

the game

LOOKING BACK

With the MSU men's basketball team's season over, reporters Alex Altman and Cash Kruth take a look at some of their favorite moments and top players.

Most Outstanding Player

Kalin Lucas — After an underwhelming first month of the season, sophomore guard Kalin Lucas emerged as MSU's best player right in time for the Big Ten regular season. The driver of MSU's potent fast-break attack, Lucas averaged a team-high 14.8 points and 4.6 assists per game for the Spartans, earning Big Ten Player of the Year honors in the process. Lucas was the player whom the Spartans entrusted with making big shots in crunch time. He made countless clutch free throws when the game was hanging in the balance, especially during the NCAA Tournament, when he helped stave off last-ditch efforts by Southern Cal, Kansas, and Connecticut. Additionally, Lucas was a source of consistency for a team that was hampered by injuries to several key players, including starting upperclassmen Goran Suton and Raymar Morgan.

Most Valuable Player

Travis Walton — The three-year captain might rank as the seventh or eighth best player on the team when it comes to skill, but take Walton and his 5.1 points per game off the Spartan team and a serious argument can be made that they never would have made it to the national championship game. Walton continued his lockdown defense this season, constantly shutting down opponents' best scorers. He also finally got his just due when he was named the Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year. Known for his toughness, defense and incredible leadership skills, Walton is the perfect example of how a player's impact cannot always be measured by a box score.

Most Improved Player

Draymond Green — Coming into this season, Green looked to be a surefire redshirt for the 2008-09 season because of an ankle injury in high school that led him to gain a significant amount of weight. Yet during the summer Green lost about 30 pounds, getting down to 235 before the start of the season. With his basketball IQ never in question, Green played a decent amount during the regular season, before becoming one of the key guys off the bench in the postseason. He was on the floor in the closing minutes of the Big Ten Tournament, and averaged 8.5 points and 5.3 per game in 21.5 minutes during the NCAA Tournament.



Sophomore guard Kalin Lucas dunks the basketball during the game against Kansas on March 27 at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis that advanced the Spartans to the Elite Eight.

PHOTOS BY NICK DENTAMARO/THE STATE NEWS



Senior guard Travis Walton attempts to block Louisville guard Andre McGee on March 29.

Best Individual Performance of the Year

Lucas' second half at Ohio State — After a crushing home loss to Northwestern Jan. 21, Lucas made sure the Spartans didn't lose their second game in a row. Trailing by five at halftime and as many as 13 in the game on Jan. 25 at Ohio State, Lucas scored all 20 of his points in the second half to spearhead MSU's 78-67 comeback victory. Lucas, who missed the first few minutes of the game because of academic reasons, shot 6-of-11 from the field in the second period.

Game of the Year

Midwest Regional semifinals against Kansas — With a trip to the Elite Eight on the line, MSU overcame a 13-point deficit with 3:26 left in the first half to defeat Kansas. Led by Lucas and senior center Goran Suton, MSU bounced back to take a 51-49 lead with 8:46 to go, but the game was far from over. Kansas went back up by five with just over three minutes remaining, and held onto the lead for another minute. But sophomore guard Durrell Summers put back a missed jumper by Suton, and Morgan threw down a two-handed dunk to tie the game at 60. After a Kansas turnover, Lucas converted an incredible 3-point play that proved to be the game-winner.

Best Play

Lucas' pull-up jumper with 48 seconds left against Kansas — With the game tied at 60 and the shot-clock expiring, Lucas had the ball at the top of the key. With his teammates being guarded, Lucas dribbled into the paint, up-faked, absorbed contact from Kansas guard Sherron Collins, and forced into the air an off-balanced floater that went right through the nylon. The shot and subsequent free throw gave MSU a 63-60 lead with 48 seconds left. Lucas iced the game by hitting all four of his free-throw attempts in the final minutes, as MSU won 67-62.

Best Dunk

Summers' dunk over UConn's Stanley Robinson in the NCAA semifinal — With about six minutes remaining against the Huskies, Summers received a long pass from junior forward Raymar Morgan and went up to the rim. Robinson, a 6-foot-9 forward, was in front of him. The 6-foot-4 Summers slammed the ball — and Robinson's wrist — through the hoop to put the Spartans up 10. The crowd of 72,456 at Ford Field went into a frenzy, and the dunk immediately made its way on the MSU all-time highlight reel.

PHOTOS BY NICK DENTAMARO/THE STATE NEWS

Biggest Dunk

Morgan's tip-stam with 27 seconds left against Indiana — With the outright Big Ten regular season title on the line, it took an incredible play by Morgan to fend off Indiana. Trailing by as many as 13 points, the Hoosiers whittled MSU's lead down to two with less than a minute to go. After Summers' triple attempt from the left wing trickled off the iron, it appeared Indiana would get a chance to tie the game or take the lead. But out of nowhere, Morgan soared through the air, collected the miss, and threw down an electrifying dunk to give MSU a four-point lead with 27.5 seconds left.

Best Moment

Walton after MSU advances to Final Four — "Make it to the Final Four" was Walton's battle cry all season long. Then it happened. The buzzer sounded, ending MSU's 64-52 win over Louisville. The senior guard who would have become the first player coached by Tom Izzo to never make it to a Final Four fell to his knees, pulled his jersey over his head and cried hysterically. His dream was accomplished and the streak wouldn't end with him.