

8 Michigan State things tip off at 8:30 p.m. Wednesday with Northwestern visiting the Breslin Center followed by a trip to Ohio State on Saturday. It offers the Spartans (11-2, 2-0 Big Ten) a chance to take advantage of the two early conference victories and continue working toward defending their regular-season championship. # " It's big time and going to be really important, " senior forward Kenny Goins said. " We need to win all of our home games, so we need to come out strong against Northwestern. Ohio State always gives us fits down there. I think those first two games really give us a chance to make a statement around our league. " # That statement was made during a difficult stretch for the Spartans that included games against No. 1 Kansas, Louisville and Florida along with UCLA and Texas in the Las Vegas Invitational. The only losses were in the season-opener against Kansas in the Champions Classic followed by an overtime loss at Louisville in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge. # Mixed in that run was a stretch of six games in 16 days with just one at home. It was a tough road but one that helped Tom Izzo learn plenty about his team heading back into Big Ten action. # " I think that we had a hell of a run if you look at who we played, where we played, and when we played them. I thought we did a good job, " Izzo said. " I still get frustrated over that Louisville loss and I was so frustrated that I watched it (again) with my staff to figure out where were we back then and where are we now. If you remember, (Matt) McQuaid didn't