

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Colorado vs Marquette

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

Marquette Golden Eagles

Shaka Smart

Stevie Mitchell

David Joplin

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll get started with questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Stevie, two years ago guards were all freshmen, had a rough first half on UNC and kind of collapsed. It looked like there was no panic yesterday, even with the turnovers in the first half, second half 15 assists, two turnovers for the team. Did the confidence ever wane a little when they were getting to you in the first half?

STEVIE MITCHELL: I think throughout the past two years we've had a lot of experience in those moments against good teams like Western Kentucky was, so just being able to pull from those experiences and know that we can still win the game if we focus on doing what we do and focus on each other and bring our own energy.

So I think just having those chips in our pocket, like we like to say, just helps us remain calm, but just still having the urgency to step it up.

Q. Stevie, your wrist is taped up, your shoulder is wrapped up. How do you find the right mentality between being aggressive and not just being totally reckless with your body?

STEVIE MITCHELL: How I play, I'm going to, you know, play kind of reckless regardless. For me, I feel like it's just the pain in the locker room after we lost to UConn the biggest tournament, the pain in the locker room last year we lost to Michigan State. That's worse than any bumps or bruises that anybody's dealing with.



So just kind of going off that and having that mindset, just going to every game and just expecting the expected, knowing that I'm not a hundred percent, but nobody's a hundred percent, and just being aware of that, acknowledging it, and then just going out there and just giving it all I got.

Q. Playing against another Milwaukee native, is it a certain level of respect or pride that you have, especially outperforming them, and is that something you consider when you see other people from Wisconsin in this tournament?

DAVID JOPLIN: Yeah, you definitely want to outperform them. But that's just anybody you're going up against, but especially someone from back home. You definitely want to have those bragging rights, you definitely want to go out there and show everybody what's up. But like I said, that's against any team. So it's definitely cool playing against other guys from Milwaukee, but we just want to win, regardless.

Q. What have you learned about Colorado and what kind of sticks out to you about them in the way they play?

DAVID JOPLIN: They're a really good team. Obviously, every team in the tournament now is really good at this point in the season. They are having a great size for their position. They're all pretty skilled. They don't have a weak link. They all can shoot, put the ball on the floor, and pass. Like any game here, it's going to take our best effort to beat 'em.

Q. Stevie, curious looking back at last year and the goals that you wanted to achieve last year, and now what you all know you want to achieve this year, always looking forward to March, that was always the end of the road here, and now you're one win away from the Sweet 16. What is your guys' mentality going into this game and being so close there to getting to the second week into the NCAA tournament?

STEVIE MITCHELL: Our mentality is just to continue -- same as what it was coming in, just stay in the moment,



just enjoy the moment, have fun, just bring our energy, and that will all lead to us being our best us, in which we feel like our best us can give us a good shot to compete with and beat anybody. That's our main focus, is focus on what we do best and the things we can control to put ourselves in the best position possible to win.

Q. Stevie, yesterday Colorado scored 102 points, shot 63 percent from the field. How important is your defense going to be going into tomorrow's game?

STEVIE MITCHELL: Yeah, it's definitely going to be huge. Like Jop said, they all got -- I mean, all the guys on their team can go offensively, they're all skilled, they can all shoot, they can all drive, they can all pass. So just first things first, acknowledging that and just knowing it's going to take each and every one of us to guard the ball as five and just step up to that challenge. We've been stepping up to challenges all year, so I think this is another one that's going to be fun and that's what March Madness is for, to compete against the best.

Q. Stevie, that high-energy style that you play with, where does that come from for you? Where did you develop that?

STEVIE MITCHELL: I would just say just from my desire to win. I've just always been super competitive when I was younger. Like, a loss would result in tears, temper tantrums. So I've been able to harness that now, but yeah, just my desire to win and just the passion I have playing for my teammates and playing for my coaches and then just everything's better when you win. So every game I go into I want to just give my best effort and just help my teammates energy-wise, whatever I can do. It doesn't have to be anything special. It can just be whatever it takes to win.

