

March 15, 2008



BIG 12 CHAMPIONSHIP

KANSAS JAYHAWKS

CHARLIE FISS: Joined now by the Kansas Jayhawks and Coach Bill Self and his two student athletes are Russell Robinson and Darnell Jackson.

Coach, we will go to you, first, for your assessment of today's victory.

COACH BILL SELF: I thought it was a fabulous college basketball game. I thought there was some high-level stuff going on out there, especially the last 10 minutes. We played great second half, and didn't guard like we should, but we played excellent offense and we made shots and made some hard shots. I thought it was a fabulous basketball game.

Q. Darnell, I was going to ask you the question that Bill talked about a little bit. Seemed like y'all played a great second half and needed every minute of it. Would that be your assessment?

DARNELL JACKSON: Yeah, we just had to come together as a team and just pick it up, make sure we execute plays and make sure everybody boxed out and crashed the boards.

Q. Russell, can you talk about your layup at the very end when you were milking the clock and seemed like you saw an opening there.

RUSSELL ROBINSON: Basically just wanted to take as much time off the clock as we could and get a good look. We got the ball to the side and had an easy layup.

Q. Darnell, do you feel like tomorrow's game determines who really was the Big 12 champion since you guys have to go down and play that game in Austin?

DARNELL JACKSON: No, I don't think we are worried about that at all. It is a big game for us and it is a big game for the seniors and the juniors.

We want to go out there and try to win another Big 12 tournament.

Q. Russell, talk about how well Brandon played today and how important that was for him.

RUSSELL ROBINSON: You know, when Brandon is playing well, everybody is playing well. And he got us off to great start. He hit great shots. He kept us in the game when we weren't doing too good on offense. Hopefully he can play like that more often.

Q. Darnell, the second part of that question I was going to ask you, what I was trying to get at, as well as you played, A&M just wouldn't go away. Did you feel like they just kept coming and kept coming back at you?

DARNELL JACKSON: Everybody is saying that. Especially at the end with the shot clock, when he threw it up and it went in off the glass, I was like, "Wow, this is going to be a long, tough game." But we kept grinding and grinding came out with a victory.

Q. Can you just talk about playing Texas again in the tournament finals, being the third straight year, and what your thoughts are about Texas at this point.

RUSSELL ROBINSON: It is going to be a great game and they got some guys. They played us really well down there at home. We are just going to try to come out and play with a lot more intensity and be more aggressive this time around.

DARNELL JACKSON: Like Russ says, it is going to be a great game. I know a couple guys on the team earlier said they had an eye out for us, they were ready to play us in the championship game.

So I guess it is just going to come down to us like it was last year and the year before. So I know both teams will be ready to play and we will have to go out there and compete.

CHARLIE FISS: We'll let you go back to your locker room. Congratulations on your victory.

Now we will go to questions for Coach Self.

Q. I'll ask you the same question I asked Darnell: Do you like the fact you get a chance to play Texas again? I know you don't care what people say, but to prove who the true conference champ is, you had to play down in Austin. Do you like the fact you get to play them on a neutral court?

COACH BILL SELF: Well, I don't know if I buy into the whole thing. Your conference champion is determined over 16 games, not one game. And we tied. So -- but from a pay-back factor, I think that we'll be excited to play because, you know, they beat us the first time and the way they beat us was physically they handled us a second half.

So we'll be excited to play. I think it is pretty fitting, to be real candid with you, that Texas and Kansas had played. I think these two programs have had the best seasons and I think it's great for our league to have the two best teams get a chance to hook up and play on Sunday.

They've got a great team. You know, you go back the last three years, I mean, there's been some unbelievable plays and some unbelievable performances by guys on both teams. I would expect the same tomorrow.

Q. You guys hit Texas A&M in the mouth a couple of times and a lot of teams would have folded?

COACH BILL SELF: They didn't fold.

Q. Talk about the stick-to-itiveness that those guys have.

COACH BILL SELF: They did a great job getting their players to play. The way we handled in College Station was probably great motivation for them here because we were the better rebounding team in College Station. Today, there's no question, they controlled the glass. I mean, numbers don't lie.

But we needed -- we needed this game. We needed yesterday's game. These are great games to play as long as you win. And they stink if you don't.

