

December 2, 2005



An interview with:

GARY BARNETT

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, welcome to everybody to the **Big 12 Championship** news conference. Out of deference for the coach and everybody else, please put your telephones on either silent or turn them off, please.

We would like to welcome **Coach Barnett** and the winner of the **Big 12 North** and let him make an opening comment or two.

Coach, welcome, and your comments.

GARY BARNETT: Well, the **Colorado Buffaloes** are excited to be here representing the north division of the **Big 12 Championship**. We are in pretty comfortable surroundings. This is the second time in four years we have been in the stadium, and the second time in less than a year we have played in the stadium. Fourth time in five years since we have played in the game, so there's a comfort level in the stadium and this situation, and the second time we played **Texas** this year, so it could be good or bad.

Actually, it does create a comfort level for your team knowing exactly, having played on the field, having been in situations, knowing exactly what everybody looks like, how they run, those sorts of things does create a little bit of a comfort level for everybody.

I know we're coming off of two tough losses. Confidence is always a question you have regarding that, but we have had a good week of practice. I think we've gotten over that. We're ready to go and excited about being here. We watched the 2001 game on the way out to the airport today and to the hotel, so we should have a team that's excited and ready to play the game. Take some questions.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the coach.

Q. Coach, one thing you said in your news conference the other day is you wanted to see how practice went to catch the collective

mind-set of the team and the emotional level coming off the last couple weeks. Can you talk about that a little bit?

GARY BARNETT: I think it took a couple days to get close where we wanted to be. I think Monday was a little bit of a struggle, but Tuesday, and especially Wednesday and Thursday, picked up and it felt like we had good practices. We're ready to come play this game and represent the North.

Q. Coach, if you could just talk about your talk on whether or not the conference championships games are a good idea. You have been able to use them to your advantage. Some coaches have expressed they don't like them.

GARY BARNETT: Sure. I know when I came into the conference I walked into a room full of coaches who did not want the championship game. After hearing, you know -- we didn't participate in it in '99 and 2000, but I heard **Bobby Stoops** talk about their participation in it, I believe in 2000, and he and **Coach Snyder** both talked about what a great atmosphere it was -- he had been against the game, but after playing the game, he really liked it.

Being in the **Big 10 Conference** and watching the game from afar and having a way to settle the conference championship, and having a day that's pretty much isolated for just the best teams in your conference to play, creating sort of a monopoly, if you would, for television viewing that day for college football, we were very envious. One, the obvious, was you got a champion out of it. The Big 10 comes down to tie breakers, it doesn't come down to the field, if such a thing would occur.

There's teams you don't play, but once I was in the conference, you know, I have been for this game all along. I still think it's the most exciting game you play all year, even more so than the bowl game, unless you're in the National Championship. I think it's been a great experience for players, fans and everybody else. I'm still in favor of this game.

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Q. Gary, I was wondering if you can discuss your kicking game and just the offense suddenly that it can generate and how you can change field positions so quickly.

GARY BARNETT: We are very fortunate to have a punter who this year is right up in the Top 5, and he really has kicked well this year. We have had three win games that's knocked his average down a little bit.

He's a guy we have been able to change field position and come out way ahead. It really helps us and also creates opportunities for turnovers in that phase of the game, but we have been able to -- over the last two years it's been critical to our success to have him be able to turn a game around, or at least turn the field position around.

Mason Crosby is just a weapon so very few teams have. We attempted a 57-yard field goal last week, and I didn't think anything of it. We attempted one and made one the week before, and we didn't think anything of it. You've got to be conscious of field position all the time, but usually you would only attempt one of those kicks if it were the end of the half and you weren't going to take a chance giving up field position.

With **Mason**, you know your percentages are with you making those points and making that field goal. It sort of changes your mind-set a little bit. You become a little less defensive and a little more aggressive in the place kicking game.

Q. Gary, this championship game has been marred by a lot of upsets over the course of the years. Why do you think that is, and also, why do you feel you guys have been able to thrive in the underdog role a couple times in the past?

GARY BARNETT: Well, I can't speak, really, to the upset. You know, it's just a big game, and it's -- you know, it plays out like every other football game. I think everybody feels a little more pressure in a game like this and there's probably less pressure on an underdog than there is on a favorite.

I think that depends on the character of your team. Human being nature, I think that's true. This is our fourth time in the game, it's our fourth time being an underdog, so we're sort of comfortable in that position, and while we won of the last three we played, it felt like we played extremely well the next year and real poorly the next year.

Coming out of the North right now, you're pretty much going to be an underdog anyway.

Q. Do you think your players may revel in the sort of shock-the-world scenario everyone is talking about?

GARY BARNETT: To some extent. I think that gets a little bit overplayed. That sort of stuff wears off early. It's got to be an overall game, full game, 60-minute type commitment, and, you know, you can think about shocking the world on the first or second play, but after that you're worried about blocking the guy across from you and making sure you run your route right or reading your defense. It gets down to the details of the game pretty quick and all that stuff goes out the window, but it's good talk before the game.

