

**October 22, 2009**



An interview with:

## **TEXAS COACH RICK BARNES**

THE MODERATOR: We're now joined by coach Rick Barnes from Texas.

Coach, welcome. Your thoughts about the upcoming season.

COACH BARNES: I'm ready to take their questions.

THE MODERATOR: Fair enough. Questions for the coach.

**Q. Coach, can you talk about Justin may on. I know you have Dexter Pittman and Damion James as your core seniors, but can you talk about what Justin Mason brings to this program.**

COACH BARNES: It is the first time in I don't know how long we've really had a senior class. We've had seniors, but you mentioned those three guys along with Matt Hill, who's actually a redshirt, but would be in that class.

Justin Mason works as hard as any player we've ever had. Last year he really struggled. He really had a tough time shooting the basketball, and I thought that really hurt him in a lot of ways.

I can't even begin to tell you how hard he's continued to work. But the things that he's done this year, really, mentoring a guy like Avery Bradley, Jordan Hamilton, that potentially could take minutes away from him, he is the ultimate team player. He really is all about winning.

He's a guy that he's going to find his minutes. Someway, somehow, he will be on the floor. Maybe not as much as he has in the past because we've got more depth than we've ever had, and he won't need to play that many minutes. But he continues to improve.

The one thing you know about him every single day, practice, games, whatever, he's going to give you everything he's got.

**Q. Rick, has anyone done anything pro or con to help you whittle down that 4-player rotation?**

COACH BARNES: Really, up to this point, every day it seems like somebody else does something -- and I've said this before. If they do what they're supposed to do, if we have to play 14 guys, we'll play 14 guys.

But every day somebody gives you something that you say he can really help us. There's no doubt we're going to be shuffling people in and out of games because we really do want to maintain an attitude of where we're going to attack both offensively and defensively. We're going to extend our defense and do some of that.

We want to play quick on the offensive end, and we do want to make conditioning a factor. So we're going to use our bench. But every day there's somebody.

You might think this person might not play that much, but over the last week, everyone's shown that they can help us.

**Q. I've heard Avery Bradley is kind of quick. Who does he remind you of in that regard, and what do you anticipate from him this year?**

COACH BARNES: Well, he is quick. He's extremely quick. He can close -- you know, if you looked at our guard core really with Avery and Varez Ward and Justin Mason and Dogus Balbay, really, if you put them in our football locker room, you would think they'd be defensive backs. They're extremely strong. They're built. They're quick.

They really can -- if they make a mistake, they all have the ability to close up and get back in the play.

Avery, what he loves to do as much as any player that I've been around in a long time, he loves to get into the offensive player and belly up

to him, try to get him to play with his back to the basket.

He'll have to go through some periods where he'll probably have to deal with getting fouled. You know, he just plays. He just goes at it.

But he is extremely quick, very explosive. He just gets there.

And he's continuing to learn every day. He's a player that, I think, he has tried to fit in way too hard. Where he has such great respect for our seniors and Justin and those guys that he has really let those guys teach him. But there's going to come a point to where he's going to have to let it go and be who he is.

He'll find it. There's no doubt about it. He's one of those players that in the last week out of nowhere he'll kind of do something, and you'll kind of go like wow. He never gets tired. He just keeps going and going and going.

But he will -- there's no doubt, he'll continue to improve every day.

**Q. Rick, talking about Avery as well, we've heard a lot about the fact that he's a pretty good defensive player, which is unusual for someone as young. How good is he for this stage of his development?**

COACH BARNES: Well, he's really good on the ball. I was talking to him, and we had a film session yesterday, and where he's going to have to -- and his idea sometime is just to attack and just like go at it.

And he's going to probably get a little defensive discipline, where he doesn't just take off and go try to do something on his own and maybe give up a three-point shot, something like that.

But he has to continue to work on his closeouts. Once he gets there, he can really guard you. But he has to make sure he gets it under control and contains it. Then he can climb into people.

He's such a -- I mean, he really wants to be coached, almost to a fault. I mean, every play. He'll look around and say, Coach, did I do that right? Am I doing it right? He's always wanting it done right.

But, obviously, you'd rather have that than the other way.

**Q. Rick, seems like every year we talk about Dexter Pittman and his weight, his potential. Just what is it -- how important is his consistency to your program?**

COACH BARNES: You know, Dexter, in all three years so far, he's had a great third of the year, and it's always been the last third of the year. And I've wondered and asked myself that question over and over. Why is it at the end he seems to come on really, really, really strong.

I don't know if it's because early in the year, you know, we obviously work extremely hard in our preseason, and Dexter never misses practice. He's never been a player that takes himself out of drills. He's going to really work at it. Obviously, he over the years has continued to try to lose weight and get his weight down. By doing that, sometimes you don't realize from a nutritional standpoint, trying to lose weight, going through a 2 1/2, 3-hour practice, how grueling it is on him.

Once we start getting into the season, practice is cut back, I think he gets better and his stamina is better. He is right now in the best shape -- I don't know if you've seen him, but when he walks in, he's a different looking guy. He's got his weight down even more so than a year ago. He's running the floor really well.

