

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

Friday, March 22, 2024

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

**Western Kentucky Hilltoppers**

**Steve Lutz**

**Don McHenry**

**Tyrone Marshall Jr.**

Media Conference

Marquette 87, Western Kentucky 69

STEVE LUTZ: Obviously losing stinks. These guys invested a lot of time and energy. They invested their heart and soul in this. It's no fun to lose this basketball game on a stage like this, but like I told them, there are no losers when you get to this point. Everybody that is in the NCAA Tournament is good. They're special. They're a very good team. So you lost the basketball game, but hold your head up high and know that you did something special.

I meant it. These guys, they've been great all year, and we just fell a little short today to a good Marquette team.

**Q. Coach, your season ends here, but you were able to win the conference tournament, get back to the tournament for the first time in over a decade and then you're up at halftime against one of the best teams in the country. What do you take away from the way you guys have played the last two weeks and have come together?**

STEVE LUTZ: It just goes to show how hard it is to sustain things. I've always thought that we have a good team, a team that could win the league and win the tournament and go to the NCAA Tournament and win a game or two. But it just goes to show how hard it is. These guys when they're their best and feeling their best, they're a good basketball team. But the hard part is to sustain it for 30-plus games.

Luckily we got going at the right time and put ourselves in a



position to get here today.

**Q. Tyrone, a career day for you. What was going for you in that first half and then what did Marquette do in the second half to throw you off there?**

TYRONE MARSHALL JR: The first half I guess they were sagging off a little bit, so I had to show them that I could shoot the ball and I can drive, so I can make passes or I can get my teammates going. The second half I guess they just denied me. But it really didn't slow me down. I was still trying to get my teammates going with shots, like Don, just trying to get him back in the game with me and stuff.

**Q. Coach Lutz, first half you guys did a pretty good job against them on the three-point line. Second half they started to connect. Was that something that they adjusted to or what was going on that allowed them to be more successful?**

STEVE LUTZ: Well, I thought that our defense was better probably from the eight-minute mark, nine-minute mark on from the first half. I thought we defended better. I'll have to watch the tape, but they obviously missed some shots, but we rebounded those shots and were able to convert in transition.

In the second half and during that time span, we didn't turn the ball over. Obviously to open up the second half, we turned the ball over too much, and we gave them some open looks where we just weren't connected enough defensively with our communication and those sorts of things, and they got going, and they're a good basketball team. When they get going, they're hard to stop.

Give them credit, give their staff credit for whatever adjustments they made at halftime, but in reality, I just felt like defensively we weren't nearly as sound to start the second half, and I think we turned it over three of the first five possessions or four of the first five possessions in the second half, and you can't do that against a No. 2 seed in the NCAA Tournament. You just can't.

**Q. To either one of the players, Coach was talking**



**about the second half, starting the second half. Let's go back to the end of the first half, 14-2 run, shots were just dropping on both sides but more for you guys. Talk about the excitement and how the game was flowing leading into that seven-point lead at halftime.**

DON McHENRY: Yeah, it was fun going on that run. We knew -- I noticed most of the time we finish halves pretty well, and in the beginning we kind of started off, we didn't make a lot of shots, so I knew it was going to come, shots were going to fall, and it was good to see them going on and going on a run, taking us to the halftime break.

**Q. For Don, what kind of things did you all see from Kam Jones maybe that didn't initially show up on the scouting report that kind of made the difference?**

DON McHENRY: I don't know. We knew like what he did well and he was a good player. It was just a lot of -- like in the rotations and getting the rotations too much and they're kicking it and getting one more pass, and he got some pretty good looks. A few offensive rebounds got kicked back out and some things like that, and they had a lot of good fast-break opportunities, they had more fast-break points than we did. I think he just had some pretty good looks.

I think we knew he was a good player and what he was capable of.

**Q. Coach, this is a pretty good first season for you at Western Kentucky. How are you going into the off-season and building off this momentum going into next year?**

STEVE LUTZ: That's a hard question to answer about 10 minutes after we just got our butts beat. You know, these days you just have to figure out what you have returning on your roster. We obviously have some guys that have graduated and can turn pro, some guys that have another year of eligibility. So we've got to sit down with families and discuss a plan moving forward and see what they want to do. Obviously we'll support them in whatever fashion that is best for them.

