

March 11, 2007



An interview with:

KANSAS

CHARLIE FISS: We are ready to begin with the Kansas Jayhawks. Student athletes will be here shortly. Let's start with Coach Self.

Q. What's your reaction with getting a 1 seed?

COACH BILL SELF: To be honest with you, I'm pretty worn out right now, so it wasn't a -- I wasn't ecstatic. I thought we would get 1 seed if we won today.

Of course, I'm sure we made it -- if they made the selection before the game was over, then I'm sure that had a chance to hurt our seed being down 22.

But, I really am not that fired up right now. I will be, but I'm worn out. I'm tired. I think our players are, too.

Q. Bill, after what you guys have been through with Durant before, were you ever intimidated in this one?

COACH BILL SELF: The first time we played them at least we could score. It's 32-10 with nine minutes left in the first half and, you know, we missed some good looks and we were too tight in pressing and everything.

I don't want to play him again. He was better today than he was the last time we played him. I had a NBA GM call me and ask me, you know, if it was -- asked me how the game was. I said we didn't guard anybody. We didn't play any defense after the first game. He said, Bill, that's not a defensive problem, that's a recruiting problem. I mean, this guy is a joke. He is a joke. You can plug him into any team in the country at any level and he can score, NBA, whatever, just plug him in and he can go get baskets.

It's unbelievable how good he is. We did a bad job on him early. He scored eight points before the first T.V. time out. We tried to make some adjustments and none of them worked.

But then, I thought, Brandon, you know, we held him to 15 in the second half and I feel great about that. We did do a better job in the second half. Took away his three-point shot better.

Q. A lot of times in the tournament, you have trouble preparing for teams or not enough time. Is your situation going to be any more difficult, do you think?

COACH BILL SELF: Because we play the play-in game? I don't think so. I don't think so. If anything -- the one thing we will not do is look ahead, so this gives us two days and our players know we can focus in on Illinois and Villanova, two days, but we don't know who we are playing yet.

The second that game is over, we will know who we are playing and we can spend Wednesday and Thursday totally focused on that team. So we'll watch tape on both those teams beforehand but still, though -- I think sometimes you can have too much time to spend on an opponent. I think this may break it up and be a good thing for us.

Q. Talking about Durant again, when you get into the NCAA tournament, how much confidence does it give your guys to say nobody will throw any more at them than he can?

COACH BILL SELF: There is some opponents we could play in the early rounds that have guys that can go for big numbers because they have all done that. The guys on the teams have done that.

But we are not going to see another one like this. But, still yet, he goes fourteen for thirty. Our whole deal was to make him work to score. If he would have told me he missed 16 shots, I would say we played unbelievable defense. He is just different.

He is the best I have ever seen. If you ask me about comparisons today, I probably have a

few better analogies because I have had a chance to think about it a lot.

Q. Coach, after the last two years' NCAA tournament, what have you taken away from those and maybe what your team has as you approach this year?

COACH BILL SELF: Well, you know, we are going to get hit with that question a lot. Up until two years ago, we had never lost in the first round and had only lost in the second round twice, if I am not mistaken.

We've experienced success in the tournament at our stops. The last two years have been miserable from an NCAA tournament standpoint, from an off-season standpoint and from exiting early.

I will tell you this, this team had nothing to do with the Bucknell loss. Nothing. They didn't score one point in the game, nothing.

I do think this, that this team -- last year's team was not as prepared as this year's team and we were very young. Three freshmen and two sophomores starting and it was a different type of feel when we got into the tournament and we played a team that was obviously very good. If they are good enough to beat Kansas and Pittsburgh in the same weekend.

I don't know if we will do a lot different, but I think our focus will be better. I think hopefully we have learned how to focus better than we did last year. I think when you have never been in it, in the game, so to speak, the big game, and you get into it basically for one week and now distractions start coming your way and being able to focus and eliminate those, I don't think we did as good a job last year as I hope we do this year.

Q. Coach, kind of a two-part question. If somebody is from Oklahoma, what does it mean to you to win the Big 12 tournament in Oklahoma City and also your opinion on the way Oklahoma City, their job of hosting the tournament. Do you think it will come back here?

COACH BILL SELF: It will come back here. From my perspective, I moved out of here after Bricktown was all made up and done. I haven't spent any time down there. From my perspective, I would think this is a good place to have it from the fans' standpoint.

To think the crowd was this good today and you didn't have an Oklahoma school playing, I

think, bodes well not only for our fans but fans in the area. I'm sure they will get it back.

It needs to come to Kansas City. I'm selfish from that standpoint. We like it in Kansas City the most. But I think Oklahoma City did a fabulous job, fabulous job.

Today, I was able to call my high school coach and my best friends in high school and some things like that to come up with extra tickets today and I thought it was cool they could have come to the game because they wouldn't have had a chance other than that.