Q. David, curious, you mentioned the size before of Colorado, but Eddie Lampkin is massive inside. Just curious what you guys have talked about with him and you personally just ahead of that matchup tomorrow.

DAVID JOPLIN: He's a big dude. He does do good work down there and he's impressive when he's around the basket. But even more so, he's a really good passer, so we got to try to limit that as well. But we're still going to play our normal defense and just try to disrupt them, make them uncomfortable. But he's a good player.

Q. David, looking at yesterday's tape from yesterday's game, what did you all kind of do differently or you feel like you did in the second half that you feel like you can kind of carry forward that not only changed the momentum of the game yesterday, but something you

can build on, especially now with Tyler back?

DAVID JOPLIN: I think in the second half, we were the aggressors. I think in the first half, towards the end of the first half, last 10 minutes, they were kind of aggressors, Western Kentucky was, and they were kind of doing what they wanted. Some guys on their team was having a game. So second half we wanted to shut all that off and just be the aggressor. So that was our emphasis, to come out in the second half, at the beginning of the second half in the first round and just try to disrupt 'em, pressure up on 'em, make it difficult for 'em.

Q. What's it going to take to stop KJ Simpson late in games for you guys?

STEVIE MITCHELL: I think just similar to what we do with every team, just guarding the ball as five. He's a good player. Obviously he made huge plays down the stretch last night, so we're not going to hold him scoreless, but we can just do our best to make things tough on 'em and make 'em earn everything.

But down the stretch, I think just stick with our rules, stick with what we do, and don't get away from that. If he hits a couple shots, if he has a couple nice plays, just trusting what we do.

DAVID JOPLIN: Trusting what we do. We know obviously Stevie's going to be guarding him, but it's five guys guard the ball at once. Obviously he's a good player and obviously we like Stevie's matchup, so we're going to see what happens. He's been really good down the stretch in the first two games that they had and we obviously have been scouting that as well. But just like Stevie said, just make him uncomfortable.

Q. Coach Smart has talked about his ways to celebrate moments from each game, his poker chips and other things like that. What was the biggest takeaway from last night's game, either from Coach Smart or in your guys' opinion?

STEVIE MITCHELL: I think the biggest takeaway was we got to just leave with our energy. We can't wait for shots to go in or for us to go on a run to have energy. I think our energy is our precursor to everything we do. So if we bring that, regardless of circumstances, then it enables us to be our best offensively and defensively.

DAVID JOPLIN: I think the biggest things we can take away from yesterday's game is that it's a full 40-minute game. I think we played good in stretches of that game, and I think just continuing to build up to playing good for the whole 40 minutes I think will get us closer to our best.

And obviously that's been our theme for the whole tournament is to be our best us.

Q. You had a double double yesterday. I know Shaka's challenged you on the boards a couple times this season, but what flipped for you yesterday? How did you turn on that switch yesterday?

DAVID JOPLIN: Honestly, I didn't like how I played in the first half. I thought I was just giving up too many buckets. I thought some of the schemes I messed up, I just wanted to make up for it more, so just, more than anything, just trying to do whatever it takes. We came in second half down seven, so whatever I could do to impact that I tried to do.

Q. David, last year we really thought of you as kind of all offense, Stevie as all defense. Can you talk about this year how you've made great defensive plays, you're guarding tough guys. Stevie has 16 points in the game including probably a better three-pointer than you've ever hit at the end, couldn't believe that horse shot. Can you talk about how you just both balanced out and you both -- on both ends of the court now?

DAVID JOPLIN: We got to keep working on our games individually. So, obviously, offseason is a big thing, and then another thing is us telling each other what we need from each other. So they needed me to become more of a defender, a better defender, obviously, and I took on that challenge. Me personally, I feel like Stevie's always been nice on offense. I think just getting older, getting more opportunities, he's able to show how good he is.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Guys, thank you. Coach Smart will be here momentarily.

(Pause.)

THE MODERATOR: We'll have you make an opening statement and then go to questions.

