

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal - NC State vs Marquette

Friday, March 29, 2024

Dallas, Texas, USA

American Airlines Arena

Marquette Golden Eagles

Shaka Smart

Tyler Kolek

Stevie Mitchell

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

NC State 67, Marquette 58

THE MODERATOR: We will take a question for Coach.

Q. What legacy would you say you are currently leaving at Marquette?

SHAKA SMART: I don't know. We just lost in the Sweet 16. I'm not really focused on legacy. I did tell the guys after the game in the locker room that our two seniors, Tyler Kolek and Oso Ighodaro, have set an incredible standard over the past three years in our program. It's really going to be on the rest of us to uphold that standard. It's going to be tough, but even try to raise that standard.

This guy sitting to my right is the best point guard in college basketball. It has been an absolute honor to coach him the last three years. It's been an absolute honor to coach this entire group. The worst thing about losing today is that we don't have practice tomorrow. We don't have another game to prepare for.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for our student-athletes.

Q. Tyler, how do you balance your individual accomplishments over the last couple of seasons with the early tournament exits?

TYLER KOLEK: I mean, not many people make it to the Sweet 16. I think eight teams. We're the eighth team all-time, so I wouldn't say that's early.



I'm just happy to be out there every time with my guys. Like Coach said, just disappointed that it's over.

Q. Progression every year, made the tournament when you were supposed to. Second round, now Sweet 16, seeing progression. Just that, and also just finishing strong. Several times this year, y'all have been outplayed the first half and really come back and outplayed the opponent the second half. St. John's, Purdue almost beating them.

Does it take anything -- the second half, you outplayed them. The shots just didn't fall versus the first half. Any momentum from that once you reflect on the season?

STEVIE MITCHELL: I mean, I don't think there's any moral victories at this point. I mean, I don't think shots were falling for us throughout the game, but we pride ourselves on the defensive end, and I don't think we as a team did what we needed to do clearly to win any way when the shots weren't falling. We've done it before this year, but today we weren't able to.

TYLER KOLEK: That's why it's a 40-minute game. You have to play both halves. They got up big in the first half. We came out in the second half. That first round, they got an even bigger lead. We didn't come out how we wanted to, but we scrapped the rest of the game and fought back and gave it all we had.

Q. Tyler, when the shot and shooting has kind of abandoned the whole team, how do you keep battling and trying to focus on staying in the game?

TYLER KOLEK: Like Stevie said, on the defensive end. We had 67 points we held them to. That's not bad. In the first half, we could have been a little better, but just keeping faith in the guys and keep giving them confidence because I'm going to keep finding them, and they know that. They know I got the confidence in them to keep shooting it.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you to our student-athletes.

Questions for Coach, please.



Q. Shaka, this group accomplished a lot over the last couple of seasons. I know you guys had lofty goals heading into this tournament. Is it hard not to view the end as a disappointment?

SHAKA SMART: We just lost. Of course, it's a disappointment. It can be a disappointment whenever you lose your last game. We go into every game expecting to win, wanting to win. That's our goal. We just lost. Those guys -- did you see the game? Those guys gave everything they had.

The amount of blood, sweat, and tears that they've shed over the course of this season, are we disappointed? Absolutely.

Q. Before this game I spoke with you about the relationships with this team and just the connection that you have and the type of student-athlete you look for.

Despite this being a tough night, what can you say in reflection on the student-athletes that you've gotten to lead this season and just what they mean to you and what they mean to each other?

SHAKA SMART: Yeah, this is at least tied for my favorite team I've ever coached. We have extremely high-character guys, guys that to a man care about one another, work to multiply one another during practice, during games, off the court. Special leadership from Oso and Tyler.

Again, that's why it's so devastating for the season to end because we felt like this was a team that could keep playing beyond today. But NC State deserves a ton of credit. They played with great force, aggressiveness. I thought they did a good job getting us on our heels in certain possessions on offense, and they went and took the game.

Q. Oso didn't seem like himself during the NCAA Tournament, didn't seem like he had the same explosiveness? Was that injury-related, or what did you think was the deal there?

SHAKA SMART: No, it wasn't injury-related. Oso cares deeply. He is one of the most conscientious basketball players that I've ever coached, one of the most unselfish -- the most unselfish of the really good players that I've coached. I think he came to battle and fight for his team.

I think there were some games where a couple of things didn't go his way. There's definitely some plays that we would want to have back. You know, listen, we win as a

team. We lose as a team. The guy has been a huge part of winning more games than have been won in Marquette in a two-year stretch than I think anyone else. We love him. We're going to miss him. We're grateful for him.

Q. Just 4 for 31 on threes, what do you think you could have done differently on offense?

SHAKA SMART: You've heard me say this before, there's a Santa Claus' list, but that's really, really easy in retrospect. This is a team that at a lot of different points of the season has been terrific on offense, you know, led by Tyler and the way that he plays. So we were going to trust and lean into what's allowed us to be good.

I think when we watch the tape, we will see that their physicality and aggressiveness disrupted us at times. Certainly some things that we could have or should have done differently against that just to kind of meet force with force. It wasn't that we didn't talk about that during the game.

A lot of the three-point shots we got were good. Didn't make nearly enough. I mean, it's going to be hard to win if you go 4 for 31 as a team, but our guys, they tried to find a way to win even despite that.

As Stevie mentioned, our mentality is even if we have a tough shooting night, find a way to win anyway, and we weren't quite good enough on the defensive end to get that done with the shooting night that we had.

Q. You talked last week about building this program. What do you want or hope, I guess, to take away from this group in building this Marquette program for the future and what they did and now in year three for you here?

SHAKA SMART: Well, I mean, there are so many things we can take out of this season, so many things we can take out of today. I understand from the outside maybe the propensity to view this game in a vacuum, but we played 37 games this year, and we've been through so many different experiences. Our guys have those in their pocket.

Today was not our best game. It wasn't. That's what probably stings the most because you want to play your best at the very end. But, you know what, NC State had a lot to do with that. They deserve a lot of credit. What can we take out of the game? I mean, a ton. There's so many lessons, motivation, different things for different players that we could have done better for our coaching staff.

I think our guys' connectivity throughout the season has been terrific. I definitely think we had some guys pressing

a little bit today, for whatever reason. Our job is to help these guys go let their hair down and attack and play, but they're human beings. I think that's probably something that we understand a little bit better internally than folks that haven't played or coached, which is part of it.

But I'll go to war with this group about at any point. We've got some good young players that we're excited about getting better and improving. Just like last year, this experience will drive us. This experience will inform a lot of the things that we do over the course of the next several months, and our guys will come together and improve and go after being the best version of us the next time we get a chance to play.

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