

# MICHIGAN STATE SPARTANS



POSTSEASON PREDICTION

**SWEET 16**

**T**om Izzo has built Michigan State to the point where last year's run to the Elite Eight after a Big Ten Tournament championship was considered to be an unsatisfying campaign.

Izzo wants to feel good about last year's injury-strained accomplishments but wonders if his second national title might have been in store if former point guard Keith Appling hadn't wrecked his wrist and if former power forward Adreian Payne hadn't been weighed down by mononucleosis. Now, the Spartans will need paybacks from the basketball gods in the health category and rapid development from freshmen if they are going to contend for a conference title.

"I like the direction we're heading right now," Izzo says. "I think that we could be really good (this) year and then really, really good down the road."



Branden Dawson

ing foul trouble — always a terrible conflict of interest in the Izzo program. That could make it difficult for Michigan State to lead the Big Ten in defensive field goal percentage for a second straight year.

**BACKCOURT** Denzel Valentine is a dazzling passer as a point/wing, and a respectable shooter. He has All-Big Ten potential and a triple-double skill set. Valentine's vocal leadership is providing a fresh vibe. He can also provide spot duty at the 4 if necessary.

Combo guard Travis Trice has thickened his once-scrawny body and hopes to have a full, healthy season. He's a streak shooter who is ready to take his role to 30 minutes per game, mostly at the point. Trice is being given the keys to the offense for the first time and could emerge as one of the surprise players in the Big Ten.

Alvin Ellis III can play defense, run the floor and hit the open jumper, making him a rangy, useful role player.

Cleveland State transfer Bryn Forbes, a deep shooter, was granted immediate eligibility and gives Michigan State's depth and offensive firepower a substantial boost.

**FINAL ANALYSIS** Leadership is on an upswing with Valentine and Trice. With six departed players and a thinned-out roster, this energetic mix of personalities is similar to the surprising 2012 group that won the Big Ten and advanced to the Sweet 16 with Draymond Green. But the conference is stronger at the top this year than in 2012.

**HEAD COACH:** Tom Izzo

**2013-14 RECORD (BIG TEN):** 29-9 (12-6)

**2013-14 POSTSEASON:** NCAA: Defeated Delaware 93-78, defeated Harvard 80-73, defeated Virginia 61-59, lost to Connecticut 60-54 in the Elite Eight

**KEY LOSSES:**

G Keith Appling (11.2 ppg, 4.5 apg)  
G Gary Harris (16.7 ppg, 4.0 rpg)  
F Adreian Payne (16.4 ppg, 7.3 rpg)

2013-14 STATLINE

	MSU	Big Ten Rank
Scoring offense	75.5	2
Points per possession	1.13	4
Scoring defense	65.6	7
Points allowed per poss.	0.98	12
FG%	.474	2
FT%	.707	9

**TRACKING THE SPARTANS**

	'10	'11	'12	'13	'14
Postseason	Final Four	One & Done	Sweet 16	Sweet 16	Elite 8
Big Ten Record	14-4	9-9	13-5	13-5	12-6

**FRONTCOURT** The Branden Dawson who averaged 17.5 points during a six-game postseason hot streak is the Dawson that Michigan State desperately needs. Dawson has honed his perimeter shooting skills to the point of becoming capable of playing the 3. But Michigan State will need him to attack opponents as a mismatch 4, as he did last March when he was Big Ten Tournament MOP.

Dawson has been a transition and garbage scorer in the past. But his improved jump shot, coupled with solid ball-handling skills and explosive finishing ability, may allow him to take his game to the next level. It's rare to find a senior with Dawson's raw talent. Injuries have kept him in the college ranks. His focus and effort have fluctuated in the past. Now he is driven to have the type of senior year Payne enjoyed last season. When properly charged, Dawson is one of the most dynamic players in the conference. However, with Payne and Gary Harris gone to the NBA, Dawson will experience defenses designed to contain him for the first time in his college career.

Junior center Matt Costello has added a layer of muscle and appears ready to blossom after a pair of seasons diminished by injury and illness. He has become a quality face-up shooter during the off-season, but his back-to-the-basket skills are average. He is strong enough to command respect on defense and the glass. He has been in the shadow of Payne and former Spartan Derrick Nix for two years. Now Michigan State needs Costello to emerge as a plus pivot, but that might be a year away from coming to fruition.

Interior depth is a concern. Gavin Schilling is a stock-rising banger off the bench. Muscular freshman Marvin Clark will need to contribute due to Izzo's dismissal of stretch-4 Kenny Kaminski in August.

The depth issues mean Costello will need to play hard while avoid-

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Michigan State is gunning for its 18th straight NCAA Tournament appearance, a figure that would tie Indiana (1986-2003) for the longest streak in Big Ten history.

**2014-15 ROSTER**

#	Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Cl.	Hometown	G/GS	MPG	PPG	RPG	APG	FG%	FT%	3FG%
13	Trevor Bohnhoff	F	6-7	225	Jr.	Saginaw, MI	8/0	1.6	0.5	0.5	0.0	50.0	50.0	0.0
10	Matt Costello	C	6-9	245	Jr.	Linwood, MI	34/20	14.7	4.0	3.3	0.8	59.8	66.0	0.0
22	Branden Dawson	G/F	6-6	225	Sr.	Gary, IN	28/23	28.3	11.2	8.3	1.6	61.3	65.6	0.0
3	Alvin Ellis III	G	6-4	205	So.	Matteson, IL	36/1	7.9	1.9	0.6	0.4	48.0	59.1	46.2
34	Gavin Schilling	F	6-9	240	So.	Chicago, IL	37/1	6.4	1.4	1.6	0.2	55.3	52.4	0.0
20	Travis Trice	G	6-0	170	Sr.	Huber Heights, OH	36/8	22.3	7.3	1.6	2.3	42.0	81.8	43.4
45	Denzel Valentine	G	6-5	220	Jr.	Lansing, MI	38/33	29.4	8.0	6.0	3.8	40.8	67.7	37.7
15	Keenan Wetzell	G	6-4	215	Sr.	Monroe, MI	12/0	1.8	0.8	0.3	0.1	44.4	0.0	33.3
41	Colby Wollenman	F	6-7	235	Jr.	Big Horn, WY	12/0	2.1	0.4	0.2	0.0	50.0	60.0	0.0

**NEWCOMERS**

2	Javon Bess	F	6-5	205	Fr.	Columbus, OH/Gahanna Lincoln
0	Marvin Clark	F	6-6	225	Fr.	Kansas City, MO/Sunrise Christian (KS) Academy
5	Bryn Forbes	G	6-3	175	Jr.	Lansing, MI/Transfer from Cleveland State
25	Kenny Goins	F	6-6	215	Fr.	Troy, MI/Warren Mott
11	Lourawls Nairn Jr.	G	5-10	170	Fr.	Nassau, Bahamas/Sunrise Christian (KS) Academy

Lourawls Nairn is the fastest point guard Tom Izzo has ever signed. He struggles with his jump shot and finishing at the rim. Marvin Clark has a nice shooting touch and a strong build but must play harder in the medium-range game. Javon Bess is an Izzo-style blue-collar battler at the wing, Bryn Forbes was second-team All-Horizon League at Cleveland State, averaging 15.6 points while shooting 42 percent from deep.