SHAKA SMART: It's great to be back. We're excited about this game tomorrow, you know, for our guys. Obviously we played much better in the second half yesterday than we did in the first half. I think there were a few different factors that went into play. Number one, some NCAA tournament jitters. I don't think it ever changes. No matter how many years you coach or play in the NCAA tournament, it feels a little bit different when you get to that first game.

Obviously Tyler's return. I thought he played really, really well. I thought he did a great job in both halves. But in the second half, our guys did a better job playing off of him and

utilizing all the things that he does so well.

And then defense. Most importantly I thought in the first half, we didn't have the level of violence that we need on the defensive end and Western Kentucky was able to really be the aggressors. Second half we were much of better. How that relates to tomorrow, we don't want to wait until halftime to be the best us. Colorado's got a terrific team. Coach Boyle's done an awesome job for a long time there. They've got a veteran group plus Cody Williams. Probably the best young player in the country. So it's going to be a heck of a challenge and an exciting game.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Stevie takes so much contact out on the court. I know you don't want to limit his aggressiveness, but as a coach, how do you approach just that balance between aggressiveness and concern for his physical well being?

SHAKA SMART: That's a good question. I think that applies to anybody that's still playing right now, but certainly someone that plays with reckless abandon like Stevie does. He's got a variety of bumps and bruises, like most players do when you get to mid to late March.

I think the biggest thing is awareness on his part and on my part and on our part of how he's feeling and where he is. And when I say awareness, also being present in the moment because that gives you the best opportunity to evade bad things happening to your body. That might be a different answer than you were expecting, but I think that Stevie knows as well as anyone how to get through little spaces on the floor. Because he plays like a bowling ball, sometimes he is going to be involved in collisions. But he's one of the toughest guys I've ever been around.

Q. A little bit of a general existential question. Why do good shooters need to get up so many shots to still be good shooters? Like, if you're already good at it, why do you need to shoot 500 times a day?

SHAKA SMART: Well, I think shooting is so mental. Even the best shooters miss the majority of their shots from outside, three-point shots, and so -- it's not exactly the same, but it's kind of like baseball where, I mean, if you can get on base one out of three times, then you're a phenomenal hitter. Well, if you can make 4-10 from outside, you're a phenomenal shooter.

But those other six can wreak havoc on your mind or just one can. So in the game, unless you're the guy that was 10-20 the other day, Gohlke from Oakland, you're not going to get that big of a sample size. And probably in his

case, he knows, I got another one coming the next possession, but most guys are not like that, so one or two misses can play with you mentally.

So I think what the reps do is it just -- it's like deposits in the bank and guys feeling good about themselves. Shooters tend to be superstitious. Maybe they would call it routine-oriented, but there's definitely a superstition there. Tyler's like that, Cam is like that. If you ask Cam Jones, why did you miss, he'll say it slipped. If you ask him, did you think that was a good shot, he'll always say, yeah, I mean, I thought I was going to make it. But you need some of that. I think the work that guys put in gives them the confidence that they need.

Q. You talked about jitters. Two years ago you had three freshmen guards, panicked against UNC, it looked like you fell apart. Yesterday it looked to me like they had resolve. Can you talk about the difference. And second part of the question is Jay Wright talked about how that easy first win can sink you in the second round. Some advantage to going through that tough first half?

SHAKA SMART: Yeah, we definitely have some guys on our team that have grown up over the last few years and, you know, I guess I'm an old fashioned guy. I still enjoy getting a chance to coach guys for multiple years, and being able to be with this group of guys that are in our junior and senior classes, Tyler Kolek, Oso Ighodaro, Stevie Mitchell, David Joplin, Cam Jones, also Cam Brown and RJ Walson, our two walk-ons in that junior class, those guys are like family. They know each other so well, they know me so well and, yeah, we've come a long way from that game. That was a rough one.

In terms of the first game, yeah, I think it can go a lot of different ways. Certainly if there was ever any thought that we didn't need to be our best to advance in the NCAA tournament, you know, hopefully, that's gone after that first half yesterday. I do think humility is always going to be part of the recipe for winning, but at the same time, we got up close and personal experience with UConn this year and I think that they, of any team that I've seen maybe since Baylor a few years ago when they won it, strike an incredible balance of confidence and humility.

