

Big East Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 11, 2023

New York, New York, USA

Madison Square Garden

Xavier Musketeers

Sean Miller

Colby Jones

Postgame Media Conference



Xavier - 51 - Marquette - 65

SEAN MILLER: Well, I would like to congratulate Marquette. They have an outstanding team. I've played them three times this year, and they played great tonight, great. I don't know how they feel, but their defense has just really improved as the year went on.

I thought tonight there are times when their effort level and their quickness, their togetherness, their communication, it was like there were six players on defense against us.

We couldn't get a good shot, and that is to their credit. They have a program. They have depth. They have spirit. They have communication. Tonight, we would have had to be at our very, very best to beat them.

On our end, not making any excuses, but where we are at with our depth, playing three games in three days, that's not to our advantage. I'm looking forward to our guys being able to get home, take a deep breath, get our health and our feet under us, and then be able to come out with a fresh new beginning in next week's tournament.

In no way, based on what we've done here in New York City, am I disappointed. I thought we represented ourselves, the level of play, Colby, in particular, was outstanding. I thought our performance against Creighton on our end was one of our best.

It's just to win this tournament, you have to be able to do it again, again, and then again. We weren't able to do it here today.

Combination of Marquette and, also, I think a combination of us running out of steam because of our lack of depth.

THE MODERATOR: Go to questions.

Q. Colby, your first two years, this tournament was not a pleasant experience. You never got to play in the NCAA tournament. Do you sort of take this week and what's ahead as the ultimate positive for you guys going forward?

COLBY JONES: Yeah. I mean, Coach kind of hit on it in the locker room, trying to keep the season in perspective. It sucks right now for our team, losing like this.

Just the season we've had and not making the tournament the past few years, the position we're in, try to stay positive throughout it all. So yeah.

Q. Sean, what is that conversation with your guys in the locker room after this one?

SEAN MILLER: Well, I told everybody I'm really incredibly proud of our group, coaches, managers, players, those that play, those that don't.

I think our record of 25-9 speaks for itself. Finishing in this great conference second, 15-5, same. And doing what we did here.

If this were three hours ago, you feel like you're on top of the mountain. But that's the thing about March, you have to continue to play well. When you don't, you pay the price.

But we ran into a team that was better than us tonight. I credit Marquette. Our lack of depth doesn't help us in this situation. But in no way should we at all feel anything other than complete joy and really being able to embrace tomorrow, next week.

Because the other message that I gave these guys is I think we're going to have a good seed. But whoever we play in round 1 is going to be a really, really good team. And we have to be at our best.

So sometimes, if things don't go well in the last game in this tournament, you can use it to your advantage



because, again, you're stung with that feeling that, uh-oh, it's over.

So I have great confidence we'll bounce back from this. Again, we lost to a really good team. And I'm going to hold on to some of the things we did against DePaul and Creighton that allowed us to be in the championship here tonight as well.

Q. Coach, on a night where Souley was 0 for 9 from the floor and only had one point on the night, how impressive was your freshman, Desmond Claude, stepping up in his place?

SEAN MILLER: Desmond has continued to develop. He's a big story line on our team. As he's improved both on offense and defense. He gives us some much-needed death.

I think Colby can talk about that as well. Who Dez would have been in early December and who he is today, he's no longer a freshman. He's a very good player. We believe in him.

To your point, I thought he did a good job in tonight's game under the circumstances.

With Souley, he was just out of gas. I mean, he just really was. And he's dealing with kind of like an upper respiratory deal. If you listened to him last night, you kind of felt it. Played great, great against Creighton. I don't know if he could have played any better.

He just didn't have the juice today. He just didn't. I don't want to make an excuse. Plus the team he was playing against, they can pressure you with their quickness and their defense as well as any team that we've played all season long.

So he didn't have it tonight. He'll bounce back. Excited for him to have a new beginning on Thursday or Friday next week.

