

Allstate Maui Invitational

Tuesday, November 21, 2023

Honolulu, Hawaii, USA

SimpliFi Arena

Marquette Golden Eagles

Shaka Smart

Oso Ighodaro

Postgame Press Conference



Marquette - 73, Kansas - 59

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by head coach, Shaka Smart, and Oso Ighodaro. We'll start with an opening statement from Coach and then go to questions for Oso.

SHAKA SMART: That was a fun game. Obviously got incredible respect for Kansas. I know their program all too well from being in the league with them for six years. We felt like as a team this was a game that we had some advantages in, but we felt like it was really, really important to press those advantages by being connected, helping each other, having a level of resolve even when things don't go our way.

I thought our guys started the game with really, really good energy. Both teams were scoring. But then after about the first six, eight minutes, I thought we settled in defensively and that was the difference in the game.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions for Oso.

Q. You guys always talk about being lost in the fight. How much did that little dust-up in the first half kind of galvanize you guys against the No. 1 team in the nation?

OSO IGHODARO: I didn't really see what happened. I just saw coach get into it. We talk about compete forever. He's as competitive as it is.

I thought we did a great job being lost in the fight the whole first half and the second half, the whole game. We weren't worried about the little stuff. We were really pouring into each other.

Q. For you, how much were you looking forward to that matchup with the All-American in Hunter Dickinson?

OSO IGHODARO: I just wanted to win. That's really the biggest thing for me. They have good players, they're a great team, obviously. I just wanted to do what I could to win.

Q. Along those lines, you had Bona yesterday, Dickinson today, two really big guys. You really got the best of both of them, and so now you have Edey tomorrow. Is this kind of an opportunity for you? Coach got emotional in the post-game interview talking about you thinking about other people so much and not enough about yourself. Do you feel like you're sort of coming into your own this week and looking forward to Zach tomorrow?

OSO IGHODARO: Yeah, I mean, I feel I've been coming into my own this whole season, and this off-season really just working on my game and really just trusting my work. Zach Edey's a great player and looking forward to the matchup.

Q. Regarding defense, could you talk about those two consecutive blocks against the backboard? Because I think that really helped spur you guys.

OSO IGHODARO: Yeah, they were getting downhill a little bit. I just stepped up and had my teammate's back.

Q. I would love to know what your guys' defensive rotations were like because you were so aggressive in not only getting to the lanes and getting on the ball, but then the communication you guys had that stemmed from sideline into the game. Talk about what the defensive rotations looked like tonight and how you guys really raised that level of intensity.

OSO IGHODARO: We talk about relationships. Defense is all relationships, having your brother's back. Our communication wasn't at a good enough level tonight, but that's something that we're continuing to work on, and we really want to keep guys out of the paint, out of the moat, and we just have to keep going with that.

Q. What was the plan with Hunter and what did you feel like you did successfully against him?



OSO IGHODARO: Just tried to keep it out of his hands. He's a talented scorer when he catches the ball. The guards did a great job heating the ball up, making it hard for them to throw it in while I fronted the post and, yeah, it was a team effort.

Q. You mentioned your off-season work that you put in. What sort of work was that -- you got Coach shaking his head. What was it that you were doing to get you to the next level and what we saw last night, tonight, and just your progression?

OSO IGHODARO: Yeah, I was in there every morning with Mark Dixon, one of our staff members, and just working on all my finishes around the paint, just working on my all-around game.

Q. When Coach took over and you were thinking about sticking around or going someplace else, did you ever think you would get to this point where you would beat the No. 1 team in the country and having a chance to be No. 1 yourself?

OSO IGHODARO: I don't know. I wasn't really thinking that far in advance. I was just trying to get on the floor and get some playing time. So it's been a long journey since then.

Q. Going up against BG in practice the last couple years, what have you seen from him? Did you think he would be able to hit those two big back-to-back 3-pointers that he hit in the second half?

