

# Spartans seek that old "family feeling"

By Ernie Boone

Ask any Tom Izzo era player, past or present what impresses him the most about his MSU experience and you're likely to get "Family atmosphere," for an answer. Old timers like Mateen Cleaves and neophytes like Chris Allen all point to that family feeling as the thing that most attracted them and keeps them coming back.

One look at the activities in the Izzo designed \$1.5 million locker room and even a

outsider gets the feeling.

It's like an oversized family room, and the kids use it that way.

Stop by and you might see a couple of guys shooting pool, a few others playing on the X-Box or Wii on the giant nine screen TV.

Or guys just hanging out or chilling.

MSU's really do act a lot like family.

That family feeling got a pretty stiff test Tuesday, February 12 as the Spartans dropped a knock-down drag-

out battle at Purdue, 60-54.

It's likely to face an even tougher test Saturday, February 16 when MSU travels to Bloomington to take on Indiana.

With the loss to Purdue, the Spartans must run the table or give up any hope of claiming the regular season conference crown, and even if they beat Indiana, they're not likely to do so without facing some pretty trying moments.

When they do, they'll have to draw on that family togetherness. Like senior co-

captain Travis Walton declared following the 70-55 victory over Northwestern, "It's Family Week. We have to come together as a family."

"It's incredibly important," said Drew Naymick. "Especially on the road. Instead of 15,000 with you and 30 against, it's reversed."

The Spartans got a heavy dose of that medicine in Lafayette. The Purdue fans were out in force and it appeared to have a major impact as MSU committed a boatload of early errors.

Purdue led by as many as 18 points in the first half and it looked like a rout was in the

making. At halftime it was 34-18.

But the family factor kicked in when it was needed most. Like a father, Izzo chastised his veterans who had been AWOL in the first half.

Like a family, the total team responded

The Spartans came out together and worked their way back into the game, closing to within one point three different times.

Purdue, behind clutch 3-point shooting by freshman Robbie Hummel, held on to post the victory.

Kalin Lucas scored a career

high 20 points, and Raymar Morgan tallied 12, all in the second half.

Neitzel, the Spartan's second leading scorer, was held to six points.

All Spartan title hopes rest on Saturday's trip to Indiana. Any loss from here on will mean that any plans to hang a championship banner from the Breslin Center rafters this season will have to come in the Big Ten post season tournament or the NCAA tournament.

To accomplish that, more than ever they'll need to have that family feeling.

## Spartan's recruit talented gridiron class for '08 season

It may not be among the nation's top rated or event the best in the Big Ten, but the 21-member 2008 football recruiting class has MSU's Mark Dantonio flashing a smile that goes ear-to-ear.

The Spartans filled some big holes and took a major step toward gaining parity with the University of Michigan in the battle for in-state gridiron talent and that's recruiting goal number one for the MSU mentor.

MSU landed its fair share of the top Michigan talent, gaining what some high school talent assessors have called an even split with the Wolverines in this year's talent wars.

Two of the state's most hotly pursued recruits signed MSU letters of intent on the annual signing date, February 6.

One, 6-7 273-pound defensive end, Tyler Hoover, from Novi High School, is already on campus attending classes and working out in preparation for spring ball.

The other, 6-3 215-pound wide receiver, Fred Smith,

from Detroit Southeaster, is a Rivals.com four star recruit and one of the top prospects in the state.

Hoover was ones of the most sought after recruits in the state, with scholarship offers from Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois and Purdue.

Hoover is expected to break into the Spartan line-up and earn some playing time as a true freshman.

He's already impressed the MSU coaching staff with his work ethic and performance during off-season workouts. Smith is also expected to contribute right away and perhaps soften the blow the offense could take from the loss of Devin Thomas.

He has size, speed and sure hands, qualities the Spartans will need next season if they are to climb a rung or two on the conference ladder and claim a more prestigious bowl bid

Another recruit who could see first year action is 5-11 180-pound Johnny Adams.

Adams ranks as one of the fastest recruits having posted

a 4.32 40-yard dash time. He too is taking classes this semester and preparing to take part in spring practice.

Out of Akron, Ohio, he's seen as an excellent cover corner who'll get a chance to contribute right away.

Among the other recruits signed by the Spartans are three defensive backs, four linebackers, four offensive linemen, two defensive linemen, two wide receivers, one tight end and two running backs.

Two top recruits who had earlier expressed interest in MSU made last minute decisions to go elsewhere.

Detroit defensive end, Nick Perry spurned both U-M and MSU, electing to go to Southern California, and Flint running back, Mark Ingram Jr., headed for Alabama.

Perry is rated the top recruit from the state, marking the second straight year the Trojans have nabbed Michigan's Number 1 recruit. Ingram is the son of the former MSU standout wide receiver.

## Bobby Williams and Nick Saban hook-up once again

TUSCALOOSA, Ala - Bobby Williams and Nick Saban are back together again. For the fourth time in their careers, the two former Michigan State University head coaches will hook up in an attempt to turn around an ailing football program.

Naban recently announced the hiring of Williams as tight ends coach/special teams coordinator for the University of Alabama.

"Bobby Williams was the first guy I called when the position opened," Saban said. "I've coached with Bobby a number of years and he is as good as there is in this business."

"Not only is he a great coach and a great teacher, but he is also an excellent recruiter and is very well respected by the players that he coaches."

Williams coached running backs for Saban at MSU and replaced Saban as the MSU head coach from 2000-02. He led the Spartans to two bowl victories.

In other stints with Saban, Williams coached running backs for the Miami Dolphins in 2005 and 2006, and was the associate head coach/wide receivers coach at LSU in 2004.

He spent the 2003 season as the wide receivers coach of the Detroit Lions after being dismissed from MSU.

"I'm very excited to be a part of the Alabam football program," Williams said. "The tradition, the history, and the passion here at Alabama are what college football is all about."

"Nick has put together a great staff, and I'm looking forward to to doing my part in helping to build a championship program here at Alabama."

A graduate of Purdue, Williams was a four-year letterman. He was tri-captain his senior season. As a player, he was a part three Purdue bowl teams.

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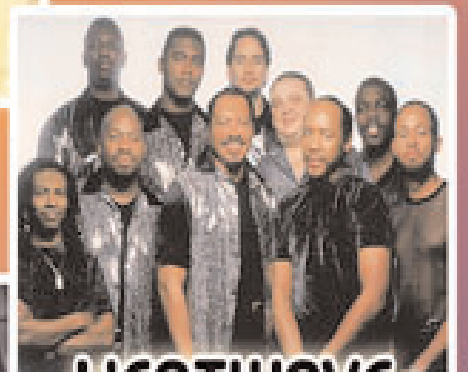
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