But we needed to execute down the stretch. We needed to come from behind like we did yesterday. And you really look at it, you take away the last 3:30 of the first half, we controlled that game. The second half, we controlled the

game almost from the start of the second half on but they would not go away. And they made big shots and they were tough. But it was good for us to have to keep playing because we did execute fairly well down the stretch.

Q. Bill, should the Big 12 tournament champion get a No. 1 seed, and your position for a No. 1 seed irrespective of tomorrow's happenings?

COACH BILL SELF: If we don't win, we won't get one. If Texas doesn't win, they won't get one. I think I can go that strong. But I don't see how the winner tomorrow wouldn't be under serious consideration to deserve one. You know you look at the RPI numbers and things like that, I don't know if that's a true indication who the best teams are, but, you know, you would say if you just look at the RPI, that we may need a little help, both teams, to earn the No. 1.

But the bottom line is this, the best team in this league is probably going to be one of the best three, four, five teams in the country. And we get a chance to determine who that will be tomorrow.

I'm not going to campaign for it or politic for it because nobody's going to listen anyway.

Q. Bill, Brandon's made no secret he wants to play in the NBA. How important was this game for him playing a very good talent out there for Texas A&M and for him to have such a big game in front of a lot of NBA scouts?

COACH BILL SELF: I thought Brandon was as good today as I've ever seen him. We've seen him have some good performances. The thing that I am most proud about, that I like about Brandon, is he didn't play at all yesterday. And for him to come back from that, you know, I think is a good sign for him and he needed -- I think you bring up a good point. He needs to have some breakout games when it counts the most. And certainly this is one of those type of games.

Of course, we're going to need him to perform tomorrow as well. But, you know, if we were watching an NBA guard out there today, and if he keeps playing like this or close to it, then I can't imagine that this wouldn't be very impressive for a lot of people down the road.

Q. Bill, when you have a game -- one game a year against a team and then you come

back and you play them in a tournament final, do you zero in a lot on that one game, the things that went right, the things that didn't go right? And what stands out in your mind from the game down in Austin?

COACH BILL SELF: What stands out is I thought we played very well the first half when Atchley and James made shots and we still played well the first half.

We were fortunate that James had two fouls early because we saw what he did to us in the second half from controlling the glass.

So I thought -- I'm okay with not winning the game. I didn't particularly care for the way we didn't win it, which was them beating us to loose balls and outthrusting us on the glass and things like that. That's what I remember of the game.

Also we got lucky in the game that D.J. didn't shoot the ball well. So there was a lot of things that happened.

But we'll watch that game. But the biggest thing is -- watch probably the last three or four games to focus in on that because when we played them, that was probably -- what was that? Five weeks ago or so. So they'll be doing something a little bit different and having a few different tendencies.

Q. What does it say about Kansas and Texas in a year when the league was so good to play again in the finals?

COACH BILL SELF: Well, you know, there's a lot of great teams in our league. It's easier to have a great team than it is to have a great program. But you look over time, at least since I've been in the league, Okie State had the run the first couple years, but really it has been Texas and Kansas.

We have great respect for them and the feeling is probably mutual. But I think it is very fitting that we get a chance to play each other because, you know, this is the way it's been the last three years and it can certainly change in the future, but it's been a pretty good run for both programs.

Q. Coach, you played a lot of good teams on your schedule this season, but is it fair to say that Texas may be the toughest all-around team that you've played all season?

COACH BILL SELF: Not fair to say; they are. That's the best team we've played. And I'll say the same thing tomorrow, regardless of

outcome. That's the best team we've played. I don't think that's going out on them too much because of the teams we played, nobody is close to having the résumé that Texas has had.

So they played Tennessee and UCLA, so they may feel differently about us. But it is the best team we've played.

Q. Is this the best team you've had? And if so, what does that mean? What's the comfort factor and why do you like these guys so much?

COACH BILL SELF: I do like them a lot. I like them because they're unselfish and for the most part they try hard.

I don't think that we play as tough as what we need to play consistently, so there is still an area of improvement. I like this team, I like the makeup. I like the balance. We can play in or out.

But, you know, you say the best team, we had -- you know, we had a guy last year, everybody talks about (Kevin) Durant for Texas. We say he was fabulous. We had a guy last year making pretty big plays for the Hornets right now, too. I don't know if this is the most talented team, but I think this has been the most consistent team. Last year when we played well, we were pretty good.

CHARLIE FISS: Coach, thank you. Congratulations again.

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