Q. Gary, earlier this year you talked about the level of athlete quarterback in this league with McNeil and Brad Smith and Vince Young.

I'm wondering, is **Vince Young** even on a higher level?

GARY BARNETT: I think no question. You know, I don't know where he hangs his cape at night, but he has got one, and he's a phenomenal athlete.

What I see in **Vince** is the intangibles. You know, he obviously has a leadership aura about him that takes people to a different level, can take over a football game. You don't see very many guys like that.

I watched him in the **Rose Bowl** and he was amazed to see a guy take over the **Michigan** team and that **Rose Bowl** game the way he did. He certainly has the capacity to perform at the highest level.

Q. Coach, do you see this as a game in which it's going to be particularly important to play well early?

GARY BARNETT: Kyle, I don't know. I think that stuff gets overrated. I think it comes down to turnovers. You look at the game we played in 2001, and **Texas** was about to go ahead 14-0, and they certainly played well early, and all of a sudden we got three straight turnovers, so that turned the ball game around, and that was early in the game, and then it was the first half, but I think the importance of playing well early is just keeping yourself in the game is what's critical.

There's two halves, and you want to get -- in our case we want to get to the fourth quarter with a chance to win the game, and that's pretty much what we're striving today. It's just the way the ball bounces and the game goes if anything other than that happens.

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Q. Gary, you said on one of the conference calls earlier this week, I think it sounded like there was some degree of certainty you expected Crosby to be back next year. Have you talked to him about this?

GARY BARNETT: *Mason* and I haven't talked to him directly, but his position coach and the guys who recruited him and his family have made indications to us that he intends to come back.

Q. You said you watched the 2001 game on the bus. Can you talk about why you did that and what kind of reaction you got from your players?

GARY BARNETT: I haven't checked our reaction. I just thought it was a good thing for us to watch. One, it was about as an exciting time in *Colorado* football as we have had. We certainly were underdogs in the game. Very similar setting, lost by almost the same score to *Texas* as before. I think it's good to see the success that is out there for them if they play the right way.

Q. Coach, what does your team have to do differently from that October 15th match-up to be successful?

GARY BARNETT: Well, first of all, we've got to get some turnovers. I think we got one turnover in the game. Secondly, we got to a 3rd down 17 times, I think more than anyone else did, but they converted ten of those 17. They're already hitting 54 percent on third-down conversion. Most of that is because the quarterback has such great capacity to get himself out of problems and run the football.

For us, we've got to get to the third down and play better on third down. We made a lot of mistakes in the opening drive in the last games. We made six critical mistakes and had them in fourth down once or twice, so those certain situations have to happen, and I think we've got to find a way to run the football. I don't think we can line up and let them play man-to-man on us and throw the football 50 times a game and win it.

Q. Coach, your school returned a lot of tickets and the estimates -- the earlier estimates are that there could be as many as 60,000 fans that are in orange and white and not too many in gold. How difficult is that for your team and were you disappointed?

GARY BARNETT: Well, the last time, when we played the Dallas team in the *Cowboys* stadium in 2001, it was pretty much the same

situation, it was not a neutral site. This won't be a neutral site.

I'm sure the disappointment in our fans in the experience over the last two ball games has created, you know, sort of to stay-at-length sort of attitude, but the ones that love us and the ones we love will be with us and that's the way we'll treat it.

Q. Coach, with the roof closed creating more noise than normal for a road situation, is there anything you can do to prepare for that and how do you?

GARY BARNETT: Lobby to get it open. We practiced with crowd noise practically half the practice on Wednesday and a good portion of it yesterday. We've already been in a couple of pretty loud places but I anticipate this being the loudest.

Q. Gary, I was wondering if you saw anything in the Texas A&M game that you can put together, and also wonder how you feel about a 9th conference game possibility?

GARY BARNETT: I thought the *Texas* quarterback played extremely well in that game. They did a great job and ran an option from every formation they had in the game. Probably surprised *Texas* a little bit. Not totally, but a little bit.

I think the quarterback is going to be a really great player. His ability to run the football certainly gave *A&M* a chance to be in that game. As far as the 9th conference game, I'm not really in favor of the 9th conference game. We beat each other up enough already.

Look at the North, you know, there's five teams that are bowl-qualified. To me if you go to nine games, you're just creating more of an opportunity for that kind of, you know -- depends on how you look at it. Some would say mediocrity and someone would say parody. I choose parody.

Q. Gary, how did they tell you about the roof? What was the explanation for the roof being closed?

GARY BARNETT: I haven't heard anything on the roof yet, so I guess I'll hear that when this is over or if somebody wants to fill me in now. I understand there's a chance of rain, which I'm sure would cause the roof to be closed. Playing here the two other times, I know in 2002 we had a decision that had to be made 20 minutes before the game, maybe it was an hour, and in the ball game last year it was actually raining prior to the game, but I think we still went ahead and played

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with it open after a while. I don't know how it's all going to work. It's really of no consequence.

THE MODERATOR: Further questions for the coach? Coach, they let you off easy.

GARY BARNETT: I hope it continues that way for the whole weekend.

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