

Season of ups, downs leads Spartans to Sweet 16

by Joe Schad
The Orlando Sentinel

Michigan State coach Tom Izzo prefers not to make excuses. So when his team began this season 14-11 and the criticism began to pour in, he asked his players to remain calm and confident. And why not?

Izzo has been to three Final Fours. Now, after a weekend in Tampa that included routs of Colorado and Florida, Izzo and Michigan State are in the Sweet

16 for the fifth time in six seasons. The seventh-seeded Spartans meet sixth-seeded Maryland tonight in San Antonio in a South Regional semifinal.

"Part of me still can't believe what we just did," Izzo said.

Michigan State began the season ranked No. 9, but finished 18-11 in the regular season and was knocked out by Ohio State in the Big Ten Tournament semifinals.

"People have asked or are wondering, 'What's so different about our team now?'" Izzo said. "Well,

I've been trying to tell people all year that our injuries have really hurt our chemistry and the development of our young players.

"It sounds like an excuse, so people don't want to hear it and I get tired of talking about it, but that's been our reality."

Still, the reality is Michigan State (21-12) will have a difficult time advancing to the Final Four for the fourth time in five seasons because of season-long deficiencies.

Although the Spartans have shot 50 percent

through two tournament games, they're still not a top-flight shooting team, instead relying on rebounding and defense. Although sophomore Alan Anderson has been solid at point guard lately, it's not his natural position. And, overall, the Spartans are an inexperienced group because of the early departures of former prep All-Americans Zach Randolph, Jason Richardson and Marcus Taylor.

"I'm trying to get this team its own identity," Izzo said. "I've talked, and we've lived, so much in the past. Sometimes that's good and sometimes it's not."

Basketball-playing twins face challenges: war, NCAA tournament

by Sarah Hoyer
Capital News Service

March Madness has taken on a whole new meaning for the Moore family twins.

Last week, while one was suiting up to play basketball for Butler University in the NCAA tournament, the other was donning a U.S. Naval Academy uniform prepping for war.

As the United States launched its "shock and awe" campaign against the Iraqis, and the tournament got under way, the Moore family's emotions swung from worry and concern for Mitch and his future deployment, to heart-pounding excitement for Mike and his team's surprising wins that brought the Bulldogs to the Sweet 16, where they'll take on University of Oklahoma tonight.

The 23-year-old identical twins from Fairborn, Ohio, spent their first 18 years together, a lot of it on the basketball court. But now, college seniors far apart, they were never more in each other's thoughts.

Mike was uneasy knowing that Mitch could soon be off to war, and got in touch quickly when the conflict began.

"I was worried and I questioned him about that - but he'll have at least six months of training in Quantico," a Marine base in Virginia, he said.

"What concerns me is his interest in embassy duty. That is scary. He could be easily overrun. And he would be a prime target with no one watching his back," he said.

The earliest Mitch could be deployed is January 2004. He said he feels an "excited anxiousness."

"I think there's apprehension because we know our brother is going to harm's way," Mitch said. "And we are getting anxious to do our part."

Mitch will graduate as a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps in a class of about 1,000 on May 23.

"This is something that I knew could happen . . . and that's why I'm here," he said. "I'm actually looking forward to it. We sat here, we've watched the military for years, and now we want our turn."

Mitch has wanted to serve his country since seventh grade, when he asked a teacher what colleges besides Harvard or Yale - which he couldn't afford - were difficult to get into.

"She told me about the Naval Academy. I did some research and just decided that I'd come here. And then here I was," he said.

"This was an opportunity I couldn't pass up. It's one of the top educations in the nation and is consistently ranked as the hardest to get into," he said, laughing about how he sounded like a talking brochure.

"I've always been drawn to the military. I grew up with it. I realized that the military was something I wanted to be a part of."

The Moores were raised near Wright Patterson Air Force Base outside Dayton, Ohio. The boys' grandfather was in the Korean War. They had great-uncles that flew planes for the Air Force.

Their father, Rick Moore, a civilian engineer at the base, is still a bit baffled at where his son's military interest came from.

"Hopefully, Mitch wouldn't have to go over there. I'm glad in a way that we are going there now, than a year from now," said their father. "But there are a lot of problems that will still need to be resolved, so he could see some action."

Knowing that there's some lag time between his graduation and full-time active duty, his mother, Lisa Moore, was slightly more at ease.

"We weren't tremendously worried; we're really just proud of him, and he is in our prayers," she said. "But I know some of his shipmates will be in harm's way," she said. "We don't ask questions."

Even Mike has been bitten by the military bug. He is considering the Reserves or National Guard. While Mitch's basketball career is over - he was a starting center for the Navy Midshipmen - Mike's is at its most exciting point.

Butler squeaked by Mississippi State 47-46 in the first round of the NCAA tournament in Birmingham, Ala.

Rick and Lisa Moore rushed home from the game to get their daughter, Melissa "Missy", 20, to the airport so she could get back to Cottey College in Nevada, Mo.

They made it just in time to catch the end of Butler's second-round upset over the University of Louisville, 79-71.

Their mother nervously paced the house. "It was so exciting. And it seemed that whenever I was out of the room they played better," she said in amusement.

It was not just exciting, but historical - the last time Butler made it to the Sweet 16 was in 1962.

Because the game was not broadcast in Annapolis, Mitch received a personalized play-by-play.

"I got a call every 10 minutes from my sister and

grandmother," he said. "I was ecstatic. I can't believe they've gotten this far."

Mike sat out his first season at Butler and suffered an ankle injury at the start of his final season. He's played 64 games since becoming a Bulldog.

"He doesn't see much time, and I'm sure it's frustrating, but he has had some good times with it," their father said. "We've had a lot of excitement over the last couple of years."

Mitch and Mike always attended the same schools. They played on the same sports teams. They even got their driver's license on the same day. But when it came time to enroll in college, they chose to go their separate ways.

"This is the first time we have been away from each other and we handled it differently," Mitch said. "I saw it as a chance to grow on my own."

But some things never change.

"I'm five minutes older and he's two inches taller," Mitch said.

"No, no, he's five minutes older and I'm one inch taller," Mike retorted. "And I'm the better looking one."

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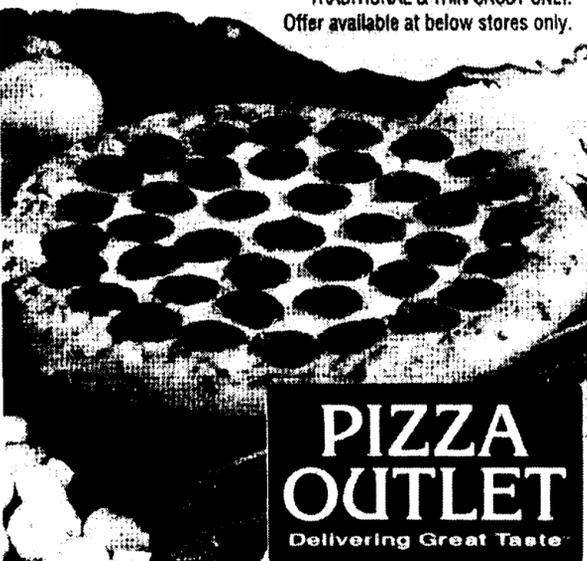
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