It meant a lot to have my family and a lot of close friends here also.

Q. Considering the last -- the two games against Texas the way they played out, can this team take anybody's best shot in the tournament and still stand up?

COACH BILL SELF: Trust me, we don't try to get down 22 again. The one thing about Texas -- when we play them, the game is a lot faster than it was against K-State or Oklahoma. 22 isn't quite as many because there is so many more possessions in the game.

And so even though we were down 22 at 32 to 10, it looked like we could get blown out. I still sense there was time.

Being down -- some people, 13 is like being down 20. Being down, some people 20 is like being down 13. That's the way Texas and us both play.

We were up 4, 5 coming out of time out and the next time you know they score 7 straight points in 35 seconds. There were a lot of points scored in short spurts.

Q. Bill, often the Big 12 title game can be anti-climactic for a lot of people because it is right before the selection show and everybody is fired up about that. Is it that way for the players and the coaches? Was this game any different because it was such a fantastic game?

COACH BILL SELF: I think the question -- I think the best way to put that is this is one of the most fun games to play in and coach in because when the game is over, it is over. Most times after a game or after a loss, you go -- can't sleep for days and all that stuff. Your excitement level immediately gets picked right back up by the selection show.

So I can't speak for Rick, but I would say Rick probably said, you know something, that was a great game to be a part of. And during the regular season or whatever you don't feel that way because you got to win.

I thought this was a fun game to play from the players' perspective, certainly a fun game to coach in because to me there wasn't that much pressure in the game today. The pressure was getting to today but there wasn't as much pressure actually playing or coaching in the game today.

Q. Coach, this whole week there was a lot of talk about who and who would not get in from this conference, K-State ends up not getting in. You were pretty adamant that they should have early on. Just your thoughts on only four getting in and K-State -- or I guess five got in.

COACH BILL SELF: Every coach in our league would say we don't like it. It also happened two years ago when Colorado was 10-6 in the league and didn't get in.

If I'm not mistaken, was that three years in a row we have only gotten four? I may be -- is that right?

We don't like that. We need to look at ourselves to see what we can do differently from a marketing, from a RPI standpoint, from a scheduling standpoint, so hopefully if you go 10-6 in your league this never happens again.

The committee has got a tough job and you can skew anything to make it look your way. Without studying some of the teams that got in as at-larges, I would say Texas -- K-State's résumé was every bit as impressive and deserved to get in.

A lot of upsets in the tournaments and last year there wasn't very many but there was certainly upsets that stole some bids and that may have been one of theirs.

Q. Bill, along the same lines, this game being quite a showcase for the Big 12 and the Big 12 still not getting maybe all the respect it deserves, don't you or Texas or Texas A&M -- this league needs to win a national championship to get the respect?

COACH BILL SELF: You know something, Jason, I would say yes. We just need to go play well, too.

We need to have teams have success in the tournament. Of course we have been on the forefront of being the school that didn't deliver the

last two years. But we need to go play extended games in the tournament. I agree with that 100%.

But I will say this about our league, best player in the country plays in it. Most fun guy to watch play. The most clutch player in the country plays in it. The coach that just won his 808th game coaches in it. And you had about four epic games that were as good as any game played all year long in any league. If you are an outsider watching those, how can you not be impressed with the league? That's what blows my mind.

If you are watching that today, you're watching A&M at Texas or Texas at Oklahoma State or if you're watching -- what was the other -- Texas-KU, yeah (smiling), yeah, if you were watching that game, you would think, God, are there that many good games, good players in this league? Because there was some stand-outs.

Q. Bill, one more question about the scheduling aspect of it. Everybody wants to be a good partner for the league. But how do you balance, you know, doing what could help the league versus what you had to do to help yourself?

COACH BILL SELF: See, this was a terrible year from an RPI standpoint to have a coaching change of six because when you look at it, the coaches are higher and they have to win confidence. And you win confidence by playing a schedule. You look at our nonconference record, it is the second or third best in 11 years of the league.

So you win games to get confidence. But you didn't play enough good people so that your conference RPI is six. Our conference RPI should not be six. It should be in the top four every year.

Now, how do we get it there? Better play obviously. Maybe schedule a little smarter. But the appearance was, it's because of the way that our league scheduled, and rightfully so, because coaches' jobs are to win games and starting to build confidence in their transitional phase, the appearance of the RPI is that, hey, we were seventh in the overall RPI until conference play started.

I mean, it isn't the seventh best team, but we scheduled the 15th toughest schedule of all the leagues. You can't do that if you are one of the four best leagues. We just have to be a little smarter scheduling.

CHARLIE FISS: We are joined by our

student-athletes from Kansas, Darnell Jackson and Brandon Rush. Any questions for them?

Q. Brandon, why were you able to slow down Kevin Durant?

BRANDON RUSH: I tried to pressure him, make him use his right hand a lot more. My team helped me out a lot by helping out other players.