OSO IGHODARO: Ben, he's grown every single game. His confidence has grown, and this is coming off a summer where he didn't really get to work out at all. I love playing with Ben, I love playing against Ben, and he's going to be a really great player. He battles, he plays hard, he's tough. Yeah, he played great tonight. He was a spark off the bench.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Oso.

Questions for Coach.

Q. It looked like McCullar had something to say to you, and you took exception with it, and that led to what happened, and then there was the huddle with Roger Ayers where it kind of kept going. Could you fill us in on what happened?

SHAKA SMART: So Kevin McCullar is one of the best competitors I've coached against in a long time. He played at Texas Tech. He always just brought an edge that was

different. And then he's always kind of enjoyed having a dialogue with me. He probably does that with all coaches. But as you said, that kind of started the, you know, little dust-up, and then their bench got involved and our bench got involved, but at the end of the day, it really had very little to do with the game.

Our guys did a really good job just basically ignoring what happened and continuing to play. That shows their maturity and their poise. The staff was worried about me getting kicked out of the game. I never intended to even get a technical foul.

But the one thing I'm going to make clear is we don't take a backseat to anyone. That's how we go about things and that's the only way you beat Kansas. I'll tell you a quick story. My first year at Texas we were up five, I think, at halftime at Phog Allen, and Jai Lucas, one of our assistant coaches, grabbed me, and he said, Coach, you got to convince these guys that we can win. I said, What do you mean convince 'em we can win? We're winning. We're up. It's halftime. And he was exactly right, man. Like, we didn't quite have the belief we needed to have and they won like they almost always do at home in that game.

So I've learned the hard way. Against Kansas, you got to stand up to them. The most important part of that was our players and the way that they played with connectivity and incredible effort and resolve, and even when a couple calls or things didn't go our way, they stuck with it.

Q. What do you think Oso showed in such a high-profile matchup with Hunter Dickinson?

SHAKA SMART: Oso has been playing his butt off for a long time. I think people tend to recognize when he plays against really good players. I don't think you can line up three better bigs for him to play against. It's almost like they get better every game. They do get better. Bona was phenomenal, Dickinson's an All-American, and Edey already has been the best player in the country previous years, and he's gotten better.

We're really big on pressing our advantages, not trying to be exactly what someone else is. We're not trying to do what they do well as well as them. Oso has quickness, Oso has a mind that's incredible, Oso can handle the ball, he can pass the ball, he plays out on the floor. He's changed a lot from the 190-pound kid that played 38 minutes his entire freshman year. Now he has a physical durability about him where he can battle with those type of guys. He's going to have to eat his Wheaties again in the morning because Edey's as good as it gets at the college level.

Q. I would love to hear you expand about the aggressiveness your whole team displayed all night. Whether it was pressing the ball, I thought your guards were terrific on the ball and then getting into the lane. That seemed like it extended from you, given how often you were in a defensive stance on the sideline. I know that energy and can you expand on the ways that, like, these are the things that we want to do? Is that energy try to flow from you, back to them, back to you and just that circle you're trying to use?

SHAKA SMART: Yeah, we talk about energy-generating behaviors. We try to promote the heck out of those. We keep track of them during the game, during practice, every day. So, I'm just trying to give those guys as much energy as I can. At the end of the day it's about the guys. I thought both teams played with terrific physicality. I thought Kansas, there was a stretch there where they were putting their head down and driving us and getting into the paint and getting and-ones, but our guys, again, they responded. These type of games -- it's November. And so none of these teams including us are fully formed. There's a lot of things, this is the best thing about being down here is you get exposure to a lot of different things that you need to improve at, to ultimately do what you want to do down the stretch. That's whether you win or lose. Obviously with it being a quick turnaround we just want to put everything we have into tomorrow, and then I think for all eight teams then you kind of take stock of where you are and you better keep getting better even whoever wins it, because whoever is good enough to win tomorrow between us and Purdue, that's not good enough to reach our ultimate goals. But we're certainly going to go after it tomorrow. Thank you.

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