Q. Obviously KJ Simpson made that big shot yesterday, sort of his NCAA moment. Is there a feeling amongst your guys that you don't want to be on the end of another one of that kind of moment, especially from him, their best player?

SHAKA SMART: We don't really look at it like that. That's what we call an avoidance goal. We try to play through

approach goals, going after something. Simpson's an awesome player. You certainly need to make him miss, to your point, whether it's the end of the game or the start of the game or any time in between. But easier said than done. I think Colorado has some veteran players that are very grizzled and tough and understand how to create shots, and then they also have terrific skill. Normally in basketball when a player shoots over 50 percent from the field and he shoots 40 percent or better from three, that's a really good offensive player. That's them, almost, as a team. I mean, that's pretty daunting to deal with. That's probably why they scored over a hundred points yesterday.

Q. When you look at Colorado's size, what kind of problem does that entail and how much will that play into the matchup tomorrow, just the size that they present?

SHAKA SMART: Well, we're used to playing against teams that are bigger than us, so on one hand, it's really nothing new for our guys, but on the other hand, absolutely. I mean, in the game of basketball positional size is a real factor. Really other than at the, I guess, 5 spot, even though Oso's a point, point 0, we call him, for us. Other than that position, they're bigger than us, and even at that spot, they're -- Lumpkin is really strong. But my college coach always used to say, it's too late to cancel, so we're going to play the game.

Q. You mentioned in your opening statement that Cody Williams is maybe one of the best young players in the country. What makes you say that about him and how maybe difficult is it to game plan for him when his minutes have kind of been up and down over the last few games getting back from the ankle injury?

SHAKA SMART: Well, he's a ridiculous talent, that's for sure. Let's be honest, in our sport, that's how young players are evaluated, by the talent that kind of jumps off the screen. But he also appears to be a very high-character guy who cares about winning, cares about his teammates. It seems like he's very, very coachable. The fact that he's coming off the bench right now when he started the majority of games before he got hurt says a lot about who he is and the fact that he's about the team and about winning.

How you game plan for him, I mean, you do your best, the same way you game plan for any other good player. I don't think it's necessarily one specific thing. We're going to need to guard the basketball. He's someone that when he gets the basketball, he's really good at making things happen.

Q. How do you think Tyler and Cam have managed to



play so well off each other and in your time at Marquette, how has that relationship between the two of them grown?

SHAKA SMART: They have a very high level of mutual respect for one another, and I think anytime that there's respect plus a genuine care and concern for the other player as a person, then you have something really, really powerful. All of our guys have a genuine care and concern for one another, but Cam and Tyler -- and I would put maybe a couple three other guys on our team in this category, they look at each other like -- they hold each other in a very high regard as players.

So because of that, Cam wants to bring the best out of Tyler and Tyler wants to bring the best out of Cam. They both know that they need the other. Then Oso's the guy that, from a connectivity standpoint, keeps everyone together. He's the best big brother that I've ever coached on any team. He can't do a lot of the things offensively that Cam and Tyler can do in terms of, you know, shooting the ball and the craziness that they do with the ball, but he has his own unique skill set and he wants to see those guys be their best. When those three guys are playing really well together, I like our chances.

Q. You mentioned KJ Simpson. Obviously you guys are no stranger to elite point guard play playing in the Big East with Tyler and the other guys that you guys have to go against. Is there anybody that he reminds you of that you've faced this season, and if not, what makes him so unique as a player?

SHAKA SMART: I think every guard is just a little bit different from the others. We've played against so many good ones. KJ Simpson, a few things, number one, his poise. It doesn't seem like he gets rattled very often, if ever. He has a really good way about him where you can tell he's confident, but he's not really caught up in anything extracurricular. He's just out there playing and trying to make his team win. I think he has a toughness about him. Just starting to get to know Colorado's team since they won yesterday, he seems to be one of the toughness leaders on their team because he's older.

