

SPORTS

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Monday



NICK DENTAMARO/THE STATE NEWS

VICTORY
Kalin Lucas (pictured) and the Spartans are headed to the Final Four. For complete coverage, visit stateneews.com.

SEASON'S FINISH ISN'T SWEET



NICHOLE HORNOR/THE STATE NEWS

Junior forward Aisha Jefferson falls to the floor after MSU lost to Iowa State in the NCAA Tournament Sweet 16 game. The Spartans lost 69-68.

Spartans surrender 7 point lead in final 69 seconds as Cyclones storm way to Elite Eight

"It felt like we were doing a pretty good job of defending them. There were some tough calls and we had to sit some kids."

Suzy Merchant,
MSU head coach

By Joseph Terry
THE STATE NEWS

Berkeley, Calif. — One minute away from the Elite Eight, the MSU women's basketball team saw its dreams snatched from its grip, as Iowa State walked out of Haas Pavilion victorious 69-68 on Saturday in a Berkeley Regional semifinal game. The Spartans held a seven-point lead with 1:27 to play after junior forward Aisha Jefferson spun through the lane and hit a shot to give the Spartans a 68-61 advantage. But a flurry of Iowa State 3-pointers, including one that banked off the glass, sent MSU packing as the Cyclones went on an 8-0 run over the final 69 seconds of the game.

"I was coaching a long time and that was one of the best games I've ever been a part of," Iowa State head

coach Bill Fennelly said. "Michigan State is amazing. Suzy (Merchant) does such a great job. That was a great college game. That is what this game is about and that's what the Sweet 16 is supposed to be about."

Last-second attempts at the basket by Jefferson and redshirt freshman forward Lykendria Johnson were met with a lot of contact but went to the wayside as the Cyclones stormed the court in victory.

The Spartans started the game off fast, quickly jumping to a 7-0 lead before the Cyclones had a chance to respond. MSU would spread the lead to nine before Iowa State began to make a comeback in the first half. "Early in the game we were stunned," Fennelly said. "(MSU) came out and just popped us in the mouth and we just recoiled."

Iowa State took back the lead by hitting its shots from deep, something that ultimately won the Cyclones the game. Iowa State's 10 3-pointers in the game are the most MSU has given up in a single game.

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Women's basketball

JOEY NOWAK

Team has lots to look forward to next season



Berkeley, Calif. — As the buzzer sounded to end the MSU women's basketball team's season Saturday night, the players hung their heads.

Having craned their necks from the bench and the floor to see if redshirt junior forward Aisha Jefferson or redshirt freshman forward Lykendria Johnson's last-ditch efforts to win the game would fall, they buried their heads in their hands and uniforms.

For them, it was a tough pill to swallow and not something they'll likely get over today, tomorrow or even in the weeks to come. That's to be expected.

But soon they should look up. The sun is shining on next season. Rarely can a team with the postseason success the Spartans had this year look forward to the next campaign and say there's no reason not to take it a step further. But that is the case for the Spartans.

They were within a point — a less-than-two-minute stretch — from desperately advancing to the Elite Eight. Afterward, players and coaches were still hung up on Saturday's loss and couldn't muster the thought to so quickly forget about this year's end and look ahead to next year.

"I'm really disappointed in the outcome," MSU head coach Suzy Merchant said. "It's hard for me to do that right now. Certainly you hope it drives kids to be a little bit tougher, work a little bit harder."

It is a team that grew exponentially as the year went on. Picked to finish third in the preseason Big Ten polls, they took over first place for a short time and earned the No. 2 seed in the Big Ten Tournament.

They overcame point guard problems — losing sophomore Brittney Thomas to an ACL injury and being sidled with leadership and turnover issues — to earn two upset wins in the NCAA Tournament before falling just short of a third.

"We use everything we've been through as a learning experience," Jefferson said. "We improved a lot from the beginning to the end, and we had ups and downs and still believed in ourselves when nobody else did. Not a lot of people thought we would have come this far."

And there's much more to come. "They'll only lose redshirt senior guard Mia Johnson — not to be overlooked, though, as Johnson was the team's floor and emotional leader and most consistent."

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MEN'S BASKETBALL

Suton named Midwest Region MOP

By Alex Altman
THE STATE NEWS

Indianapolis — About a decade ago, Goran Suton hadn't even heard of the Final Four.

Next weekend, the senior center will have a chance to experience it. And because of him, so will his teammates. Suton finished with 19 points and 10 rebounds Sunday, leading the MSU men's basketball team past No. 1-seed Louisville 64-52 in the Midwest Regional final. Suton was named the region's Most Outstanding Player. "You have to believe in yourself," Suton said. "The whole time I told myself, I just got to

play. I don't worry about how many points I'm gonna score when I'm in the locker room, I just play."

If Suton did keep track of how many points he scored, he probably would have lost count early. Suton accounted for more than half of his team's points in the first half, scoring 17 points on 7-of-10 shooting, including 3-of-3 from 3-point range.

"I was open, I didn't realize how open I was," Suton said. "Once I got loose, I noticed I had open shots and just started.

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Men's basketball

CASH KRUTH

MSU overcomes long odds to reach Detroit



Indianapolis — This wasn't what was supposed to happen. At least, that's what they said.

And by "they," I mean everyone.

The MSU men's basketball team can't shoot. It doesn't have a go-to player. The Spartans have trouble winning on the road. (Even though they're 9-1 on the road and now 9-3 at neutral sites. I'm still trying to figure that one out.) They can't play fast because they play in the slow Big Ten. Heck, even their own coach labeled them "fragile" throughout the year.

Combine all that with the fact that the Spartans were playing Louisville, the Big East regular-season champions. And the Big East Tournament champions. Oh, and yes, the No. 1 overall seed in the NCAA Tournament.

They were toast before they even stepped on the court. At least they were supposed to be.

Before the game, senior guard Travis Walton said he overheard some of the Louisville players talking about the victory parade and what they were going to wear to it.

After the game, Walton was wearing a Final Four shirt with a piece of the Lucas Oil Stadium net tied around a Final Four hat.

The Louisville players were wearing tears — and they weren't tears of joy. "You can't do that to a good team," Walton said on the court after MSU's 64-52 win. "They're a good basketball team and we're a good basketball team. They have a good coach and we have a good coach."

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