

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

Sunday, March 24, 2024

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

Marquette Golden Eagles

Chaka Smart

Chase Ross

Tyler Kolek

Media Conference



of the game? There was a time-out at three minutes and the score was 74-74. Walk us through what the conversation was.

SHAKA SMART: Yes. I called time-out because we didn't have Kam Jones in the game. The whole game he was in foul trouble. I told him, man, you're too valuable to take a couple of those fouls you did. But he's just out there competing. We were able to get him back in the game.

The guys did a good job executing. I thought either we got a good look on pretty much every possession, or there was a good opportunity and the ball either got hit out of our hands or something happened.

But for the most part, I thought the guys really executed offensively throughout the game, and then on the defensive end, again, we got just enough stops, just enough rebounds. Our guys did a great job at the end there when they called time-out when we were up two, getting a stop, and then we were able to make free throws, get the ball inbounds.

It was a little hairy there when they had a bunch of fouls to give. We knew they were going to be aggressive, but the guys got the ball inbounds and were strong with the ball.

Q. Tyler, on the baseline drive that wound up with you taking the half hook over Lampkin, are you thinking at that point exactly what you're going to do, or are you looking to see how they react to you and taking whatever the defense provides?

TYLER KOLEK: Yeah, the whole time they've been telling me to keep my dribble along the baseline. I was kind of getting stuck down there a little bit. Not so much today but a lot of times yesterday, kind of keep going around, and we work on that. We call it our Nash dribble.

Big fella switched and I was getting to my spot and just floated it up.

Q. Chase, on some of those defensive plays, the hustle plays, particularly those two blocks, though, Cody Williams might be the No. 1 pick in the NBA

Marquette 81, Colorado 77

SHAKA SMART: I'm just so grateful for our guys, the way they hung in there. Colorado made a heck of a run. That's about as good of a 10 seed as I've ever seen in my life. We started watching tape a couple days ago, and we said, who made these guys a 10 seed? No disrespect to anyone.

Man, they're a talented, talented team, and they got going in the second half. But our guys never blinked, never wavered. These two did a phenomenal job leading the way. We made some mistakes, but we kept belief in each other. We stayed connected.

Then I thought down the stretch we got enough defensive stops to win the game. It certainly wasn't our best defensive half, but the activity that our guys had throughout the game was disruptive enough, and then two huge, huge free throws by David Joplin.

Q. Tyler, I'm sure you've heard since you got to Marquette that Marquette hadn't been to the Sweet 16 since 2013. What's it mean to you that this group is the one that finally broke through?

TYLER KOLEK: Yeah, even for this group we feel like it's been a long time coming. That first year didn't go how we wanted. Second year certainly didn't go how we wanted, and then coming back this year we had a vengeance. I told the guys before the game, this moment has been in our nightmares and we're not running from it anymore.

Q. Can you just walk us through the last three minutes



Draft. You spiked that blocked shot and looked pretty happy about it. As good as they were on offense, how key was that play and just your hustle?

CHASE ROSS: I take pride in my defense. When I get in, I'm not really looking for the offense, I just want to have contagious energy on defense to get these guys energy on offense, and having plays like that, steals, blocks, all that, just get out and run.

Q. Chase, TK found you for that three that broke the tie after that time-out play. After not scoring in the first round, what gave you the confidence to take that shot?

CHASE ROSS: Coach always preaches, eff-it shooting, so when I got it, it was eff it, and it went in.

Q. Shaka, after you got through the handshake line, some real jubilation from you. What was going through your mind at that moment?

SHAKA SMART: I'm grateful for our fans. One of the things about Marquette is there's a high standard here. The games, and particularly this time of year, are so incredibly meaningful to the folks that have followed our program for so long. Going back many, many coaches -- I got a text today from Mike Deane wishing me luck, and it just kind of made me think of all the coaches and players that have come before us to give us the opportunity to sit up here.

Then we've been through a lot as a group together, really 90 some percent of the things we've been through have been very positive, but you tend to remember some of the hard times, as well: The loss to Michigan State, Tyler's injury, Chase was banged up this year all year long, Sean Jones tearing his ACL. We've had some adversity. But guys have never wavered in terms of their belief in our playing and our way, and they stayed connected with one another.

Relationships is our number one advantage, and that's just something that we believe in, and I think it won us the game today.

