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COLLEGE BASKETBALL Jordan Ott goes from McConnellsburg to Michigan State bench

Public Opinion Online

By JOEL RINEER

Staff writer

From McConnellsburg High School to a courtside seat at the 2009 Final Four at Ford Field in Michigan.

If it hadn't happened to Jordan Ott, even he wouldn't have believed it.

A series of fortunate events led to Ott ultimately landing a coaching job for the Michigan State men's basketball team and a spot on the bench next to Spartans coach Tom Izzo for the NCAA Championship game against North Carolina on April 6.

"Being from such a small high school like McConnellsburg, you never think something like this is a possibility," Ott said. "To be part of the Final Four and the national championship game, it still hasn't fully set in."

Izzo said, "There's no question Jordan has added great value to our program and was a key reason we were able to make a long run during the NCAA Tournament with his motivational videos and help with game prep."

There were plenty of twists and turns along the way before Ott ended up in Michigan as the video coordinator with the Spartans.

A lifelong Penn State fan, Ott attended PSU after graduating from McConnellsburg in 2003. He wrote a letter the summer before his freshman year to apply to be a basketball manager.

Ott got accepted and for three seasons he helped at practice with the Nittany Lions and attended the home games. After graduating with a bachelor's degree in sports management in 2006, he was at a crossroads.

He knew he wanted to do two things -- go to graduate

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himself for about hour.

"It was the biggest break of my career so far," Ott said.

"It just so happened that the previous guys had left a couple of weeks before and they had no (graduate

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Rare opportunity: Jordan Ott, right, an assistant coach at... (Katie Rausch/The State News)

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school and stay involved in basketball.

It came down to West Virginia and Michigan State.

"I was 99 percent sure I was going to West Virginia with coach (John) Beilein (now at Michigan)," Ott said. "But my mother (Pam) actually told me to go to Michigan State, maybe I'll love the program. At that point, I was still on the fence about whether I wanted to actually be a coach."

Ott and his parents made the trip to East Lansing and talked to an academic advisor, who gave him perhaps the most important piece of advice he's ever received.

The message: If you want to be a graduate assistant, there is no better place to do it than at Michigan State. With his parents sitting in the car, Ott walked into the basketball office and sold

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assistants) at the time. After the interview was done, they told me to come back for their summer camp."

In what amounted to a 10-day tryout, Ott drove home and flew out the following weekend to work the camp. From the end of June until the middle of August, he didn't hear a thing.

He called ... he waited ... he hoped.

"I still didn't think I had a chance," he said. "but after being there, I felt like this was what a basketball program was supposed to be like."

He finally got the call -- the position was his. Ott was a graduate assistant for two years before another fortuitous break landed him a full-time position with the team. The previous video coordinator moved on to the Big Ten offices, opening up a spot.

"It's being in the right place at the right time, I guess," Ott said. "I was incredibly lucky to walk into that office and sell myself with my parents sitting in the car that day. I've come full circle since then."

And if being video coordinator doesn't sound like an appealing or overly demanding job, then you don't know much about Izzo, a video fanatic.

So much so that ESPN.com writer Pat Forde wrote an article entitled, "King of the Quick Turnaround" following Michigan State's 64-52 Elite Eight upset win over the tournament's No. 1 seed, Louisville.

Ott's name appeared in the very first sentence.

It certainly validated all his hard work. His main job was to take video of the next opponent and condense it into short, 20-minute segments for the coaches to pour over. Ott, along with two graduate assistants and 11 student managers, taped every game on national television this season.

"We stayed up until like 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning and put in a press break the night before (the Louisville game)," he said. "People talk about our video program for a reason. That's how coach Izzo got his start and he watches so much film it forces everyone else to, as well."

Izzo said, "In his first year as video coordinator, (Jordan) did an unbelievable job adapting to his new position and helping us maintain one of the best video systems in the country. I expect him to have a bright future."

The NCAA Tournament also forced Ott to lose plenty of sleep.

From Michigan State's final regular-season home game on March 8 until the national championship game on April 6, Ott said, "If I got 35 hours of sleep in a week, that was a lot."

The Spartans flunked out of the Big Ten Tournament before rolling past Robert Morris, USC, Kansas, Louisville and UConn on their way to the title game, which they lost to the Tar Heels 89-72.

The entire time, Ott was right there on the sidelines, soaking up the experience like a sponge -- and drinking tons of caffeine. His parents Pam and John, his sister Emile and his close friend Drew Washabaugh made the trip to the Final Four.

"To hear my family say, 'Man, we're at the Final Four' made it all this worth it," Ott said. "My dad said, 'Wow, this is the greatest sporting day of my life' and he is 54 years old."

Memories were plentiful during the Final Four run, including:

n Following the Louisville win, the team returned home at 1 a.m. and MSU's Breslin Center was filled with around 8,000 rowdy fans.

n When the team left for Detroit, the sendoff route -- about 10 miles long -- was lined up to the highway.

n A pep rally before the UConn game at a nearby mall drew nearly 10,000 people.

n Walking up the tunnel during the national championship game, Ott walked right past David Robinson, John Stockton and his boyhood idol, Michael Jordan, who are part of the 2009 Basketball Hall of Fame class.

n Oh ... and Magic Johnson was also a regular at Spartan practices.

n In the tournament alone, Ott got to shake hands with a who's who of the coaching world -- Kansas' Bill Self, Louisville's Rick Pitino, UConn's Jim Calhoun and UNC's Roy Williams.

"I don't know if I'll ever fully appreciate (being on the sidelines for the Final Four)," Ott said. "To go from the McConnellsburg gym, where if there were 500 people we thought it was a lot, to 75,000 people at Ford Field is amazing."

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Quite an Ott-essay

The year 2009 couldn't have started much better for McConnellsburg native Jordan Ott, who, as a video coordinator for the Michigan State men's basketball team, enjoyed a memorable run through the NCAA Tournament to the national championship.

Ott, a 2003 graduate of McConnellsburg, was a basketball manager at Penn State University before becoming a graduate assistant for the Spartans for the last two seasons. This was his first year as the video coordinator.

ESPN.com writer Pat Forde wrote a story titled, "King of the Quick Turnaround" about the video program at MSU. To read the article, go to http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/columns/story?columnist=forde_pat&id=4044481&sportCat=ncb



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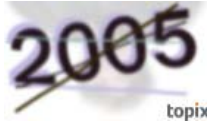
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