

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - New Mexico vs Marquette

Friday, March 21, 2025

Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Rocket Arena

## Marquette Golden Eagles

**Shaka Smart**

**David Joplin**

**Kam Jones**

Media Conference



New Mexico 75, Marquette 66

SHAKA SMART: Congrats to New Mexico, Coach Pitino. I thought they won the battle of poise. They were the more poised team over the majority of the game. And then obviously, they scored way more around the basket than we did and, in the paint, made better decisions in there. Because of that, got to the foul line more. When we took the lead in the second half, three-point lead with about 12 to go, we could really feel a level of momentum that we had going, but we just weren't able to win that next swing minute, which matters so much, and just some mistakes that cost us on both ends of the floor.

**Q. The other senior a little. He's obviously playing hurt. Another great defensive game, but y'all lost the steal battle 7-8, which is very unusual. I wondered if him having to play through so much pain, you guys obviously lit it up with 43 points, but was there a difference late in the year with not getting the same steals and fast breaks you had early?**

DAVID JOPLIN: There's no excuses. I'm in the tournament. They had guys that made plays. They were able to get deflections that were costly for us. Yeah, they made plays.

**Q. Kam, I know this isn't the ending that you envisioned, but how do you weigh all the success you've had over the four seasons against maybe the struggles you've had over the last couple months as a team?**

KAM JONES: This has been a lot of fun wearing this

uniform, being with these guys every day, spending time with these guys. No other group I'd rather play with.

I love these guys to death, and I hate it ended this way.

**Q. When you think about everything you've accomplished, the Big East championships, all the success, how do you feel about kind of the state of the program? Although you guys are leaving it now, where you guys kind of left it as players in your four years here.**

DAVID JOPLIN: You know, unfortunately for our era, we weren't able to win our last game, but just being with these guys, this group that we have now over the past couple months with the new freshmen coming in, we've got the utmost confidence in them and their ability to grow just like we grew when we were that age. To see them guys work every day, seeing how much they care, seeing how much we care about each other and ourselves, I'm super excited for the progress that we make as a group. Got so many young guys that are hungry, and just got to learn and develop, and they're going to be some killers. I'm excited for them.

**Q. David, over the past four years getting to play in front of your hometown, every night family being so close and everything, what are you going to remember about playing basketball at Marquette?**

DAVID JOPLIN: Man, I mean, it was a blessing being able to play in front of my family. They've been to every game, to play in front of my hometown. But things I'm going to miss the most is off-the-court stuff. Yeah, we don't have practice tomorrow. There's not going to be no more locker room talk. But the best moments that we have are just when we're together, just at the dorm, at our apartment hanging out, fooling around, being us, being kids, doing what we love, playing basketball every day. Those things I'm going to remember for the rest of my life. I've built relationships with these guys I'm going to have for the rest of my life.

**Q. Shaka, this team was so good in the non-conference. What do you put your finger on with the inconsistencies of this team after February 1st?**



SHAKA SMART: I think that's a question that we'll be thinking about a lot over these next several weeks and months. Obviously, we've been thinking about that. As a coach, it's my job to help our guys be our best. It's such a fine line between caring as much as our guys do but then also letting go of certain things outside of your control, including the result, because if we could control the result every time, it would be a win, and going after it. I think we did a better job of that, to answer your question, earlier in the year on average than we did later in the year. It's a generalization. We certainly had our moments. We certainly had our stretches.

But a game like tonight, not enough poise to win this game and then not enough of an ability to say, you know what, you guys are really good getting in the paint. We're not going to let you in there.

It's easier said than done, but you've got to give New Mexico a lot of credit.

**Q. It seems like a two-point offense is actually one of the staples of your team this year. I think you went 1 and 3 when you shot below 45 percent from inside the arc. Tonight, 44.8. What do you think gave your team so much trouble today? Was it defensively, schematically or some of the shots that normally go in that did not?**

SHAKA SMART: It's always a combination of things. It's never one answer to that question. We had some looks that we felt were pretty good that we didn't make. New Mexico did a much better job finishing in the paint than we did. We also got in the paint quite a bit and had open guys that we either weren't able to find in a timely manner, passes got deflected, passes got stolen, or by the time the pass was made, the guy wasn't open. But definitely a combination of things.

We didn't get to the foul line nearly enough. When the other team makes 11 more free throws than you -- obviously, some of those were late, but we had some that we certainly -- if we finish them, it's a little bit different game down the stretch and we're not fouling. We have to do a better job of that.

**Q. I wonder if you could talk about the pressure on the three seniors. People want experience, but seniors out there know this is -- to have beaten UConn the one year -- you have so many great wins already, but talk about the tougher part of being a senior in a game like this?**

SHAKA SMART: Yeah, it's do or die, now or never for you as a senior, for your career, and obviously, for the whole

team in the NCAA Tournament. Again, it's such a fine line of just getting the guys to truly accept that, and I have to do a better job with that. We have such conscientious guys on our team that care so much about each other, care so much about wanting to win for Marquette. You've got to balance that with letting it rip.

I thought Jop did that, obviously, from an offensive scoring standpoint. He gives us 28, you feel pretty good that you're going to have a chance to win. But we obviously struggled offensively in different areas.

**Q. That 10-0 run down the stretch by New Mexico, obviously, a couple uncharacteristic turnovers, looked like a couple bounces didn't go your guys' way. How did you make sense of that run down the stretch that they made?**

SHAKA SMART: Yeah, again, you said it, there was a couple turnovers that we just can't have. We tried to spend too much out on the floor where there's traffic. It's different when you're in the paint and you're kind of in a one-on-one matchup and you spin. Then Kam missed one right at the rim, Chase missed one right at the rim. I think we missed a three in there that was wide open. But more importantly, New Mexico scored.

I thought Dent, he just did a great job controlling the game. Our guys did a nice job turning him over, eight times obviously, but on every other possession when the ball was in his hands, he did a really good job controlling the game. There's a reason he's talked about as one of the best point guards in the country. He was the most poised player on the floor.

And then I thought Nelly Junior Joseph just was so impactful from the opening segment of the game all the way through because he was the most physical guys around the basket and was a domino for their team in a positive way.

**Q. Shaka, with the way you guys do things, you're going to have younger guys off the bench. How much was this team missing maybe more developed, physical bodies off the bench?**

SHAKA SMART: I mean, I think when you look at games that you lose, you certainly can say we were missing this or missing that, and that's a fair assessment.

That being said, we felt like we had the guys this year that we could compete with anyone. That doesn't necessarily mean you're going to win the game, but that we can be competitive with anyone we played.

Honestly, when Sean went down last year, it was as bad a time as you could get because we were hopeful to get him back this year, but we kind of knew, well, a year, late January -- so would he have helped us if he was fully healthy and played the whole year? Absolutely. But other teams deal with that, too.

No question, I told the guys in the locker room for all of our returning guys, we have a lot of growing to do, a lot of growing to do.

Honestly, there's a lot of basketball growth that we've got to create, but more than anything, it's personal growth that also informs who we are as players and coaches. We were not poised enough to win an NCAA Tournament game tonight. We just weren't. We also weren't tough enough around the baskets.

Those are personal qualities that obviously go into being a player, as well.

You know, this hurts. Losing this game is very hard to accept for everyone in our locker room. But it's our reality right now. We've got to use that to push us to be better.

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