

Freshman lifts MSU to 59-44 victory over Wolverines

By Ernie Boone

Just in time! That's what the Michigan State University coaches and fans are feeling about Raymar Morgan's outstanding performance in a grind-em-out, 59-44, victory over the University of Michigan at the Breslin Center February 13.

The 6-7 freshmen forward hit 14 second half points to keep the Spartans' fading NCAA Tournament hopes alive.

His scoring outburst provided the boost MSU needed to break open a close contest and assure victory in what head coach Tom Izzo had privately called a "must win," contest.

Morgan took over with about 12 minutes left, scoring nine points in a five minute stretch to spark a 16-7 MSU run put things out of reach.

"I felt that my team needed me at that time," Morgan said about his scoring outburst. "The guys did a real good job of getting me the ball where I

could score, and I just took it over from there."

The victory, MSU's ninth straight over the Wolverines at Breslin, snapped a four-game Spartan losing streak and raised MSU's record to 18-8 overall and 5-6 in the conference.

Morgan's 18 points for the game were the most he's scored since coming back from a stress reaction in his right shin which kept him out 35 days and seven games in December.

Spartan coaches and fans are hoping the outburst means that Morgan is finally back in shape and ready to resume his role as a major weapon in the MSU offensive arsenal.

"He's starting to get it back," said Spartan coach Tom Izzo following the game.

"He missed some shots early, some lay-ups, but Raymar is a heck of a player, and I don't think any of us will appreciate what it's been like to be out as long as he was.



Raymar Morgan

"It's hard for freshman to get back and right in the groove of things."

Morgan is confident that he's back in the groove and thinks that he can provide scoring on a consistent basis. "I can't promise you that (score 18 points per game). It

would be really be great if I could do that," he said. "Whatever my team needs, that's what I try to do."

His resurgence is right on time. MSU is in the midst of a first ever four-game home stand that will see Iowa, February 17, Wisconsin, February 20 and Indiana, February 27, follow the Wolverines to Breslin.

Forecasters think 21 wins will assure the Spartans of an NCAA Tournament berth. To accomplish that they need to win out at home, or win two of the three remaining home games and beat either Michigan or Wisconsin on the road.

That won't happen unless Morgan provides consistent offensive punch.

Since he is now able to practice full time, Spartan coaches have added plays to take advantage of his skills and plan to go to him inside. Against Michigan Morgan scored on some post-up moves and cuts to the basket.

The Spartans would like to make those weapons a permanent part of their game plans during the stretch drive.

Prior to his injury, Morgan played like a house afire. He became the first Spartan freshman to score in double figures his first six games. Twice during that stretch he scored 18.

Then came the injury! Morgan has started the last seven games, and gradually worked his way into shape. Despite not practicing full time, he's been logging plenty of game time, averaging more than 30 minutes per game during the last five games.

He ranks as the team's second leading scorer, averaging 10.5 points per game, and ranks third in rebounding with a 4.9 average.

Spartans assemble 20 high school player football recruit class

Mark Dantonio's new Michigan State staff didn't sign every football player it wanted, but wanted every player it signed.

Ten weeks after being named head coach of the Spartans, Dantonio assembled a recruiting class of 20 high school players -- 13 on offense, six on defense and a punter.

To no one's surprise, Michigan State failed to land any of the state's three Parade All-Americans and ranked in the second division among Big Ten schools, according to all analysts.

But Dantonio and his

assistants were successful in adding four promising linemen on each side of the ball and making major inroads in Michigan and Ohio.

"You're going to win games up front in this conference," Dantonio said. "And we signed some players who can help us do that. We also formed relationships that will last. Every time you make a contact, something happens. A relationship either strengthens or weakens."

The Spartans signed seven players from Michigan, six from Ohio, two from Illinois and New Jersey and one each

from Kentucky, Tennessee and Georgia.

Michigan State could add two or three other players who remain undecided or need to complete an academic requirement.

"We've got a couple of guys still hanging," Dantonio said. "They're highly recruited players. But that should work itself out in the next week or so."

The biggest names are wide receiver Mark Dell from Farmington Hills Harrison in Michigan and defensive tackle Antonio Jeremiah, a 6-

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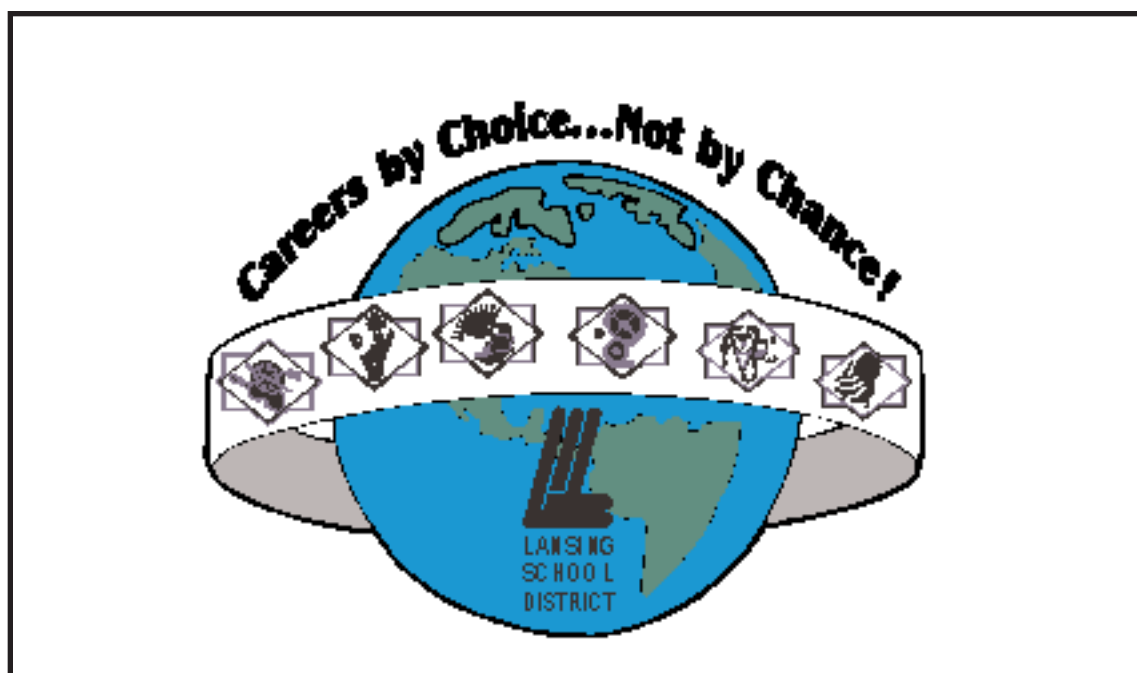


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