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Defend, rebound, run: MSU men's basketball rediscovers identity in 88-64 beatdown of No. 6 Baylor

[Bella Johnson](#)

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The Spartans celebrate their victory against Baylor University at the Little Caesar's Arena on Dec. 16, 2023. This is MSU's first victory over a ranked opponent after starting the season ranked no. 4.

— Photo by [Donté Smith](#) | The State News

The beginning of the Michigan State men's basketball season had a lot of fans wondering what exactly happened to the preseason No. 4 ranked team in the country. Coming into Saturday afternoon's matchup against No. 6 Baylor, the Spartans were 4-5 and had yet to log a banner win.

In a press conference Thursday, head coach Tom Izzo reflected on the start of the season and said the team needed to get back the identity they had since Izzo took the helm 28 years ago: defend, rebound and run.

Michigan State's Saturday afternoon [88-64 beatdown of Baylor](#) was a near-textbook performance of Izzo's mantra.

“We did something we haven't been doing,” Izzo said. “We gotta get back to who we are, you know, and we were so worried about our shooting, and I probably did a poor job of talking about it ... For 29 years, we've defended rebounding ran, and that's what you got to do. And if your running game starts going in, you're defending better, and some good things happen offensively.”



In the matchup against Baylor, Michigan State logged 29 points off of 21 turnovers. Graduate student guard [Tyson Walker](#) and senior guard [A.J. Hoggard](#) headlined the Spartans defensive efforts combining for a total of eight steals of the team’s 15 total.

Following the game, Hoggard said Saturday afternoon’s battle was the most complete game they have played all season and probably one of the best games he’s played in his career.

“We got back to having fun,” Hoggard said. “That was the biggest part of us coming out here and making this statement — was just getting back to having fun ... The things that we haven't done as well this year, we did before. We had to get back to being us, and I think we did a good job of getting back to being us tonight.”

The Spartans were having fun this Saturday; the energy at Little Caesars Arena was palpable from both the players and the crowd.

There is no doubt that the game against the Bears was the best 40 minutes of basketball the Spartans have strung together in a while, and they will try to build on that momentum heading into a home matchup against Oakland Monday night at 7 p.m.

“We had to get back and show the world that we're still that Michigan State team,” Hoggard said. “And we had to find a way to play Michigan State basketball and have our swagger at the same time.”

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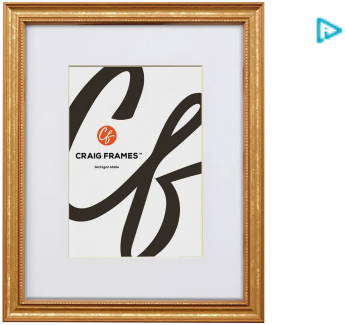


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