Q. Tyler, I think there was a stretch there in the second half, especially when Colorado took the lead, where I think you assisted or scored on every bucket. Did you purposely put everything on your shoulders and want everything to run through you at the end there?

TYLER KOLEK: I mean, a lot of the game, the ball is in my hands, so that could happen with any given stretch. Kam happened to be out, another one of our shot creators, play

creators for other guys, so the ball was in my hands maybe a little bit more.

But guys do a great job spacing off me, playing off me, and I find them in their spots, and they make the plays. So I'm grateful for them.

Q. Shaka, you cut the rotation down to seven guys, guys that have been here the last couple seasons. What's it mean to you that those are the guys that got you there?

SHAKA SMART: Yeah, it wasn't even a decision necessarily before the game. Just the way the first half was going, I thought these guys and the five other guys that were in had a good flow about them. These media time-outs are so incredibly long. The NCAA has got to pay the bills.

Really by the end of those and these guys can speak to it more than me, but they're ready to go.

But I told Tre and Zaide in the locker room, you guys are a huge part of us getting here, and we're going to need you in the next game.

So it's kind of a game-by-game thing, but didn't want to go too long without having him in the game. Km had some foul trouble. Oso, it wasn't his best day, but I thought he hung in there, and our guys just kept batting.

Chase and Stevie, we absolutely needed to have in there for their defense, and I thought David Joplin, he played through approach goals this whole game. He had a look in his eye of going to attack. That was huge for us.

Q. Tyler, you had 11 assists last game and 11 today. What do you think that says about you and your team's focus on sharing the basketball?

TYLER KOLEK: Yeah, all year I've been sharing the ball like that. I think I lead the country in assists, so it's not really anything new. Guys are making shots, making plays when I give them the ball, and I'm grateful for them.

Q. Tyler, for you, I've never seen this team this intense in three games. Guys almost weren't smiling when they hit three-pointers. Was that just so focused on the next play no matter what good had just happened in?

TYLER KOLEK: We know what's at stake. This isn't a time to be joking around. I'm a serious guy as it is. I like to have fun, but when it comes to crunch time, you've got to be serious. It's win or go home. That's all it is. If I'm joking

around out there after we make a shot, messing around, they'll come down -- I think Chase celebrated after he won one three, they came down in transition. He knows better than that. It's like, young guy, you've got to reel him in a little bit.

It's just trying to get my mindset off to the team, and I think everybody does a great job of adopting that. And really credit to Kam Jones and his demeanor is really free flowing, kind of all over the place. But these past, I don't know what it's been, two months, he's been laser focused on what he really needs to do, and that's why he's been playing so well.

Q. During the time you were sitting out, was there any part of you that was worried you would not get this chance to get out there and take your team to the Sweet 16?

TYLER KOLEK: No, I didn't think there was any chance at all. I would have battled through -- I'm not really feeling anything when I'm playing right now, which is a good thing, knock on wood. But even if I was, I'd still be playing through it. That's just the nature of who I am.

I think originally they said three- to four-week injury, and the three weeks would have brought us right up to the first week of the NCAA Tournament. Me personally, I felt like I was ready to go the week before that, the championship game of the Big East, but obviously being that early, it probably wasn't smart to go out there. The risk of reinjury was greater than the reward of winning that tournament. We had our mindset on March Madness.

That's why I never really spiraled down mentally, just because I knew I was coming back, and I knew what I was playing for.

Q. Coach, you talked about relationships. In the ever-changing environment of collegiate athletics and the transfer portal and people not really being connected to anything, why do you feel like Marquette is so different and why are these relationships so strong?

SHAKA SMART: Well, number one, anyone that's part of our program has been hand selected because they value relationships. From the jump, we have a group of players and coaches that care about the people around them, and it's important to them.

We don't go about things in a transaction at manner. Not saying that anyone else does. But for us, we're old fashioned. We still enjoy getting to know guys during the recruiting process, building a relationship with them and

their families.

These guys have families that care about these games every bit as much as they do, and we can't expect our players to have relationships with each other if we don't have relationships with their families, with them.

I believe it goes into winning. I learned that as an assistant coach. If you've got a bunch of guys out there for themselves, you're going to have a ceiling on how good you can be. But if you have guys that are willing to run through a wall for each other, then you can get past hard like we did today and go do something special.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports.