But once we figure out who's staying and who's going, then you get back to recruiting, and you have to do it all over again. That's just the way this process works nowadays.

We're going to enjoy it here for a little bit, but then we'll be back to reality here very shortly.

**Q. For Don, what has this experience been like, and how has this helped you going forward?**

DON McHENRY: This experience has just been real good. Like just getting more experience and playing at this level, just having fun, I feel like it helped me get better, like build good relationships with my teammates and coaches and stuff like that, and I think it helped me for sure in the long run to be the pro that I'm trying to be.

**Q. Tyrone, you're one of the few returners from last year's team to this year's team with the new coaching regime. Talk about how this year transition has been for you going from last year to this year and this team making the tournament for the first time in over a decade.**

TYRONE MARSHALL JR: It was very hard to adjust for a little bit, coming from Coach Stansbury to Coach Lutz because I was in the process of hitting the portal until me and Lutz had sat down and had a talk and he told me, I'm going to make you a better player, and I believed in him, and he did. So I thank him for that, and I thank my teammates, too, because they kept me going. Some days that I wanted to give up, they had my back.

I'm just really grateful to be here. That's all I've got to say.

**Q. Steve, I wanted to ask you about the pacing of this game. It seemed to favor you guys at least in the first half. Just looking at three-pointers, I think you guys were 50 percent in the first half. Do you feel like you rushed them a little bit in the second half?**

STEVE LUTZ: No, I don't think that we played good enough defense to transition into offense and get some easy ones. I thought that Marquette was very sound defensively in the second half. They probably got into us a little bit more and were more aggressive.

Again, I'll watch the film, but I would say just going off of the game, we had -- shoot, we had 12 assists on 17 made baskets at halftime, and we finished the game with 17 assists on 28 made baskets. The percentages, those numbers are skewed. So I don't think we probably shared the ball nearly as well as we did in the first half, and again, just give Marquette credit because they did a much more job defensively in the second half.

**Q. I just have a question for you. Brandon looked to be playing less than his average amount of minutes but he also had less than his average amount of statistics. Was that giving him less minutes because of his production or was that a game plan coming in?**

STEVE LUTZ: You've covered us long enough to know that the guys who are playing well and playing hard are



going to play. It's not to say that Brandon didn't want to play well and didn't try, but for whatever reason it probably wasn't his best outing. It's a shame because I feel bad for him coming back to Indianapolis in front of a lot of friends and family and fans.

I wanted -- we all wanted him to do well. We needed him to probably do well to win. We were going to need all hands on deck to play well today to win this game. It stinks for him because he's worked really hard and he cares a lot. But the fact of the matter is it's my job to figure out a way to win the game and play the guys that are going to help us win the game on that particular day.

Now, with that being said, Brandon helped us get here in Huntsville and was a very good player for us all year long. Like I say, it just wasn't his day, but that shouldn't diminish his career by any means.

**Q. Just going back to two years before this, you came from Texas A&M Corpus Christi, take those teams to the tournament. First year at Western Kentucky you do what hasn't been done in a long time. Talk about how special that's been for you.**

STEVE LUTZ: Yeah, I told these guys, obviously I've been absolutely blessed to have been to a bunch of tournaments at Creighton and Purdue and Corpus Christi and now here.

This one is different, obviously, and I told these guys this the other day because I asked them all what's the coolest thing that's happened since we made the NCAA Tournament? And like what's something that you'll never forget? And for me, being here this year without my family was really, really hard. These guys were all I had. Between them and the staff, that's all I had.

There were some people within town to tried to take care of me and had me over for dinner, whatever, but there's a lot of lonely days. These guys poured their heart and soul into it. I poured my heart and soul into it. When you do that and you get rewarded for it, there's no better feeling in the world.

That's why I keep telling them -- again, there's no losers today. We just lost the basketball game. These guys are winners, and they're going to be great husbands and fathers and productive members in the community as they grow older.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports.

