

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Western Kentucky vs Marquette

Friday, March 22, 2024

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

Marquette Golden Eagles Coach Shaka Smart

Kam Jones

Tyler Kolek

Media Conference

Marquette 87, Western Kentucky 69

SHAKA SMART: I thought Western Kentucky played with phenomenal aggressiveness in the first half. Hats off to their team, the way that they competed and battled.

Tyrone Marshall was terrific. Fortunately Tyler and I kept us afloat. We were fortunate to only be down seven at the half. These guys were able to make some plays.

But in the second half I think really to a man, our whole team ramped up our aggressiveness on the defensive end; much, much more Marquette basketball, flying around, getting our hands on the basketball. I believe we got eight kills, which is a huge goal of ours, and not easy to do.

So just grateful for the response. We talk about building championship habits. One of the most important of those is the way we respond to adversity, and the guys did a great job of that today.

Q. Tyler, I think you hit your first two shots, but how long did it take you to get your wind and feel like you were in a groove?

TYLER KOLEK: I really haven't felt out of the groove at all, even in practice. The two days that I did go full go -- it's been basketball. I've been playing this game a long time. Once I hit the floor, some obvious jitters because I haven't played since three weeks now, but I think 37 minutes, most minutes in a game, so I thought I did all right with the wind.

Q. Shaka, what did you get from Stevie Mitchell in the



second half, especially defensively?

SHAKA SMART: Energy, just phenomenal energy. Get his hands on the basketball. Those swing plays that he makes where it's a deflection or he blows up an action, and then on the offensive end, he really gave us a big lift, some offensive rebounds. He finds a way to get in there for some lay-ups, and the three at the end didn't hurt.

I think overall our whole team, Stevie, Diop, these two guys, Oso, they took it upon themselves to say, hey, that first half, it wasn't a violent enough approach from us on either end, and we were much better in the second half.

Q. What did you do differently to Tyrone? What adjustment did you make to limit him from getting shots up?

SHAKA SMART: Play harder, try harder. I just thought he was the aggressor. He was terrific with how aggressive he was in the first half.

It's as fundamental as changing the look on our face when we're guarding him. We really challenged David Joplin and all of our guys, and I thought they did a nice job on him in the second half. He's a good player, and he's a downhill driver. When he made four threes in the first half, it's like, okay, we've got to guard both. But the guys were much, much more aggressive.

Q. Kam, I think your first three hit off the side of the backboard but you finished 10 for 16. How did you just get yourself going?

KAM JONES: Well, that first shot slipped. It slipped out of my right hand, so I tried to push it but it hit the -- yeah. That's why I came down on the second possession, and I thought for sure that was going in.

I mean, Coach just did a good job of, like he said, changing the look on your face, and I feel like first half, me personally, I was a little tight. I just really, really, really wanted to win. I think that's good, but you've got to find a way to channel it and have a clear mind.



Q. Kam, when did you know that once you got Tyler back, when did it feel like the team was the old Marquette team again?

KAM JONES: I mean, the first practice he came in. He came in and just did what he does. It was nothing unusual. He came back in, got the ball, made the plays he normally makes and we just do what we do and we're glad to have him and grateful to have him back.

Q. Kam, first half you all went cold for a stretch. They rallied. How did you all kind of stay focused on getting your shots and knowing that they would fall?

KAM JONES: The reason why that was happening in the first half is because they were more aggressive than us. They were guarding us with a lot of aggression. They was pushing, grabbing, and we pretty much said at halftime -- well, Coach told us before the second half started that the more aggressive team is going to win the game, and we really wanted to come out and be aggressive starting on defense, and that opened a lot of stuff up on offense.

Q. Tyler, in the second half, early second half, Stevie had that chase-down steal, three-point play, block. I think Diop hit the game-tying layup. How much do you feed off of Stevie's energy?

TYLER KOLEK: Yeah, I tell him every time we come out it starts with him. He starts off with a deflection or a steal. His energy on the defensive end leads us to everything we want to do on the offensive end, so he's a major domino for us.

KAM JONES: Yeah, we wouldn't be here without Stu. We need what he brings to the table every night, man. Like T said, we try to make that known, like we need you to set the tone from the first tip.

Q. Tyler, I think you had 10 of your 11 assists in the second half. Was there anything schematically that was a little bit different that enabled you to be a creator and be a scorer, as well?

TYLER KOLEK: Yeah, I came out aggressive, like Ben said, hit my first two shots, but they were doing a good job keeping me out of the paint. We kind of went away from the 1-5 ball screens because they were doing a good job hedging, getting out there. We were going more me and Kam playing in a two-man game, playing on the side of the floor with a guard or wing. And we were struggling with that keeping me out of the paint, so we just changed that up, and we got to what we want to get to.

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