

Ibok adds to Spartan drive to the ‘Big Dance’

By Ernie Boone

Rarely has so little meant so much to so many.

Idong Ibok doesn't have spectacular statistics. The red-shirt sophomore is averaging just 2.2 points, 2.6 rebounds and 1.1 blocked shots per game.

But with a thundering dunk or blocked shot here and a rebound there, ID, as his Spartan teammates call him, has been a major contributor to MSU's recent success.

The 6-11 center with the 7-5 wing span came off the bench and made key plays in MSU victories over Michigan, Wisconsin and Indiana as the Spartans closed out a four-game home stand and all but assured themselves of a spot in their tenth straight NCAA Championship Tournament.

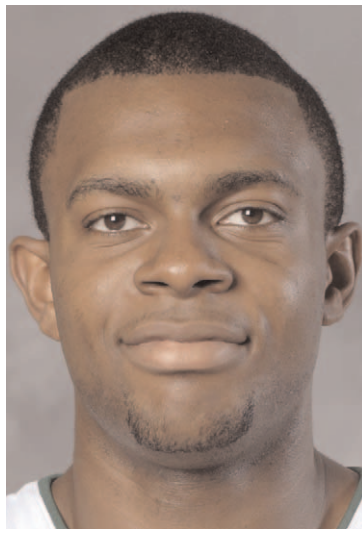
Nothing is certain these days in the quest to make the

Big Dance, but 21 wins, including triumphs over No. 1 Wisconsin, 19th ranked Texas, and highly regarded Indiana and two-point losses to Ohio State and Maryland on hostile and neutral turf should be enough.

The 67-56 loss to Michigan suffered at Ann Arbor February 27, coupled with a likely loss at Wisconsin could, however, put MSU back on the bubble, needing a win or two in the conference tournament to cement an NCAA bid.

He had just two points in three minutes against Michigan in East Lansing, but they came as MSU made 6-0 run to break a 29-29 tie and grab a lead it never relinquished.

He made his presence felt in a big way against Wisconsin, with a free throw, a steal, a blocked shot three rebounds



Idong Ibok

in 7:41 minute stretch to help close the first half down just 30-29.

He made key plays in a Spartan surge against Indiana also, getting a blocked shot and three points on a free throw and thundering dunk, to stretch the MSU lead to five

points, 51-46.

"ID has given us some very good positive minutes," said Spartan assistant coach, Dwayne Stephens.

"He does one or two things that really help each game."

Ibok, who hails from Lagos, Nigeria, was recruited as a "project" player with limited basketball skills and knowledge but excellent size and athletic ability.

Stephens, who works with the MSU post players, says that while he, like all coaches, is never satisfied, he's pleased with Ibok's progress to date.

"He's only been playing basketball four or five years now," Stephens said. "He has a very high ceiling."

"Defensively he's been awesome for us. Offensively he's been good."

A red-shirt sophomore, Ibok was little more than a big body to bang in practice.

When he put up a shot, from the floor or the free throw line, it was hardly more than a prayer.

"At least those shots have a chance now," Stephens joked. Actually, Ibok is shooting .686 from field on 24 of 35 attempts, and .515 from the free throw line. All of his shots have come at close range, usually monster dunks.

"He's an unbelievable teammate," said Stephens, "everybody just loves him."

At 6-11 255 pounds, Ibok is a big body that takes up a lot of space. He's a pretty good shot blocker and his rebounding continues to get better.

Defense and rebounding will always be his major strengths according to Stephens, but he has the work ethic that could turn him into a significant inside threat.

He's not likely to become a

major scorer, but he has the size, quickness and toughness to set picks, dunk and get to the boards on offense, and he can defend the lane and bang bodies with the big fellows on defense.

He's started 16 games this season but recently has been more effective coming off the bench.

He'll have to continue his productivity if the Spartans are to have a chance to repeat their success against the Badgers or post a win or two in the conference tourney.

And that's the only way they can be assured a spot in NCAA title chase.

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MSU senior Victoria Lucas-Perry receives top honors, Allyssa DeHaan named Big 10 Freshman of the Year

By Ernie Boone

In the classroom or on the basketball court, Victoria Lucas-Perry stands out.

The 5-9 Flint senior was recently named to the ESPN the Magazine's All District 4 Academic Second Team.

Already admitted to the University of Michigan dental school, Lucas-Perry earned the honor by compiling a 3.6 GPA.

On the court she ranks among the Big 10 leaders in seven categories. She is 10th in scoring at 13.6, 18th in rebounding at 5.8 and seventh in steals at 2.1.

Those numbers earned her a spot on the All-Conference second team along with Big 10 Freshman of the Year, Allyssa DeHaan.

DeHaan was also named by the coaches to the All-

Defensive team along with senior guard Rene Haynes.

A fourth Spartan, sophomore Aisha Jefferson earned conference honors as an Honorable Mention selection by the media.

While the honors are nice, Lucas Perry is most excited about the Spartan's late season surge which saw them defeat Purdue and Ohio State on the road to place third in the conference with a 13-3 mark.

The record was good enough for a three seed in the Conference tournament which opened Thursday, March 1, in Indianapolis.

The seeding earned MSU a first-round bye. They'll await the winner of a game between Northwestern and Minnesota.

Lucas-Perry, a preseason Naismith Trophy Candidate,

had 10 games of 15 or more points, including a 20-point effort at No. 1 Maryland and an 18-point

She had 16 games with five or more rebounds and has also posted five five-assist efforts and 10 three-steal efforts.

She's Michigan State University's leading scorer, and has raised her season totals in points, 380, rebounds, 167, assists, 72, steals, 60 and 3-pointers, 51.

In her third season as a starter, she seems to come up with top notch performances in big games.

She credits last summer's experience as a member of the USA Basketball Under-20 national team which earned a gold medal in the FIBA America's Championships.

"It really helped my

confidence," Lucas-Perry said of the team USA experience. "There were try-outs. I hadn't been in try-outs since high school."

It made it clear that she could compete with the best women in the world.

She hopes to use that confidence and experience to lead the Spartans to victory in the Big 10 tournament and deep into the NCAA Championship Tournament.

She started two years ago when MSU reached the finals, scoring 14 points, grabbing six rebounds and dishing four assists to help the Spartans to a win in the semi-finals.

One of two 1,000 point scorers in the winningest class in Spartan history, Lucas-Perry has helped MSU to a 101-30 record in her four years.

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