

Marquette University: Shaka and Maya Smart make major gift to Marquette University to help students cover emergency expenses

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MILWAUKEE — Shaka Smart, head coach of the Marquette University men's basketball program, and his wife, Maya, have made a major gift to help Black students at Marquette cover emergency expenses. The gift, which President Michael R. Lovell called "a true blessing," will help support students who experience unanticipated loss or travel emergencies as well as food and safety needs. The fund will mirror the university's Bridge to the Future Fund, which has provided immediate support to hundreds of students experiencing financial strain.

"The reality is, in higher education, we need to continue to do more and do better for students of color," Shaka Smart said. "Dr. Lovell believes in that mission, and that's why we're here. We want to be a part of something much, much larger, and we want others to join us. That's what sports are all about. That's what coaching is all about — trying to get our guys to be part of something much bigger than themselves."

"We all have an opportunity every day to make a difference in ways large and small," Maya Smart said. "We are happy to contribute in this way to shine a light on the needs of students who have tremendously bright futures ahead of them and just need a little help."

Honoring tradition and those who've 'made an impact'

The Smarts underscored the importance of honoring Marquette's tradition and those who have made a "major impact." Their gift will launch an endowed Student

Success Fund in honor of Bo and Candy Ellis. The Smarts highlighted the impact Bo and Candy Ellis have made through their foundation and by raising significant scholarship funds following the sudden death of their beloved daughter, Nicole, a 2000 Marquette graduate.

Bo Ellis starred on Marquette's 1977 National Championship basketball team under Coach Al McGuire and earned his degree from Marquette.

"We are truly honored that Coach Smart and his wife, Maya, have decided to start an endowed fund named after us. Since establishing our foundation, it has always been our goal to help Marquette students with financial support towards completing their college education," Bo and Candy Ellis said. "This fund will do just that, helping our communities and exposing students to a university that promotes professional excellence. They will have the privilege of joining the great Marquette University family of alumni. It means the world to us."

Addressing a challenge, driving progress

"From the moment they stepped on campus, Shaka and Maya have energized our entire community," President Lovell said. "Their significant gift extends far beyond the basketball court through the halls of Marquette, embodying our mission to serve others and foster new opportunities for underrepresented students. Their leadership is an inspiration."

In June 2020, during an address to campus following racial injustice tragedies across the U.S., President Lovell challenged the Marquette community to increase support for minority students, saying, "I truly believe we are sitting at a pivotal moment in our country's history. As a society, we must demand better."

Since then, the university has expanded its Urban Scholars program to 40 full-tuition, four-year scholarships for high achieving, low-income scholars from high schools in the Milwaukee area. In addition, a new living-learning community for Black students opened in fall of 2021.

The Smarts arrived on campus shortly before the public launch of the university's *Time to Rise* campaign. Their goal, they said, is to motivate others to give back.

"Beyond both the immediate and lasting impact of their gift, Shaka and Maya are a perfect example of leaders who are modeling our growing culture of giving at

Marquette,” said Tim McMahon, vice president for University Advancement.

Vice President and Director of Athletics Bill Scholl emphasized how the gift from Shaka and Maya Smart demonstrates the values and mission of both the Athletics Department and Marquette University as a whole.

“We talk often with our student athletes about being women and men who go forward to make a positive impact on the world and pursue excellence in all that they do,” Scholl said. “Shaka and Maya not only embrace and speak to these principles — they live them.”

The Smarts’ gift will make an immediate impact while also generating invested funds in perpetuity.

“We wanted to start a fund that could help students immediately, but also we thought it’d be pretty cool if 50 years from now, this fund could still be benefiting African American students,” Shaka Smart said.

Shaka and Maya Smart are encouraging the Marquette community to join them in their efforts to support Marquette’s Black students. You can contribute at timetorise.marquette.edu/give.

Time to Rise: The Marquette Promise to Be The Difference

Marquette’s \$750 million comprehensive fundraising campaign, which is the most ambitious in Marquette’s 140-year history, is elevating resources to advance the university’s mission and pillars of excellence, leadership, faith and service. The university has raised more than \$562 million to date, amounting to 75 percent of its goal. More than 53,000 donors have already supported *Time to Rise*, including 44 percent who have made