

## the game

2009 NCAA  
TOURNAMENT

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## THE WILD CARD

Raymar Morgan's quality of play has been up and down this season. Now, he's ready to prove himself.



Junior forward Raymar Morgan drives around Ohio State guard William Buford during the Spartans' game on Jan. 6 at Breslin Center.

PHOTOS BY KATIE RAUSCH/THE STATE NEWS

By Alex Altman  
THE STATE NEWS

Step right up and take your shots at Raymar Morgan. You won't be the first. Call him too sensitive — it's not like the junior forward hasn't heard that one before. Compare his up-and-down play to the stock market, a jab taken at him by a TV commentator earlier this year. Even snicker that he has invented "new ways to travel," a quip authored by a Sporting News reporter before the season even started. Say whatever you want — just don't expect Morgan to listen to you.

"You really can't get caught up in that stuff," said Morgan, a 6-foot-8 forward from Canton, Ohio. "You've just got to take it as constructive criticism and just keep moving on and playing hard."

Unlike some players who feed off the venom spewed by their critics, Morgan

doesn't dignify his naysayers with so much as a shrug. He's never felt the need to defend himself to outsiders, not even when their opinions are patently unfair.

So when Morgan heard people call him an underachiever

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Junior forward Raymar Morgan puts the ball up for three during the second half of a Dec. 27 game against Oakland at The Palace of Auburn Hills. Morgan pulled down nine rebounds and scored eight points during the Spartans' 82-66 victory over the Golden Grizzlies.

To see a photo gallery from the Metrodome in Minneapolis, visit [www.stateneews.com/multimedia](http://www.stateneews.com/multimedia).

## MEN'S BASKETBALL

## Izzo, Morgan say team is practicing well, ready for tourney

By Cash Kruth  
THE STATE NEWS

Minneapolis — MSU head coach Tom Izzo couldn't help but laugh when told of what Raymar Morgan said to the media Thursday afternoon at the Metrodome.

Morgan, a junior forward on the MSU men's basketball team, said the Spartans have played exceptionally well during their last two practices.

"That's a great line — over the last two practices — you're supposed to say the last two weeks," Izzo said with a smile. "But I think everybody's aware with the kind of things we've been through

and we have had a couple of good practices... Even though it's a crazy statement, I have to agree with him."

MSU, the No. 2 seed in the NCAA Tournament's Midwest Region at 26-6 overall, plays 15-seeded Robert Morris (24-10) at approximately 9:30 p.m. Friday.

Even though the Spartans have notoriously struggled throughout the season with their inconsistency, the players' confidence in their ability and hope for a deep run remains an important part of their motivation and focus for this weekend.

That said, those two qualities are part of every team's psyche

at this point, and senior guard Travis Walton said March is a new beginning for not just the Spartans, but everyone.

"It's a new season whenever you come into the tournament, no matter who you're playing and what their seeds are in the tournament you're excited for it because you come in here 0-0," Walton said.

"Especially the smaller teams. They won their conference so they have their heads up."

## AAU reunion

When Morgan takes the court tonight, he'll see a familiar face on the other bench. Jimmy Langhurs, a 5-foot-11 guard for Robert Mor-

ris, was a teammate of Morgan's on an Amateur Athletic Union, or AAU, team, the King James Shooting Stars.

Morgan said the two have communicated via text message for the past couple of days, "talking a little trash, but it's all in good fun."

MSU's third-leading scorer had the utmost respect for Langhurs, calling him a leader, great shooter, great ball handler and smart player.

Despite that praise, when asked who was the better player for the Shooting Stars, Morgan responded quickly.

"I gotta go with me," Morgan said with a laugh. "I ain't going down on myself, it was me."



JASON CHIOU/THE STATE NEWS

Junior forward Raymar Morgan, front, and sophomore guard Kalin Lucas laugh when speaking about playful text messages between he and Robert Morris guard Jimmy Langhurs.