Then he's got a very high IQ for the game. So just understanding angles, understanding where to go on the floor, we've got to do a good job making sure we try to keep him out of the paint because even though he's a real threat outside, man, as a team, they just do incredible damage around the basket. Even though he's the smallest guy out there for them, he's one of the leaders with that.

Q. Yesterday early in the second half Stevie had a sequence where he had a chase-down steal and came

back the other way for an and one layup, and from there the rest of the way you all outscored Western Kentucky 44-21 to really put the game away. It felt like that was a turning point in the game. Can you just speak to Stevie's energy that he brings to this team and how important he is, even though he scored 16 points, the blocks and its steals and everything else he did yesterday really turned the game around.

SHAKA SMART: You can't quantify what he brings. We try to quantify it. We keep track of EGBs, we keep track of deflections, other energy stats, and he always grades out off the charts in that stuff. But you can't really put a point total that comes out of his energy, but it is high if you could. We always tell our guys being the first team ready is worth about four, six, eight points in the game. Well Stevie Mitchell's energy alone is worth a lot of points. But believe it or not, it's not something that just happens. He has to make it happen. It takes incredible will and focus, dedication, to winning on his part.

So I don't ever want to take that for granted and I also don't want anyone to think that he's like some machine that once you hit on, he just does that. He's a human being and for him to will himself to be that type of ball of fire energy-wise is impressive.

Q. How would you describe or characterize Tyler's vision or feel for offensive flow?

SHAKA SMART: Oh, it's crazy. Yeah, I'm no expert on the next level, but I think he'll play in the NBA because of it because he just -- he has a real sense for where everyone is, including his four teammates and the five defensive players on the other team, and he has this uncanny ability to time what he wants to do around what everyone else is doing or is about to do. Some of the time he's guessing, but he guesses really, really well. That's something that you can't really teach or replicate.

It's interesting, his first year I thought he was by far the best offensive player on our team. A lot of the people that maybe covered our program or supported our program from a fan standpoint didn't think he had the greatest year. I just didn't really understand that. I guess it was based on shooting. He didn't shoot the ball particularly well from outside. But I knew that that would come because he's always been a great shooter in practice and in drills. He just had to adjust to striking a balance between distributing and scoring. So now that he's able to do both it's really impressive.

Q. This is more of a wellness question. With the awareness now about mental health and such, how do you help your players or what kind of things do you



help encourage your players to do to kind of strike that balance between school and athletics and really kind of staying on an even-keel? Do you have any kind of activities or anything for them that you tell 'em say, look, do what do you?

SHAKA SMART: That's everything. I mean, it's not about activities or maybe one-off events. That's every day. If their mental health and they're feeling good about themselves, the rest of the stuff takes care of itself. It really does. I think we overrate ourselves as coaches in terms of, like, you know, we're going to diagram this great play or institute this terrific defense. Our jobs in a lot of ways come down to helping these guys accept who they are, where they are, what they're doing, and this is amidst very, very challenging circumstances.

I mean, how many people in here have advanced as a player in the NCAA tournament? I haven't. What these guys are doing sometimes looks easy, but they care about it -- and I'm not just talking about our team, as much or more than anyone else who is following the game, writing about the game, tweeting about the game, betting on the game, and they put everything they have into it. So over the summer, we went to Italy. We took our guys to the Roman Coliseum. And all year long we've been using the analogy that, hey, you guys are gladiators. Everybody else is the crowd. And when you're trying to be a gladiator and do something really, really hard, then you're absolutely right, mental health is -- it's the key. I think remembering that they're human beings with human emotions, human frailties, weaknesses, mistakes that we all make at times is a big step. And then the number one word I try to help 'em with is acceptance, just acceptance of what is.

That's what our guys did at halftime yesterday. They accepted the fact that we're down seven right now and we've not played our best, and there's a lot of people in this room that need to ramp it up, go harder, you know, dot, dot, dot, and that's what's going to allow us to win. And because our guys have incredible character, that's what they did.

When you get in these moments, though, there's 32 teams left still playing in college basketball, the other team's going to try to do the same thing.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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