He got sick a couple weeks ago and lost -- got down to really under 290 for the first time. I said, maybe you should stay sick all the time. But actually the other day after practice he got on the scales while he was wet, and he weighed 281. That's really over 100 some pounds since he's been at Texas that he's lost.

And we talk about the weight, but that's not really a factor anymore because he's -- people, I think, will find out this year really the skill level that he has. I mean, he's a guy that can do some things, catches everything. And he'll be -- and a guy that we really need to be the team that we want to be is a guy that probably needs to be on the floor 26 minutes a night for us.

**Q. Following up on that, Rick, is it something of a luxury in college basketball these days to have a true post like Dexter and especially one as experienced as he is?**

COACH BARNES: I do think you've got to have that. We've got Dexter, and I think a year ago, losing Alexis Wangmene hurt us.

Alexis gives us another presence. He's got a 7'5" wingspan, and he and Dexter go at it every day. We had a good day the other day where those guys were blocking shots. Dexter has started to improve, where he's really started to make an impact on the defensive end. He blocked

two or three shots the other day, Alexis did. When you have two or three guys that can do that, it does give you something that you can deal with.

Dexter is a guy where, if we can give him the ball where he needs it, we don't think anyone can keep him from scoring. He's such a strong force down there.

Like we said to him, a big man, you've got to do more than just score. You've got to rebound it and defend your position. Got to be able to guard on the perimeter because people are going to definitely look and say, let's get him away from the basket and get him into pick-and-roll situations. He's done all that. He's improved in every area.

I do think in today's game, if you've got something like that -- and not a lot of people have it. But what helps us with our team this year, people want to play differently, five guys out, we can play that way too, with Damion and Gary Johnson, who often play together there. We were even playing Jordan Hamilton and Shawn Williams in those positions. We need to just spread out and play, we can do that.

**Q. I was wondering, since you got into the league, how have you seen general coaching styles change comparing now to then?**

COACH BARNES: Well, it's definitely changed. I think each person that comes into the league brings their own style and what they want to do and how they want to play.

You know, I've seen some good coaches in this league that have come and gone and were, I think, excellent coaches. For whatever reason, things didn't work out exactly the way they could have or should have.

Overall, this league, I think we've proven as a league that we've been able to attract some of the best players in the country.

The league has improved in a lot of ways. When I look at -- I mean, I could sit here and talk about the officiating from where it started 12 years ago to where it is today, it's night and day. It's going to really continue to get better.

You know, I think the way, really, the league has -- what they've done to continue to support basketball has really been impressive with, you know, once John Underwood came on board, a lot of things changed.

I think Dan Beebe is doing a great job and understands it. You can feel that he understands what we're going through as coaches and what we're trying to do to continue to build that part of it.

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Our league is always going to be able to attract high-level coaches because of being a league that has the exposure that we have. Coaches come in. Really, there's some great coaches in this league right now, great coaches.

And you know that your team's got to be ready to play, or you'll get beat.

**Q. Talking about your point guards, what do you expect from J'Covan Brown as far as where he fits in? How has he looked after sitting out a few years?**

COACH BARNES: Well, extremely talented. Great court vision. Great feel for the game. Plays the point guard position the way I think most coaches would like a guy to play the point guard position. He's thinking pass first, set his team up.

What makes a great point guard is a guy that makes it easy for everybody else, or makes it easier for everybody else. He has a way of doing that. How quickly he's able to show that will be strictly dependent on how quickly he can get himself in the kind of condition that he needs to be in.

He wasn't really with us all summer. And so when he got on campus -- and he is behind from that standpoint. But every day he gets better and better. He's one of those guys that you can tell that he loves to compete. And what's helped him now is right now every day he's being guarded by Dogus Balbay, Varez Ward, and he can really guard you. He's never had anybody belly up to him, get into him, so that's really going to help him. That in itself is going to bring him along quicker than anything else.

But once he figures it out, he's going to be a real weapon for us.

**Q. Rick, I know Kevin Durant has helped you guys attract more talent since he left, but do you have any way of knowing if it's helping the league in general? Some people have asserted that.**

COACH BARNES: I think it helps not only Kevin, but I think you look at all the players that come through here. Obviously, the more that those guys continue to go into the next level and perform at a high level, you know, kids are current. They keep up with what's going on right now.

You know, hopefully, from our standpoint, with the players that we have -- Kevin, LaMarcus

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Aldridge, Daniel Gibson, T.J. Ford, those guys, the more visibility they have, people know who we are, there's no doubt about that. There's no doubt what we've done coming through this program and this league. I think the same can be said with a Michael Beasley, a Blake Griffin, you know, those guys, yeah.

I mean, our league -- you know, years ago people used to say -- or ask the question, is our league ever going to be considered one of the best leagues in the country, or it can't be until you win the national championship. Obviously, Kansas doing that, I don't know what other questions people can ask about our league. If we're not the best league in the country, we've got to be in that discussion every year.

You go back and look at the success year in and year out, I think also in the tournament, obviously in the recruiting, where there's a lot of games won during those months.

But there's no doubt that from a Texas standpoint, that those guys that you mentioned, Kevin, and I mentioned are guys that really continue to help our program.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you very much.

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