

## the game

## Men's basketball vs. Connecticut

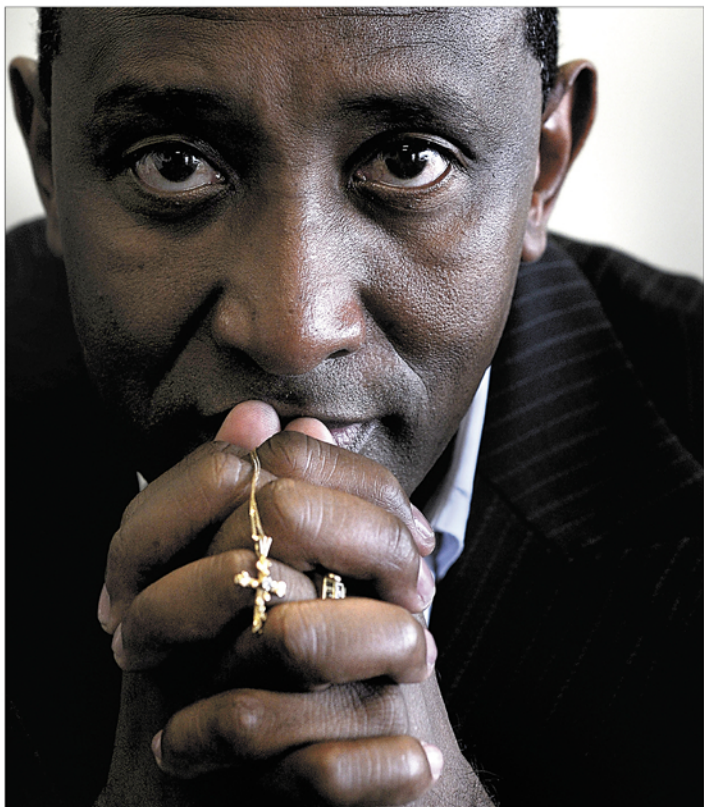
Tipoff at 6:07 p.m. Saturday

## Follow the game

TV CBS  
Radio WMMQ  
(94.9-FM) or  
WJIM (1240-AM)**Players to watch** MSU — Senior center Goran Suton is averaging 14.3 points and 11.5 rebounds a game in the NCAA Tournament. **Connecticut** — 7-foot-5 center Hasheem Thabeet is averaging 11.5 points, 11.3 rebounds and two blocks a game in the NCAA Tournament.

## In the paint

Connecticut has never lost in the Final Four. They are 4-0 all time, with the 1999 and 2004 National Championships

DRIVEN BY *faith*

**Pastor Jesse Brown** of the Rivers of Life Church, 2495 N. Cedar St., in Lansing, has been praying with the men's basketball team since they lost in the Big Ten Tournament. He said he knows the team can win if they pray, focus and start talking about winning and not about losing. He knows they're up against a team with a higher ranking, but he said nothing is impossible and asked the team to think about the story of David and Goliath.

JEANA-DE ALLEN/THE STATE NEWS

Men's basketball team credits Pastor Jesse Brown for renewed sense of faith, turnaround in postseason

By Cash Kruth  
THE STATE NEWS

During his sophomore year, Travis Walton was sitting at a barbershop when he overheard a man talking about God. "Do you really believe that?" Walton asked the stranger. He replied that he did. The man was Jesse Brown, a pastor at Rivers of Life Church, 2495 N. Cedar St., in Lansing. His message struck Walton, now a senior guard on the MSU men's basketball team. Interested and intrigued by Brown and his beliefs, Walton began going to Rivers of Life regularly — although only after his grandmother met and approved of Brown.

As the relationship between the two started to grow, Walton began bringing his teammates to church. He liked Brown so much that he brought Chris Allen, Kalin Lucas and Durrell Summers to Rivers of Life on their recruiting visits to East Lansing.

Two years after their first meeting, Walton — who on Saturday will live his dream of playing in the Final Four — calls Brown "the guy who is responsible for (the team's) turnaround."  
"He turned this team around, as far as with the spirit and telling us how to be emotionally," Walton said. "What he did for this team can't even be put into words."

## Lost in the dark

The Spartans were reeling March 14, the day they lost to Ohio State in the Big Ten Tournament. Not only did they lose out on a chance to potentially earn a No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament, but the whole season had simply been a mess.

MSU had dealt with a preseason knee surgery on freshman forward Delvon Roe, a player who head coach Tom Izzo admitted they were not a top 10 team without.

Senior center Goran Suton had knee surgery in November. Without Suton, North Carolina dismantled the Spartans by 35 points at Ford Field in front of a national television audience.

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## FINAL FOUR

## Spartans prepare for Connecticut, Hasheem Thabeet

By Cash Kruth  
THE STATE NEWS

Detroit — Senior guard Travis Walton said the MSU men's basketball team is going to go inside against Connecticut and its 7-foot-3 center Hasheem Thabeet.

Sophomore guard Kalin Lucas, however, said the Spartans can't go to the basket because of the risk of getting blocked by Thabeet.

The indecision remains on track of what head coach Tom Izzo said earlier this week.

"I can't sit here and tell you I know how I counter him because I just started watching a lot of film," Izzo said

Wednesday in a teleconference. "I watched Connecticut play a lot this year. But when you watch him as a fan, you don't watch him the same way you do as a coach or an opponent. I'm trying to look at some teams that are playing smaller guys on him. ... I can't say we'll even know until we get there."

The Spartans (30-6) better decide on a game plan soon, as they are gearing up for their national semifinal game against UConn (31-4) at 6:07 p.m. Saturday at Ford Field.

While Thabeet is the main concern, four players for the Huskies — guards A.J. Price and Kemba Walker, forwards Stanley Robinson and Jeff

Adrien — are scoring in double-digits in the NCAA Tournament, along with Thabeet.

Adrien and Thabeet also are averaging double-doubles. The surprise has been Robinson, who missed eight games during the fall semester after being suspended by UConn head coach Jim Calhoun.

"He's a 6-foot-9 athlete who jumps out of the gym and is long," MSU junior forward Raymar Morgan said. "He's a rebounding machine and goes to the boards hard."

Izzo called Robinson an X-factor for the Huskies, but another one may be Walker. The freshman guard also has averaged 12.25 points a game

while coming off the bench in all four postseason games.

While Morgan will guard Robinson starting out, Walton will once again take the opponent's leading scorer in Price (14.7 ppg through the season). Walton said the 6-foot-2 Price is a "big-time" player who demands the ball when he feels he needs to take over.

As for Thabeet, add MSU senior center Goran Suton to the list of people who have an idea how to play against him.

"As far as offensively, you have to try to pull him away from the basket and make him work," Suton said. "Run ball screens and pull him away, get your mid-range (game) going."



**MSU head coach Tom Izzo** talks with sophomore guard **Kalin Lucas** during the first half of last Sunday's game against Louisville at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.

NICK DENTAMARO/THE STATE NEWS