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Inconsistencies plague MSU men's basketball in second round loss to No. 1 North Carolina

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Michigan State graduate guard No. 2 Tyson Walker tears up after round two of March Madness in Charlotte, North Carolina on March 23, 2024. The Spartans fell to the No. 1 seeded University of North Carolina and remain winless all-time against the Tar Heels during March Madness.

— Photo by [Brendan Mullin](#) | The State News

Michigan State men's basketball started the season as the No. 4 ranked team in the country, but it ended the season far from it.

The 2023-2024 Michigan State Spartans were inconsistent—not only from game to game but from minute to minute. Saturday night was no different.

There were multiple points throughout the season where the Spartans showed bursts of that team everyone believed in during the preseason—like dominating Baylor at Little Caesars Arena, battling Purdue in West Lafayette and even going up 12 points early against No. 1 seed North Carolina in the second round of the NCAA Tournament.

Despite these promising glimpses of something great coming out of East Lansing, that's all they were: glimpses.

The opening minutes of Michigan State's game against the Tar Heels looked like the start of a late tournament run people have started to expect out of head coach Tom Izzo. UNC struck first, but MSU kept the ball moving and nabbed a 26-14 lead with 9:37 left in the first half.

"I think we definitely thought we could definitely make a run in a tournament in general," senior guard [A.J. Hoggard](#) said after the game. "Just being up, especially being in this environment where it's a lot of (UNC fans), they're close to home. And, just starting off the way we did, and doing the things we did with the way we've been playing last couple weeks, we definitely thought we had a chance ...we just didn't finish how we thought we were going to."



Michigan State sophomore guard No. 5 Tre Holloman looks to receive a pass during round two of March Madness in Charlotte, North Carolina, on March 23, 2024. The Spartans fell to the No. 1 seeded University of North Carolina 85-69.

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The last eight minutes of the first half were a disaster for the Spartans. North Carolina started hitting all of its shots and Michigan State could not get anything to fall. After going down 12, the Tar Heels closed the half on a 26-5 run; the Tar Heels ended the half up 40-31.

Michigan State needed to come out of the half swinging, and the team did off the backs of strong performances from graduate student guard Tyson Walker and forward Malik Hall. The two combined for 41 points and 11 rebounds and they truly fought to extend their final season as Spartans.

The Spartans got within two points, but then all of a sudden, the momentum stopped again and North Carolina pulled away.

"I think we played well," Walker said. "Just didn't execute, and they did. They made big plays, we didn't. For the underclassmen, it'll be something for them to learn. Just how the game goes, how it can have big stakes. You know, the game is fragile."

Michigan State turned the ball over 11 times, and the team's inability to handle the ball at times led to huge ups and downs during the matchup. MSU went from playing elite basketball, to the team passing the ball to invisible players.

Unfortunately for the Spartans, veteran point guard A.J. Hoggard was not having his best game. He went 1-10 from the floor and turned the ball over three times. He played significantly better on Thursday against Mississippi State, and players have bad days, but it's hard when the bad day comes in a win-or-go-home situation.



Michigan State head coach Tom Izzo watches his team play during round two of March Madness in Charlotte, North Carolina on March 23, 2024. The Spartans fell to the No. 1 seeded University of North Carolina and remain winless all-time against the Tar Heels during March Madness.

— Photo by Brendan Mullin | The State News

The game ultimately got away from MSU, and the Spartans fell to UNC 85-69.

"It's frustrating because I kept saying to myself, 'I know this team has enough,'" Izzo said following the loss. "And then, you know, I'll leave today believing I'm right. I really think we had enough that we could have made a little run. I really do ... Somehow I got to do a better job. I got to figure that out. And I

promise you, between now and October, I will."