

Big East Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 10, 2022

New York, New York, USA

Madison Square Garden

Marquette Golden Eagles

Coach Shaka Smart

Justin Lewis

Postgame Media Conference



Creighton - 74, Marquette - 63

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Marquette.

COACH SMART: Congratulations to Creighton. I thought they played with really good aggressiveness and togetherness. Our guys did a really good fighting to come back, cut the lead down to two.

I think we had an offensive possession where we could have tied it. But we didn't do a good enough job with the attention to the details that it took to beat Creighton on both ends of the floor.

Our guys, again, showed a lot of fight down the stretch. But Creighton's a good team. They made a lot of good plays. Made some back-breaking shots when we cut the lead down. Gotta give them a lot of credit.

Q. Once you got it to two on breaks, three-point play, I think you lost track of Hawkins, he hit that 3, is that emblematic of the little details you're talking about?

COACH SMART: Yes, he's a guy, he's as good as there is at making you pay, when you're not where you need to be. And I think our guys have done a phenomenal job all year long of supporting each other, being connected, moving on to the next play. And I think today, for whatever reason, we're in the Big East Tournament, our guys really, really wanted to win.

And some things didn't go our way early. I think we unfortunately kind of allowed that to affect us a little bit. But as a team you have to find a way to stop those type of plays. But certainly Hawkins, that was a big 3. They made some big shots to kind of counter back when we made runs.

Q. Justin, you guys didn't seem to find your rhythm until right in the second half. Why do you think it took so long for you guys to figure things out, and then what happened after that?

JUSTIN LEWIS: I felt like that's, in our theme, we got lost in the fight more. That's kind of why we went on a run. We let things go and that's what helped us on the run.

Q. Creighton had four players finish in double figures. What was the challenge of that today, that they just didn't allow you guys to hone in on one player; they had a couple others that they fed the ball to?

COACH SMART: Those are four really good players, and you add O'Connell. He had nine points. I thought Trey Alexander played well for Creighton, not only having double figures but having eight assists. Since Nembhard went out he's really done a great job at the point guard spot. Just hurt us in different ways.

I thought Kalkbrenner, in a strange way, he's 7'1" but he's just kind of quicker to the ball on some of those plays. They shot one, like, off the bottom of the backboard. He was just quicker, got it, was able to either score or draw a foul. He's played really, really well against us. Kaluma gives them a different element with him being back.

But I think if you take away some of the plays they had in transition and then some of the drives we gave up from the top, I thought our guys did a nice job on defense. We just, too many times got beat on penetration, and in transition we lost them too many times.

Q. Creighton started the second half 8-for-9. How worried were you about the defense? We talked about defensive issues the last couple of weeks. How worried about the defense for heading into the NCAA Tournament?

COACH SMART: We'll watch the tape and we'll look at things that we can do better. I tend to focus on, okay, are we connected? Are we playing for each other? Are we responding when things don't go our way? If we do those



things we can be a really good defensive team. We've shown that all year. So we're going to focus on being better in those areas.

We'll certainly talk about, whether it's rotations or whether it's moving our feet to guard the ball or closing out, but I mean we've practiced 100 and some times this year. We're going to keep working on those things. Our guys are good in those areas when we're at our best.

Q. What were some of your impressions about the conference, about the league this year?

COACH SMART: It's been great. It's a first-class operation from Val on down. I think terrific teams, terrific coaches and most importantly, great players.

I think it's a testament to Justin being named most improved, being named to the first team. To be one of a handful of the best players in the league, in this league. There's a lot of great players that didn't get named anything.

And, so, it's a lot of fun to be part of the league. We really wanted to win this tournament. We came up here to win. And that's why it really stings that we didn't.

But you've got to give Creighton credit. And I really appreciate the fact that our guys have put us in position where we still have meaningful basketball to play even after losing today.

Q. Justin, you had 10 turnovers in the first half. Do you think it was just nerves, adrenaline? What do you think contributed to that?

JUSTIN LEWIS: I feel like, based on our play, it was kind of like nervousness, not wanting to mess up, wanting to play a perfect game.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports