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BIG 12 CHAMPIONSHIP

TEXAS LONGHORNS

CHARLIE FISS: We're ready to begin with the Texas Longhorns and Coach Rick Barnes and his two student athletes, A.J. Abrams and Alexis Wangmene.

Coach, congratulations on your victory today and your thoughts?

RICK BARNES: I thought it was a great team win for us today. I thought that everyone that went into the game really made a positive contribution. We obviously got great play from our bench.

And A.J., I'm really happy for him because he's worked hard for so long. He and I talked last night a little bit and I said, you've gone way beyond being a guy that just has to make shots to be effective.

I actually think back at the beginning of February when we really started becoming a better defensive team, he was the key guy in getting that started. And we're all happy for him bouncing back and getting things going.

I thought D.J. was masterful today the way he worked the game. And Damion and Justin Mason and Connor, they do what they always do for us. They care of the details and the dirty work. Alexis came in and gave us a great lift. I thought Dexter's minutes were huge.

So, again, it was a great, great team win and I'm also here now to serve Alexis' translator, if you have a problem. If I can't understand it, A.J. will take care of the rest because he's with him in the locker room.

Q. Can you just detail -- I mean it is nice of Coach to say you are really good at defense, but it's hard to play basketball when your shots aren't dropping, I presume. Can you tell us what you've gone through.

A.J. ABRAMS: I just haven't been making shots. Like Coach said, he says I've gotten a lot better of not just being a shooter on the court and getting lost on the defensive end, I can contribute.

Just playing defense and helping my teammates out on that end. But, you know, he did a great job. We had a talk last night and he boosted my confidence a lot for just the couple things he said to me and what I do for this team. That really helped.

RICK BARNES: You can't ask Alexis a question if you can't pronounce his last name.

Q. A.J., just talk a little bit about finally hitting some shots, though. That has to feel good.

A.J. ABRAMS: It feels real good right now, just finally knocking down some shots, helping my teammates on the offensive end as well as the defense. But my teammates did a good job of setting screens for me and D.J. did a great job of penetrating and kicking the ball tonight.

Fortunately I was knocking in shots.

Q. Alexis, you are a wonderful man, I don't know how to pronounce your last name but I am going to ask you a question anyway. Talk about this team, this resurgence. Do you guys feel like going into the championship team and beyond you can play with anybody in the country and compete for a national championship?

ALEXIS WANGMENE: I think we're able to play against whatever team in the country because we have such a good player as D.J. and A.J. and we have a good coach. So all we need to do is go out there and compete and play hard. Like Coach always said, the person who played the hardest will always win, so ...

Q. You guys have been close before, but just talk about how good would it feel to actually come out and win this thing Saturday?

A.J. ABRAMS: It would feel great for us. We have been working since the summer and the preseason for this game. We took care of business the past two games and got to where we wanted to be. So now it is just all about effort and competing, whoever the team we play against. I

think we just have to go out there and compete and play hard.

Q. A.J., they went on a 7-0 run there at the start of the half to tie the game. You guys answered with a 11-0 run. Talk about the shots during that stretch and just how big that stretch was to sort of kill their confidence.

A.J. ABRAMS: The start of the second half, we didn't come out with the right intensity and Coach let us know about it. And we had to raise the bar. We needed to penetrate more and just lock in on the defensive end. I think that's what we did. We kind of picked up our intensity on the defensive end, and that translates to the offense.

Q. Alexis, with Gary Johnson on the bench, did you feel extra pressure to contribute?

ALEXIS WANGMENE: You have to be ready to play, so we never know what's going to happen during the game. So every night you just got to come out with the right mind-set and go out there and compete so even Gary is not playing right now. We got his back so we got a good thing in representing the bench.

Q. You were a little more aggressive offensively tonight. Did you just feel something there or was that something that coach had told you to do?

ALEXIS WANGMENE: I just got a little confident and I got my tempo going, and I figured out the guy, they weren't really guarding the big guys, so I used a little bit. I got my confidence going and I made a shot.

Q. Those post clothes you got, did you get those from Duncan or did you get those after you moved here?

ALEXIS WANGMENE: Probably. Some of the move --

RICK BARNES: I actually got a time to get some more minutes here. You know what you're saying?

ALEXIS WANGMENE: We have been working on that all summer long and I have been working with Coach Mack to use it during the game.

CHARLIE FISS: Thank you very much. I will let you return to the locker room.

Let's go to questions for Coach Barnes.

Q. Rick, would you elaborate a little bit on what you got out of Dexter tonight. A lot of rebounds? The defense, he helped slow Blake Griffin at times, didn't he?

