

Big East Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 15, 2024

New York, New York, USA

Madison Square Garden

Marquette Golden Eagles

Coach Shaka Smart

Stevie Mitchell

Oso Ighodaro

Postgame Media Conference



Marquette 79, Providence 68

SHAKA SMART: It was a heck of an effort by Providence. I thought they played with tremendous desperation, and playing a third game in three days, they found a level of energy that allowed them to almost over take us there. I think the lead got as small as two. But Stevie and his teammates just continued to battle. I thought the trust that our guys in our way more so culturally really than anything else is why we're sitting up here right now.

We know there's a lot of things we're going to need to do better if we want to be able to win tomorrow night, but this group, we played five games now without Tyler, and really proud of the way that our guys have found ways to compete and found ways to win games.

MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Stevie, like Shaka said, the crowd was going crazy. How can you guys figuring out how to win these games down the stretch, how can that help you not only tomorrow but next week?

STEVIE MITCHELL: I think the biggest thing is like every game we come in expecting it to be a war. Like we're not expecting to blow whoever we play out. So we're expecting. I think it helps us when we're in those positions like okay we knew it was going to be this. Let's stick what we do, stick with each other and go finish the game. Even they came back we still had three. Would you rather be up three or down three. So we're still in a good position to go win the game. And I think that's the mindset we have and it's all about winning. None of us care about it being pretty. We just want to win the game.

Q. Coach, after today's game and the game earlier today with Uke and St. John's, how do you feel like your team is prepared for tomorrow and even beyond that going into the tournament?

SHAKA SMART: Well, I think we've been battle tested in a lot of ways. We've gone through a lot of adversity this year, more recently Tyler's injury. And our guys haven't blinked. You know, they stayed together. Obviously tomorrow night is going to be a heck of a challenge. We've played Uke twice, came up short both times, played them the second time without Tyler. So, you know, for us, I think the biggest thing is really doubling down on being the best version of us. I thought when we got up 17 in the first half, we got away from that. We got almost a little bit too happy, and they smacked us in the face. And then that made it a much tighter game.

Q. Marquette is now back in the conference finals for the second year in a row. What do you think about the challenge compared to last year when you won it all going into the March Madness tournaments?

STEVIE MITCHELL: I think that, I mean, last year I think, you know, what we learned was we just gotta be ourselves each and every game, and yeah, I think that was the biggest game. And then this year, I think we're just looking to do the same thing, be ourselves, stick to what we do. Obviously UConn has some good players, has a good team. So we're going to obviously watch film, learn from previous games against them, learn from this game, and then continue to move forward. But I think being the best version of ourselves is what we're really focusing on the most.

MODERATOR: We've been joined by Oso Ighodaro, and we're going all the way on the right.

Q. Shaka, can you talk about the way you defended Josh Oduro. It was one double team after another, and it seemed like you guys were determined to get the ball out of his hands?

SHAKA SMART: Well, it starts with this guy here. It's a



war down there. These games are really hard to officiate, I would imagine, because there's a whole lot of jostling for position, if you will. The way we play, we don't really let guys just go post up and play one on one. We fly around and try to get it out of there.

One of the reasons we do that is to turn people over. Oduro is a good player and a good passer, but I thought our guys had really good active hands against him and that was a big difference maker.

Q. The first time in your program in history that this team will play for back-to-back conference championships. What does it mean for you to see this program's resurgence?

SHAKA SMART: Well, it's all about these two guys and Kam Jones, Tyler Kolek, the other guys that have built this program. There's been a trust that they've had first and foremost in each other, and as we say, you know, they've been dominos to make each other better.

I have a reference for this league because I grew up watching John Thompson and the other great coaches in the Big East. And so for us to even be here in the Garden on Friday night is very, very meaningful. And for us to have the type of team and type of high character guys to put us in position to play tomorrow is awesome, and we're looking forward to making the most of it.

Q. Coach, you just made a great statement, how hard it is for the officials to officiate. Oduro picked up an offensive foul for a screen. If you watch, it was about four screens that were very similar.

SHAKA SMART: Yeah, for sure.

Q. After they made that call, they put him back in and he went out to foul him out. How important was it when he picked up a fourth foul and how was it that you guys were able to keep your composure?

SHAKA SMART: I thought the building, there was a frantic nature. I thought it affected us at times, but I thought our guys poised down the stretch in the midst of that kind of chaotic environment is a huge part of why we won.

In terms of screens, there's moving screens on every possession, both ways, both ways. And it's just kind of been decided, like hey, we're going to let most of those go. But sometimes it's so egregious that they call it. I'm glad I'm not an official. That's a hard position to be in.

And a lot of times like we're telling these guys get over the screen, defeat the screen, and it's a collision. And so the

foul sometimes could go either way. But definitely foul trouble was a factor tonight because Devin Carter had four for a while and obviously Oduro fouled out.

Q. Chase Ross got banged up early on and has been battling all season. How big was he for you tonight?

SHAKA SMART: He was huge. Yeah, he kind of retweaked one of his injuries. He's just been a warrior on the defensive end. We depend on him and Stevie to guard the other team's best offensive perimeter players. Jayden Pierre is a good player, and he's been really, really aggressive in this tournament. He was really aggressive today. He led them in shot attempts.

So we can't put Stevie on Carter and Pierre. So that Chase Ross is huge because he can go out there and guard those type of guys. And I thought Zaide Lowry gave us a real lift as well on the defensive end.

Q. For the players, and Oso in particular, your coach mentioned it was frantic, very physical. What was your assessment of how you guys kind of were able to maintain some poise as they were making that surge. And again it's kind of a frantic game at that point.

OSO IGHODARO: I thought we did a good job responding. We kind of got into the back and forth and I got out of control a little bit. But I thought we did a good job of resetting and responding and coming together as a team and just really scrapping it out.

Q. Shaka said yesterday you guys did play a lot. What did you think about the contribution you got from Zaide and BG on the bench?

OSO IGHODARO: They were huge. Zaide and Tre have been huge all season for us. They're ready to play every time they get in there. They're tough. They make winning plays.

Ben is just a dog. He's getting better and better. You can see it. Every single game he's getting better and better. His confidence is growing. He hit a big shot for us. Zaide hit big shots for us. They were huge for us.

Q. How does it feel to be in this moment?

OSO IGHODARO: It feels great. We came here to win the tournament and we're in position to do that. So we have a big task tomorrow playing UConn. They're a good team, and we're ready for it.

Q. Coach, you talked about Kolek, first tournament. First two games turnover ratio of 27-13. How big of an



emphasis have you put on ball handling, and having a big like Oso help take the pressure off?

SHAKA SMART: First of all, the first thing he said in the locker room, he grabbed me and said how about I play tomorrow.

But yeah, our guys, listen, we're not the same without him offensively. He's, in my opinion, the best floor general, the best pick and roll player, the best passer in the country. And so our guys have done a heck of a job trying to pick up the slack the best they can.

As we told them, no one is going to become him. We just gotta each do a little bit more of being the best version of ourselves. I thought tonight for whatever reason, we got a little, again, frantic or chaotic when the game got that way, and that's why we struggled a little bit offensively in the second half. But our guys are doing a great job taking care of the ball. They did yesterday and they did again today.

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