6, and they've changed.

I think it's really helped them. They went small ball. I think that's helped them. And I think Skyy Clark has really helped them. He's a very good player. He was a great player and had that injury that lasted a month.

The number of shots we missed at the rim really hurt us. We had some wide open 3s late that hurt us. They didn't have many wide open ones that they didn't make, and that really helped them. We had a couple stretches where we gave up three rebounds in a row, and they hit a 3 on it.

It's hard to overcome that. For some reason the combination of Jeremy took some blame. Yet he has 21 points, shoots 7 for 14, 2 for 3, 5 for 5, 13 assists and 4 turnovers is pretty good. There's a combination of things we didn't do on those ball screens. And then you know late in the game and we didn't want to foul, of all people -- some of our freshmen just made some freshmen mistakes.

We should have fouled on that layup. That was the worst free-throw shooter, one of my seniors. We just kind of weren't with it tonight, and it really had nothing to do with looking by somebody or because we beat them by 30. We had great practices. Some of you were there for some of them.

But I did not think we handled -- they played desperate tonight. I absolutely love that. I love the team that played desperate and came at us and took us two-thirds of the game to respond.

Q. Your players talked about beating themselves up for lack of effort or not enough effort.

TOM IZZO: They should.

Q. I was wondering if you concur with that, or was it more tactical things with their ball screens and whatnot?

TOM IZZO: We all have to take some blame for it, yeah. We all have to take some blame for it. We made some adjustments at halftime that worked for a little bit, and then we fell asleep again.

When you lose like this, everybody has to take some blame. I've got no problem taking a lot of it. It's my job to get my team ready to play, and they were not ready to play. I never seen so many dropped looks early in the game. I don't know why. We played the best schedule. We played some of the best teams. We've done this and that.

I thought Mick had his guys ready to -- yeah, desperate. That's the best word I can come up with, and we did not look desperate. So if it was coverages, if it was coaching errors, let me tell you something, they'll never, ever come close to beating themselves up as much as I'm going to beat myself up, never. Players don't do that anymore.

We're going to have to get ready, but it ain't going to be tonight. I was disappointed. I was disappointed for our fans. I was disappointed for people that flew in a lot of ways. I just did not think that was a Michigan State effort. I really didn't.

Q. You've had four games allowing now one point, two point possession in the last five. What is up with the defense slippage? What do you think is the biggest cause for concern right now?

TOM IZZO: The defense slippage, I think you're right. I do not think we have been defending as well even when we won games. Some of it's a little bit skewed from a standpoint of the Rutgers game when we had a 19-point lead, and they scored, I think, 100 points in a minute and a half or two minutes. I exaggerated by a point or two, but I think they hit five 3s. So that kind of distorts some of that stuff.

But I do not think we're playing as good a defense as we were. I think you start to want to become an offensive team, and we've just got to get back to who we are and who we've been most of the year. I think you're right on your evaluation.

Q. Coach, two straight games with bad fouls in crunch time. It was the Coop intentional foul at Michigan, and then tonight with Jordan Scott, when you guys could have played it out and gotten the ball back. I'm just curious how you eliminate those going into the tournament?

TOM IZZO: Got to coach better, definitely got to coach better. You're right, there's a couple of things that didn't

make sense. Not fouling on the layup didn't make sense to me. We've just got to situationally coach better, and that is me. I deserve to take the blame for that because if people aren't doing that, there's a reason they're not doing it, and that's where the coach has to take some responsibility.

Q. In the first half, the play where Jordan Scott kicks the ball out of bounds, and then he has the turnover, and then there's the jump ball, I wonder if you got a sense that maybe he was out of sorts in that sense, or he took himself out of it. When you see that, how do you get him back knowing there's games you're going to need him coming down the stretch here?

TOM IZZO: Out of sorts is a phrase I used in the huddle a couple times. I thought we did look out of sorts.

With the freshmen, that's part of the process of growing up and going through things. The sad part is the seniors, they don't get second chances. I said it during the week to the media. When you say that was my bad, it's okay if you're young, but it's not okay if you're old. I do think we were out of sorts.

I don't know why yet. That will be meetings I have with players and trying to figure that out. And again make sure, make sure, make sure, because I know how the media is, they earned the win. That was not a two or four-point game. They kicked our you know what. So they deserved to win, but we did not do the things that we've been doing most of the year. That's disappointing when it gets to tournament time.

So we'll have to regroup and figure it out. Going to have to do a better job coaching them so they don't make the same mistakes.

Q. For the first year players or maybe even the freshmen that are part of this program for the first time, when you hear win or go home, I think it's a lot easier to hear it instead of experience it. Now that you've maybe experienced that in this setting, how do you -- what's the formula in practice this week to make sure the energy gets back not only for the team, but honestly also for the coaches as well for you guys to get ready for what's coming up?

TOM IZZO: Really intelligent question because it would be an easier answer if I thought we practiced poorly. I thought we had great practices. Not good, great. I wouldn't have changed one thing.

So what happened between that? That's my job to figure out. Let me tell you something. Players nowadays are so resilient because it doesn't hit home like it does for coaches, so they'll be resilient. And there's a lot to build on because they've already done it.

I just was disappointed on a big stage with so many people here for Michigan State that we did not give them what they deserved, and that was to play harder. Still miss some of those layups, still miss some of those wide open 3s, that's okay. Those are mistakes again. But throwing the ball away for touchdowns, and I don't even know how many turnovers we ended up with, 12. Make a couple break-aways on that, that's unexcusable. That shouldn't happen.

But freshmen are going to make freshmen mistakes. That's why they're freshmen. There is a process, and the process means that you learn from it and you get better if it matters enough. I think to my freshmen it matters enough.

Q. You talked about playing with desperation. Is there a line between desperation and out of control? And when you see you have every game going on from here is going to be an elimination game, do you think -- are you concerned about the lack of energy, or have you seen -- you've been doing this for a long time. Have you seen teams that can come back from something like this?

TOM IZZO: We haven't been as good defensively, but I told you that's been skewed a little bit. We were pretty good down at Purdue and pretty good at Indiana and actually pretty good at Michigan. Rutgers, we had a 19-point lead, and Coach screwed that up. Maybe the coach has got to do a better job.

I don't look at that. We played 31 games and played with energy most of them. No, no, I'm not going down that rabbit hole. That's ridiculous. It's for some reason on this stage we did not bring it, and the credit goes to UCLA because they did bring it.

You know, when you get beat by 30 and you're Mick Cronin -- I know Mick well. I bet it was hell week there. I give him credit for that. I love that about him. I really do.

Q. I'm wondering about Trey Fort and the game he played and just the building block that might be for him going into the postseason, and maybe some of the other little things that you can use, like Jordan getting some time at point and Kur continuing to just keep shooting. How do you use those going into the next couple weeks?

TOM IZZO: Well, I think, first of all, we've got to start doing a better job defensively. When we do a better job defensively, we get our running game going. If there was a

couple things we did do a decent job of, Coen rebounded better, especially on the offensive end. Cam Ward had three offensive rebounds early. We had 16 offensive rebounds, which is a ton, especially shooting 45 percent. It wasn't like we shot 10. So that was encouraging.

Fast break points wasn't. We didn't do as good a job on the defensive boards. When you do a good job on the defensive boards, you do what Michigan State does, and that's rebound -- defend, rebound, and run, and that running game is a big part of our offense just like it is for some teams.

They're a little different on that, but they do their thing and we do our thing, and they did their thing better than we did our thing. That's the truth.

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