RICK BARNES: He did and, you know, it's really -- there is no one to blame for probably Dexter and Alexis and all those guys not playing more minutes than probably me because I got to get them out there. And we actually went back and showed them some foot age of us earlier in the year, the attitude we were playing with in a couple early games.

Actually, as I was watching it last night and Todd Wright put it together about us being aggressive. I told him, the one thing I noticed watching those clips you put together and those games, we played everybody. That's what I told the team before the game. I said, I don't know how the game is going to play but our thoughts are right now that we're going to try to get everybody involved. You got to be ready. I thought yesterday when we called on Dexter, I think he was a little bit surprised because he hadn't played very much.

So I told him, I'm just telling you, those are our intentions. I don't know how those games are going to shake out but you got to be ready.

I could tell the difference in the way Lex came in the game and Dex came in the game. I think it was huge with what he did.

And we -- normally, we felt like we probably should play zone when he comes in. But we actually said, hey, we are going to stay with our man and let Dex go to work down there, see what he can do, and I thought he did a really good job defensively. I thought he did a really good job rebounding the ball.

Q. You guys have now beaten Oklahoma six straight times all by double digit. Why the domination in this series of late and your thoughts on Oklahoma, are they NCAA worthy --

RICK BARNES: Oh, no doubt. I said back -- this is probably the hardest year since I have been -- in the ten years I've been in the Big 12 -- to pick a coach of the year because there are so many guys that did a great job and one thing about Jeff Capel, he did an unbelievable job this year fighting through the injuries, keeping his team where they are with the nonleague schedule, everything.

There's no -- Oklahoma is a NCAA team.

But in terms of -- again, I don't think it's dominance. I think obviously we've had some really good players in Texas over the ten years I've been there. But in terms of what they do, they're hard to play against. We got it going today. I mean, we really started shooting the ball well. When we do that, we can be hard to guard.

But, again, I have so much respect for what he's done in the short time being there, but there is no -- there's no question they've got to be in the NCAA tournament. They have to be.

Q. D.J. has come up in the last six, seven games, he had a little slump midway through the season, but it seems like he has picked things up even for him in the last month. I wonder if you can talk about the leap he's given you guys.

RICK BARNES: I think where's really -- he's been terrific all year. But people are going to look around and say, you know, we play him too many minutes.

I go the other way and I think as a staff, our job is to get our best players out there and he's gotten himself in a rhythm, too, and we don't want to break his rhythm. Where he's really improved so much in the last month is his concentration. In terms of understanding even more and more his teammates -- I mean, he did an unbelievable job today knowing he had to come out in some way, somehow get the pump primed for A.J. He made a conscious effort to look and try to get him going and transitioned a couple times. He came down -- if you were seeing him, his eyes were just darting.

Again, there is no doubt he was looking for A.J. to get him going. And he's done a great job of out of bounds situations, get guys talking more. But it is just his concentration. Today, again, I thought he was masterful with the way he worked the game for us.

Q. If it does wind up being a rematch with Kansas tomorrow, any thoughts on how that matchup sets up for your guys?

RICK BARNES: Well, Kansas, I've said all along, I think they're the best team we played all year. If that's what it gets down to, I am not going to assume that's going to happen obviously because Texas A&M at their place beat us as badly as we've been beaten all year. So regardless of who it is, we know -- I mean, this time of year, it is ironic. We started out the tournament playing a team we played a week ago and now we

got another game tonight where I think these guys played the same day, I think or maybe the day before.

It will be a hard-fought game for either team.

At this time of year, especially in your league when you're -- everybody knows each other so well, it is really hard. It is really hard. But hopefully, again, whoever it is, I just hope we can come out and put 40 minutes together and see what happens.

Q. Obviously you got your eyes on next week. What would it mean to you and the upper classmen to get over the hump on Sunday and win this thing?

RICK BARNES: Well, I think any time you go out to compete it means something. Again, having a chance to win a conference championship -- and we've been here a couple times. I'm not sure how many, but we haven't been able to finish it off. Again, I don't think that's because of the lack of effort or want-to. I think the ones we've been in, we've been beaten.

But there's no doubt when you compete, you want to win and you really do want to win. People will throw out there that, hey, next week these guys are young enough, you don't think about next week right now. We haven't for the last month and a half, I hope. But it is the next 40 minutes. It is a game of habit. And so we've got a chance to continue to build to get better. That will be our approach.

Again, whoever the two teams end up being tomorrow, believe me, both teams are going to go out there and play as hard as they can play and try to get a championship.

CHARLIE FISS: Coach, thank you very much. Congratulations. Good luck tomorrow.

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