Q. Sean, hope you can indulge one Marquette question. Since you've seen them three times, what about them kind of lines up with what a team that's successful in the NCAA tournament is?

SEAN MILLER: Well, first of all, their style is very unique. You know, if you're playing them for the first time, it's not going to be your advantage. The way they play is so unique because they never turn the ball over. They had four turnovers today. It's hard in Madison Square Garden in the Big East Championship game to turn the ball over four times. They had one at the half. They'd been number

one in the Big East in that category all season. They're also the same group that forces the most turnovers on defense. They did it. They had 13.

If you think about that, that's a difference of nine. That stat is a great stat to have to your advantage. I also think that they're not reliant on one or two players on a given night. Many of their players can beat you. And, look, this conference is a monster, our conference.

We don't take a back seat to really any. I mean that. The 20 games that Marquette's played, 20 that we've played, has really prepared us for what's to come.

I think that Marquette and I believe a number of other teams in our conference can really have a great run in the tournament.

Know what? I hope we can as well.

Q. Sean, we've talked so much about Xavier's defense this year, and tonight you held them to 36 percent from the floor. That was Marquette's third lowest scoring game of the season. Did you feel like the defensive effort was good tonight?

SEAN MILLER: Man, I certainly didn't feel like we were good on defense. You're right, but -- what do you think, Colby?

COLBY JONES: No, I agree with you, Coach. I definitely don't.

SEAN MILLER: I will tell you, I thought in the second half, they missed some shots. When the game was in -- when the game was like a real game, I thought they really got what they wanted. Maybe I'll be wrong, but it's hard for me to give our defense a lot of praise right now. Just the feeling I had is they were able to get good shots, and we had a tough time really stopping their penetration.

They're an excellent team. Shaka, Big East coach of the year and what he's done in the brief time at Marquette, you know, I really admire what he's done. I really do.

They have depth, quickness, and I coached a guy named Tyler -- T.J. McConnell who is still playing in the NBA. He's in year 8. I've never seen a player in college remind me more of him than Tyler Kolek. He's hard to explain. He has a unique style. He had 20. Again, I thought he was the best player on the court tonight.

Q. Colby, what are you looking forward to about tomorrow and what's going to come next week? You're going to get to experience something you've

never gotten to experience before.

COLBY JONES: Yeah. Just I'm ready to take it all in. Like you said, I've never experienced it before. To be there and be present in the moment, that's what I'm looking forward to the most, actually hearing our name being called, being around my team, my coaches and the community. That's what I'm looking forward to the most.

Q. Colby, I assume you probably know this by now, but obviously, Selection Sunday, you find out who you're playing, where you're going. One of those cities happens to be your hometown. Has that crossed your mind, a potential homecoming for the NCAA tournament?

COLBY JONES: I've seen it on social media and stuff like that. If we get to play there, that would be an ideal situation for me. So that would be sweet.

Q. Coach, you speak a lot to Marquette's program and their accomplishments tonight. What it does mean for you and your program, being in the final day in New York for the first time since you took the job?

SEAN MILLER: Great. I've only had one shot at it. But I will tell you, though, to your point, we've only been in this championship game one other time. So it's not easy to do. And like I said, right now, it doesn't feel good because I really felt like the game -- we never were able to impose any type of threat to Marquette tonight. That's disappointing.

But being in the championship game, we feel great about. Our season, our Big East regular season. Colby's up here and he's a great guy, easy for me to talk about. Watching him blossom over the last three weeks and just add to what he already does well, I believe he's one of the best two-way players in the game in college basketball.

He's a terrific leader. And you know what, we get to next week, guys like him and have a tendency to shine. I believe that we have the makings of a special group moving forward. We just have to kind of leave this behind right now.

But we feel great about being in the championship game to answer your question. To win the last two and be here, the buildup, pregame introductions. Unfortunately, once the game started, it didn't go our way.

THE MODERATOR: Xavier, thank you.

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