

El-Amin remorseful after marijuana arrest

By Susanne Youmans
The Associated Press

STORRS, Conn. — A contrite and emotional Khalid El-Amin apologized Thursday to his family, his teammates and the people of Connecticut and Minnesota for his arrest on marijuana possession charges.

The Connecticut point guard, joined by coach Jim Calhoun at a news conference in Gampel Pavilion, called the actions leading to his arrest Tuesday evening "a gross error of judgment."

"I have earned the respect of this school ... and I just want a second chance to prove myself," said El-Amin, glancing at notes scrawled on a blue sheet of paper and taking long pauses to collect himself. "To all the people who have supported me ... I am very sorry for this incident. It will never happen again."

The 19-year-old Minneapolis native, a sophomore majoring in communications, was stopped for a traffic violation in Hartford, and a small amount of marijuana was discovered during a pat-down search.

UConn scoring leader Richard Hamilton was in the car but was not charged. El-Amin also publicly apologized to Hamilton on Thursday.

Calhoun has stood by El-Amin since the arrest and on Thursday called him an "asset to the university and the program."

Calhoun also ended any speculation that El-Amin would not participate in a victory parade on Saturday.

"I would tie him down to make sure he's on the float," Calhoun said.

El-Amin was arrested 15 days after leading the Huskies to their first national championship and a day after he was honored in Minneapolis.

The public apology came hours after El-Amin appeared in a Hartford courtroom and entered a conditional plea on the misdemeanor marijuana charge. He drew a sentence of community service and a stern lecture from the judge.

El-Amin also was ordered to speak to school children on the evils of drug use, an assignment he said he welcomes.

"I am a role model and I'll continue to be a role model," El-Amin said. "I just want to help the youngsters understand to make the right decision."

Judge Raymond Norko handed El-Amin a rebuke along with the sentence.

"The court is aware of who you are, where you are from and what you have done," Norko said.

The judge reminded El-Amin of his jubilant claim after the Huskies upset Duke in the NCAA championship game March 29: "We shocked the world!"

"The epilogue to that is: 'I disappointed the world,'" Norko said.

El-Amin did not respond, except to politely reply, "Yes, Your Honor" to questions from the judge.

The arrest might not have been a coincidence. The Hartford Courant reported Thursday. The newspaper, citing police documents and sources it did not identify, said an informant had tipped police about El-Amin's trip to an area of Hartford known for drug activity.

Detectives arrived at the parking lot before El-Amin and saw him making what appeared to be a drug transaction, the newspaper said.

El-Amin was charged with possession of less than 4 ounces of marijuana, a misdemeanor. His sentence is the typical punishment given to first-time offenders. His record will be wiped clean in 30 days if he successfully completes his community service.

His unspecified community service is scheduled for April 21. The lectures to middle schools are not yet scheduled.

A handful of UConn fans watched the proceedings, one bringing a basketball he hoped to have autographed. The 5-foot-10 point guard quietly passed autographs to two courthouse workers sitting behind him before his lawyer instructed him not to sign any more.

Calhoun said the incident does not tarnish the program accomplishments this year.

"I looked at the trophy and it looked exactly the same," he said. "I don't know how this got involved with the basketball game. It's a quantum leap."

"Do I feel we didn't win the national championship because one kid made an error in judgment? No," Calhoun said. "Has the last week not been as happy as the last two? Yes."

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spite the seemingly lopsided defeat, Oregon didn't play all that poorly, as several of the Ducks' matches were close.

Since then, Oregon has struggled with the tough Pac-10 competition, losing seven of its last 11 matches.

"Over the course of the past month the guys have forgotten how close everything has been," head coach Chris Russell said. "We're just strokes away from being a top-40 team."

"So our goal is to have this weekend be our best performance of the season. Not just to look at the wins and losses — although that's our objective — but to have our best performance."

While Russell said he has confidence in his players' ability to have such a successful outing, he said the execution is all up to his players.

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Chris Russell
UO head coach

pared," Russell said. "We have to increase our energy level, increase our concentration, increase our intensity. That's been our challenge all year long, to stay with our planning and processing through the good times and the bad. If we can do that, we're going to match up well."

Oregon will also face Gonzaga (10-9) on Sunday in its final dual match of the regular season.