

# 3/19/2012: State of the Big Ten, Volume 60 (premium)

*Every Monday, we will be running a weekly series titled "State of the Big Ten," which will be made available to all members of HawkeyeDrive.com. This series of columns will focus on one major headline regarding the conference and go in-depth on the subject at hand.*

By Brendan Stiles

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To the surprise of no one earlier this month, Michigan State forward Draymond Green was named the Big Ten's Player of the Year. He was clearly deserving of the honor, as he was the only player in the conference to average a double-double with points and rebounds and more importantly led his team to both regular season and tournament championships.

As the Spartans prepare to face Louisville in the Sweet 16 on March 22 in Phoenix, it's easy to see why Green has become the player he is today in college basketball. No, his career isn't over just yet. But his mark at Michigan State and on the Big Ten is worth showing appreciation for right now.

Playing against LIU-Brooklyn in the second round of the tournament March 16, Green posted a triple-double of 24 points, 12 rebounds and 10 assists. The 6-7 forward has had a knack throughout his career for compiling triple-doubles, but his most recent feat made him the first player to ever record them in consecutive NCAA tournament games.

Then against Saint Louis two days, Green finished with 16 points, 13 rebounds and six assists in what ended up being a four-point Spartan win.

But it's not just Green's play that makes him who he is.

Back in October, Michigan State head coach Tom Izzo compared Green's leadership traits to those of perhaps the two best players to ever wear Spartan uniforms – Magic Johnson and Mateen Cleaves. Maybe it wasn't far-fetched for Izzo to say at the time, but what that did was put Green in a different light, one he has excelled in.

In fact, it might be fair to argue that Green could be considered the best to ever play for Michigan State if the Spartans go on to win their second national title like they did in both Johnson's and Cleaves' final seasons in East Lansing.

Two more victories would give Michigan State its third Final Four appearance in four seasons. Let that thought sink in for a second. Three Final Fours in four years. That also goes without mentioning that the one season there wasn't a Final Four appearance was perhaps the most tumultuous season Michigan State has ever had under Izzo.

Sure, it's one thing for Green to sit there and say by week's end that he has played in three Final Fours. But it's his role in helping resurrect Michigan State back to what it was during the early portion of his career that will ultimately define him in the eyes of Spartan fans (and Big Ten fans) everywhere.

After drawing the No. 7 seed in the 2011 Big Ten Tournament and just barely making the NCAA tournament field one year ago, no one thought the Spartans could win the Big Ten this season. Sure, maybe they'd compete for a league title, but not actually win it.

As it turned out, Michigan State rebounded two losses to North Carolina and Duke to start the season and didn't look back. The Spartans ended up having to share the regular season crown with both Michigan and Ohio State, but they capitalized on the chance to distinguish themselves from everyone else at the Big

Ten Tournament.

This doesn't happen without Green. Not only because of his on-the-court production, but because of the leadership intangibles that separated him from just about everyone else in college basketball. Heck, if Kentucky freshman Anthony Davis didn't burst on the scene like he did, a valid argument could be made for Green being National Player of the Year this season. He had that kind of year and that type of impact on Michigan State.

Players like him don't come around often, which is why there's no reason to wait in showing appreciation for a player like Green.