

Big East Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

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Madison Square Garden

Marquette Golden Eagles

Shaka Smart

David Joplin

Kam Jones

Postgame Media Conference



At one point, I looked out, and we got a bunch of freshmen and sophomores out there fighting, battling, scratching for their lives. These guys didn't blink. They were lost in a fight the entire night. It was a ton of fun to watch.

Q. You've talked about this team responding in moments throughout the entire season. St. John's game out in Queens, you came back in halftime tonight. You kept responding to UConn's runs. What can you say about your team's response tonight to make sure you put yourself in a position for tomorrow, the title game?

SHAKA SMART: I think when we get lost in a fight, what I mean by that is we let go of all the other stuff that can creep into the mind, the doubts, anxieties, worries, all the stuff on social media.

These guys, if you cut them open, you'll find inside them championship DNA. It's exciting because these guys are just in their sophomore year. We've got three freshmen out there playing significant minutes. We've got another sophomore in Stevie and three juniors.

The reason that they've built that character about them is because of the way they feel about each other. That's what's allowed us to respond when we hit adversity.

Q. Coach, you talk about defense. All year I've watched this team play for steals and deflections. Looked like you had a completely different mind set from the beginning, walling up and three steals you held for 68 points. Was there a reason for the change?

SHAKA SMART: No. We didn't go into the game trying to change anything. UConn was the reason. Those guys took care of the ball really well. They had nine turnovers. Normally we force 16, 17, 18 turnovers. We didn't get our hands on the ball the way we normally do.

You have to find different ways to win. We knew playing UConn we'd have to make adjustments and fight like crazy to get offensive rebounds. We did that just enough.

Connecticut, 68 - Marquette, 70

SHAKA SMART: That was a heck of a game for the three of us. The first time being part of the semifinals, Friday night, Madison Square Garden, Big East Tournament, playing UConn. Doesn't get much better than that, I guess, unless you get to Saturday.

We really tried to emphasize to our guys that we had to win on the defensive end. UConn is a terrific team on both ends of the floor. They had some advantages relative to us with their size, strength, girth, offensive rebounding. We knew it would be a fight. We had some foul trouble. I thought Jop did a phenomenal job coming in the game and changing the complexion of the game with his shooting and with his ability to stretch out the defense.

That run that we had with him in the game, you know, where we took the ten-point lead was pivotal, and you knew UConn was going to make a run back. Down the stretch, I believe we had five -- at least four, but I believe we had five straight stops in a row, and that's what we needed to win it.

Q. The phrase win anyway since you got to Marquette, is this the open example of winning anyway with the foul trouble and giving up offensive rebounds and going deep into your bench?

SHAKA SMART: Yeah. This was a great team win. In a game like this, UConn is going to make some plays. The refs called some fouls. Some of our best players were riddled with foul trouble for most of the game. Oso played for less than half the game. It's a testament to the depth that we have on our team.



Q. Cam, the three you had to hit to beat the shot clock, that was a pivotal moment. As a player, you have those moments that you chuck it up and it goes in. Was that one of the moments for you?

CAM JONES: No. I shot that honestly knowing I was going to make it. I feel like every shot I take, I'm going to make it. I had a little bit of time I felt like I could have took an extra dribble or two. Once I got it, I took my time, I set my feet, shot like a normal shot.

Q. Coach, you had the key stretch into the second half. Without (indiscernible). What was the key there?

SHAKA SMART: These guys managed the game really well. We've probably practiced next to never without those guys in the game. So we had a lineup out there that normally is not out there together. Again, our guys stayed together. They trusted the plan.

We had some imperfect possessions on the defensive end -- on the offensive end. There was a dedication to getting stops. They just kept fighting.

Q. You had to come in, you had to battle the two behemoths on UConn. What was the mentality? How did you try to affect the game when you got in?

DAVID JOPLIN: Just fight. Also, when we're dealing with foul trouble, I knew I had to come in fight for positioning down there and be smart. On the offensive end, it's kind of -- if they want to post me up down there, I have to manage the offensive end. They've got to come out and guard me. I took advantage of it.

Q. Coach, congratulations. Right at the very end of the game, you jumped high in the air, pumped your fist. What were the emotions right there? Would you say you have the best jumping ability on the team?

SHAKA SMART: I got more jumping ability than these two. I definitely don't have the best on the team.

It just kind of felt like -- I want to say this in the most respectful way possible, but it felt like a lot of people were giving UConn the game coming in. And there was comments made about who owns the Garden and that kind of stuff. And, you know, we said wait a minute, we won this league. So we're not taking a back seat to anybody.

And you can say that, but then going and doing it is another thing. And you know it's going to be hard. You know it's going to come down to the last minute or even second of the game. It did. So that was just elation that, you know, our guys were able to go do what we said we

would do.

Q. You held Hawkins at 2 for 11 from the field. What did you try to do with him? Why were you so effective?

SHAKA SMART: That was the defensive key to the game. I thought both teams missed some really good looks from three that, you know, could have swung the game either way. But I thought on Hawkins, Omax Prosper and whoever on our team on him did a phenomenal job.

We can beat UConn with their bigs scoring some twos around the basket. We can win the game like we did tonight. I don't know if we can beat them if Hawkins goes and makes five, six threes and Calcaterra and guys are making. They made some in the first half. I thought throughout the game, our guys stayed attached to him. They ran a lot of different screen actions for him.

Again, Omax Prosper deserves amazing credit for being locked in on that assignment.

THE MODERATOR: Marquette, thank you.

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