Q. Darnell, take me through your big block at the end of the game, how were you able to get so cleanly and what do you think it meant for the team?

DARNELL JACKSON: I just told myself to make sure I have strong helping Augustin drives. I just went over there and put my arms straight up and jumped and came down with the ball and got fouled. Brandon told me to make these free throws so I made them and they helped us out and helped the team out.

Q. Can you talk about your level of confidence right now, taking the shots that you've taken over the last couple weeks and coming back and finishing 11-0? What's your confidence level like?

BRANDON RUSH: Our confidence level is pretty high right now. Just making big plays at the right time. That's all I can say.

DARNELL JACKSON: Just like Brandon, the same. When we're out there, we just always have to think next play because we are always going to make a mistake. Everybody knows we have a lot of players that can come off the bench and made good plays for us. Everybody right now is real confident.

Q. Brandon, you will probably get this question a lot. Coming off of last year's first-round loss, what do you think you and the team learned from that and how maybe you will approach the game differently, if at all, this season?

BRANDON RUSH: We got to come in the game with a different mind-set than what we did last year. Stay focused on what we are trying to do and that's try to get past the first round and lead on to whatever, whatever leads up after that.

Q. Darnell, talk about that block you made right there in the closing seconds of overtime that pretty much sealed the deal?

DARNELL JACKSON: It was a big block. I came down with it, and I made it. I got a chance

to make two free throws to help the team to get a good lead.

I feel good about the block.

CHARLIE FISS: Guys thank you for coming. Again, congratulations. Good luck next week.

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An interview with:

TEXAS

CHARLIE FISS: We will get started with the Texas student-athletes. As you can see, Kevin and A.J. are here for questions.

Q. A.J., can you talk about their -- they seem to really tighten up on the perimeter there in OT and just seems like you all were having a tough time getting good looks there.

A.J. ABRAMS: They're a good defensive team. They kind of cracked down when it came to clutch time, so we got to give them credit. They made plays in overtime.

Q. For both Kevin and A.J., you talk about swagger a lot, even in the loss. You take that swagger into the NCAA?

KEVIN DURANT: Oh, yeah. It is the bigger picture. It is a bigger week next week. We just got to bounce back off this loss and get ready for the tournament.

A.J. ABRAMS: We are always going to carry a swagger about us. That's what we do. We are going -- we are disappointed we lost, but we did a lot of good things out there and we can build from that.

Q. Can you talk about Oklahoma City as a host venue for the Big 12?

A.J. ABRAMS: It was a great setup. They had the girls across the street from us and we were in here.

I think it was a great place for basketball for the fans and for the players.

Q. Kevin, you had such a hot first half. Can you talk about the defensive effort, I guess Rush and some of their other guys did on you in the second half?

KEVIN DURANT: They didn't do anything different. I missed easy shots. They did a great job pushing me out of the lane and helped the defense. I credit them.

I just was missing shots and they did a great job.

CHARLIE FISS: Good game today. Good luck in the NCAA tournament.

Joined now by Coach Barnes of Texas. Coach, your thoughts on today's game.

COACH RICK BARNES: Great game. I really -- I told our team before the game, we just wanted to be in a position in the last four minutes to win it. Obviously we got off to a great start.

You know, whether it was us getting off to a great start or them getting off to a great start, I felt it would be one of those games where both teams would go at each other and come down to the kind of game it was.

We had our chances, and they made obviously a big three and even in overtime we had some chances. And the free throws hurt us a little bit.

Nonetheless, I'm proud of our guys. I thought a lot of good things happened here this week. We're disappointed but it is over and done with and we will move on to next week.

Q. Coach, you kind of talked about all the positives. Can you expand on that? Because it seems like you guys were able to come back in one game. You did a lot of things in this tournament. Can you just talk about those things?

COACH RICK BARNES: Again, I think we've got a team, I think we're a confident team. I think we're a tough team. I think for a group of guys that started from ground zero and to be where we are right now, I'm proud of the way they've grown throughout the season.

I am proud of the way they've gone into different situations and competed every night. Regular season, post-season, we came up a few plays short here, but nonetheless, I'm happy for these guys because they've continued to get better and we're playing -- if they're a No. 1 seed, we're

not far behind and we are playing pretty good basketball right now.

Q. Can you talk about the decision with 22 seconds left about to have D.J. go for the quick two instead of a three to tie the game?

COACH RICK BARNES: That's what we thought. He had a couple different options. He could go to a two or to a dribble hand-off. We know they would defend the three-point line very well. They obviously defended the basket well, too. It worked out for them, it didn't for us.

Again, we will put it in his hand and let him make the play. We felt like he could get by and we wanted him to and he had some other ways he could go with it.

CHARLIE FISS: Thanks, Coach. We will let you go watch the show.

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