

# MICHIGAN STATE SPARTANS

POSTSEASON PREDICTION

SWEET

16



One year after proving yet again that a Tom Izzo team should never be counted out in March, Michigan State will be back in the hunt to cut down more nets this season.

The Spartans will not be the favorites to win the Big Ten but should be watched closely for clues that they might be on the march for a potential eighth trip to the Final Four under Izzo.

"I think we have a chance to be better than last year, talent-wise," Izzo says, "I don't know about team-wise. That'll be my job to get them there."

Despite the losses of Travis Trice and Brandon Dawson, the Spartans will be deeper, more athletic and a better shooting team than last year's squad, which advanced to the Final Four before losing to Duke.

Izzo will seek continued excellence in team chemistry and renewed defensive toughness. These are difficult areas to gauge, but Izzo swears by them — and the Spartans will eventually be strong in those categories again.

**FRONTCOURT** Matt Costello and Gavin Schilling formed a functional tag team at the center position a year ago and are back as an improving asset. Costello has good strength and skill on the block at both ends, and he can nail the open face-up jumper. He has taken his leadership skills up a level and is bent on helping Izzo notch his second national title. The toughness and determination Costello showed on defense and the glass in a must-win situation against Purdue last year — while Dawson was out with an injury — revealed what kind of performer Costello can be on a regular basis.

Schilling is the most athletic big man Izzo has ever had, and he needs to put it to better use as a finisher around the rim. Schilling must improve his dependability, especially on the glass.

"I need to get more out of Costello and Schilling in order for this team to take a big jump," Izzo says.

Javon Bess is quietly developing behind the scenes as an impact player. He would have been a part-time starter for last year's team were it not for a maddening foot injury. Now healthy, he's strong, skilled and crafty, with ability to help at either forward position.

Incoming McDonald's All-American Deyonta Davis is a big, bouncy athlete with length and pure scoring ability. He adapted quickly to program expectations during his first summer in East Lansing.

Marvin Clark is the strongest guy on the team and a sweet shooter from deep. He is a quality offensive rebounder but needs to prove himself on defense.

**BACKCOURT** Denzel Valentine is an Izzo-molded senior, shooter, rebounder, leader, passer and triple-double threat. He performed well for the Pan-Am Games team in July. The All-America candidate's only weakness might be that he isn't harsh enough



DENZEL VALENTINE

on his teammates, but his will to lead them back to the Final Four is immense.

West Virginia transfer Eron Harris can create his own shot, drill it from long range and finish at the rim with sky-walking hops. He is an instant All-Big Ten candidate.

Bryn Forbes, perhaps the best shooter of the Izzo era, packed on a much-needed layer of muscle. Izzo called him the team's MVP of the summer.

Fast and strong, Lourawls "TumTum" Nairn has added a dependable jumper to his quality repertoire at point guard. His ability to move the ball to open teammates

on-time and on-target will enhance the team's offensive productivity. Nairn is Izzo's next great leader.

Alvin Ellis has occasionally provided a surprising scoring lift, including last year's 16-point binge at Indiana. His wavering level of commitment has bothered Izzo.

**FINAL ANALYSIS** Locker room chemistry will remain a strength for the Spartans, but it may take awhile to establish on-court cohesion with a talent like Harris looking to find his niche within an established group of skilled veterans. Overall, that's not a bad problem to have, especially with the agreeable personalities of Valentine, Costello and Nairn embracing him.

MSU will be able to run, score and deliver highlight-reel moments, but Izzo is more concerned about harnessing a championship level of defense and rebounding.

Once he gets it, this team will be a threat to win conference tournament and NCAA Regional championships — again.

**BIG TEN PREDICTION: 2**

## AT A GLANCE

**HEAD COACH:** Tom Izzo

**2014-2015 RECORD (Big Ten):** 27-12 (12-6)

**2014-2015 POSTSEASON:** NCAA: Lost to Duke 81-61 in the Final Four

**KEY LOSSES:**

F Brandon Dawson (11.9 ppg, 9.1 rpg, 1.7 bpg)

G Travis Trice (15.3 ppg, 3.2 rpg, 5.1 apg)

## 2014-15 STATLINE

	MSU	Big Ten Rank
Scoring offense	71.1	5
Points per possession	1.10	4
Scoring defense	63.6	T6
Points allowed per poss.	0.98	T7
FG%	46.5	3
3FG%	38.5	2
FT%	63.2	14
Possessions per game	63.2	11

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Michigan State became the fourth program, joining North Carolina, UCLA and Duke, to appear in seven Final Fours in any 17-year span.

## TRACKING THE SPARTANS

	'11	'12	'13	'14	'15
Postseason	One & Done	Sweet 16	Sweet 16	Elite 8	Final Four
Big Ten Record	9-9	13-5	13-5	12-6	12-6

## MICHIGAN STATE 2015-16 ROSTER

#	Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Cl.	Hometown	G/GS	MPG	PPG	RPG	APG	FG%	FT%	3FG%
2	Javon Bess	G	6-5	215	So.	Columbus, OH	12/3	12.3	2.7	2.9	1.0	47.8	42.9	50.0
13	Trevor Bohnhoff	F	6-7	225	Sr.	Saginaw, MI	13/0	1.8	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.0	50.0	0.0
0	Marvin Clark Jr.	F	6-6	230	So.	Kansas City, MO	39/7	11.2	4.5	2.2	0.3	50.4	67.5	33.9
10	Matt Costello	F	6-9	245	Sr.	Linwood, MI	39/6	20.4	7.0	5.2	0.7	57.9	67.1	0.0
3	Alvin Ellis III	G	6-4	210	Jr.	Matteson, IL	32/1	8.6	1.7	0.7	0.6	32.1	45.5	24.0
5	Bryn Forbes	G	6-3	180	Sr.	Lansing, MI	39/24	26.2	8.5	1.4	1.0	44.7	80.8	42.7
11	Lourawls Nairn Jr.	G	5-10	170	So.	Nassau, Bahamas	39/17	19.4	2.2	1.6	2.4	31.8	54.2	30.0
34	Gavin Schilling	F	6-9	240	Jr.	Chicago, IL	39/33	16.9	5.1	3.8	0.4	58.2	47.9	0.0
45	Denzel Valentine	G	6-5	220	Sr.	Lansing, MI	39/39	33.2	14.5	6.3	4.3	44.3	82.6	41.6
41	Colby Wollenman	F	6-7	230	Sr.	Big Horn, WY	29/0	7.6	1.2	1.7	0.2	60.7	22.2	0.0

## NEWCOMERS

Kyle Ahrens	G	6-5	195	Fr.	Versailles, OH/Versailles
Deyonta Davis	F/C	6-10	215	Fr.	Muskegon, MI/Muskegon
25 Kenny Goins	F	6-6	215	Fr.	Troy, MI/Redshirt 2014-15
14 Eron Harris	G	6-3	180	Jr.	Indianapolis, IN/Transfer from West Virginia
Matt McQuaid	G	6-5	180	Fr.	Duncanville, TX/Duncanville
30 Matt Van Dyk	F	6-5	205	Jr.	Imlay City, MI/St. Clair County Community College

Eron Harris will provide go-to scoring ability as one of the more talented guards in the Big Ten. Deyonta Davis compares favorably to former first-round pick Adreian Payne. Matt McQuaid impressed Tom Izzo in the offseason with athleticism, long-range shooting and IQ. Kyle Ahrens is tough and skilled but must overcome nagging injuries. Springy walk-on Kenny Goins could be a contributor someday.