

March 11, 2009



Texas – 67
Colorado – 56

An interview with:



CHARLIE FISS: We're joined now by the Texas Longhorns, Coach Rick Barnes and his two student-athletes, A.J. Abrams and Dexter Pittman.

Coach, congratulations on today's victory. Your thoughts?

COACH RICK BARNES: One, obviously, happy that we got the win and did some good things. Looking at Dexter, I just saw it here for the first time, he got 26-10. He should have had 35 and whatever. Right, Dexter?

DEXTER PITTMAN: Yes.

COACH BARNES: Again, I thought our guys did the right thing, really trying to play through. We definitely knew we wanted to put the ball inside and make Colorado defend.

Second half, we obviously did a much better job of not giving them free throws and keeping them off the free-throw line.

Q. A.J., is this the most you guys have looked all season to make sure you got him the ball?

A.J. ABRAMS: For the most part. We always try to look to get him the ball early in the game. But, you know, tonight we knew he would be a big dominant force which he always is. He was going to work inside. He was getting close to the paint, getting close to the rim. He was making the shots. He played a heck of a game tonight.

Q. Dexter, how come you didn't have 35 and whatever?

DEXTER PITTMAN: Because I missed some free throws. Five free throws I think? I missed five free throws.

COACH BARNES: What about the lay-ups?

DEXTER PITTMAN: I missed some lay-ups.

COACH BARNES: Who guarded you on that last lay-up?

A.J. ABRAMS: Me.

DEXTER PITTMAN: I think A.J. did.

Q. Both of you guys can talk about your new zone defense, is that your new staple? Where did that come from?

A.J. ABRAMS: Is that our new staple? We work on it. We just haven't used it. We have been pretty much a man-to-man guy, trying to apply pressure. I think Coach would agree, you have to mix-up defense this time of year and just try to be good at both of them.

Q. Dexter, did you run out of gas at the end referring to those lay-ups?

DEXTER PITTMAN: No, I wouldn't say that. Probably concentration. I wasn't concentrating on it, like Coach said, at the end of the game.

Q. A.J., can you talk about the confidence that you guys have in Dexter now, how that view of him is changing and maybe when it changed that you would feel comfortable running everything through him?

A.J. ABRAMS: We've always had confidence in Dex. I mean, he has put in so much work over the years. He has worked hard. He deserves what he is getting. Not too many people can stop him. We will keep giving him the ball and play through him because he is a dominant force, like I said. We will just try to play through him.

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Texas - 03.11.09

Q. This is for both A.J. and Dexter. You will advance to the quarterfinals and take on the Kansas State Wildcats. Kansas State is notorious for giving the Texas Longhorns grief in basketball, whether you are talking football or basketball. How are you planning on breaking the streak for your team?

A.J. ABRAMS: We will go out and play hard. That's what it is going to come to. That's what it is going to come down to is just effort and working the game plan. I mean, we are a better team than what we did last time we played them. We have to go out there and, like Dex said, we have to concentrate for a full 40 minutes.

COACH BARNES: Does the Big 12 reprimand for that? (Smiling).

Q. Dex, you weren't a factor in the game at Colorado like here. What happened in that one?

A.J. ABRAMS: Couldn't breathe.

DEXTER PITTMAN: That wasn't it, man.

COACH BARNES: He couldn't breathe.

DEXTER PITTMAN: Yeah, I was a little tired up there. It was quick.

I don't know. I was so worried about them, just them having smaller guys trying to drive me and I didn't get caught up in the game quick enough. I wasn't ready. But Coach and Coach Todd was talking to me and said I didn't play that good against them. I had to come in with the mind-set that I could show Colorado that I could play.

Q. Did you teach Jim Boeheim that zone defense or did you get it from him?

COACH BARNES: We started using it actually -- it was the year -- I don't know what year it was when Daniel Gibson -- Daniel's first year here. We had gotten down. I remember going to play Colorado up there. That was the game we only had seven scholarship players with us. That's when we really started using it.

But, yeah, I did talk to Jim about it. I really did. Back then we talked about it. As A.J. said, we've had it, we just haven't used it very much. We knew coming in that we really are -- our game plan was to use it 70 percent, 80 percent depending how it was going.

Colorado does a great job of driving the ball out of their man offense and they did a good job against the zone really. And we wanted to push out a little bit which is going to open up some

driving lanes. We've had it. We just haven't used it quite as much as we have in the past.

Q. Can you talk about Dexter's confidence and what you're seeing from him? I know he has missed some lay-ups and whatnot. Can you just talk about his confidence?

COACH BARNES: I think the difference is we walked in the locker room today -- I'm sorry, when we walked out of the hotel coming over here after we watched our personnel tape, he said, Coach, I didn't play well at all at Colorado. And I asked him the same question you guys asked.

He said the same thing. And today we actually said, "Stay back, don't allow yourself to be driven, make them come through you. You get deep post up on the offense end, they won't have an answer."

The difference in him is, again, I think he keeps working and keeps going. Our guys are starting to learn to get him the ball, throwing it up to him, which I think is good. We had a couple of really nice post feeds in there.

The one thing he did, Coach Sutton asked me about how he became such a good free-throw shooter, the year he spent losing a bunch of weight, the one thing I said to him from the day that we recruited him, he said, you must become a good free-throw shooter because you are going to get fouled a lot. That's the one thing of all the things he's done that I think he has worked really hard on.

I think we are all very confident in that situation that he will make his free throws. I still think some of those shots at the end, it's concentration really. But the biggest thing is, he has more minutes, he is playing more minutes. We try to get him out before each -- before each time-out if we can for a little bit. I thought he showed really some toughness today because he rolled his ankle a little bit and came back in.

Again, he is just getting started to what he can be.

Q. Did the fact that you played zone so much, did that also help Dex? He is a little bit better off when he can just stay back in the zone, right?

COACH BARNES: Well, you would think that. But honestly, that middleman in that zone is in some way the most important guy.

So it is not an easy position to play. Obviously, he is not moving as much. But that's not an easy position, it really isn't.

Again, at Colorado, our whole plan up there was, again, to play about 70 percent zone to keep Dexter in that game and he gave up eight quick points up there in the middle of a zone where he was just -- like you said, he was worried about people driving him. They got him up in the air and they went by him. That was the real reason he didn't play at Colorado. He wasn't effective in the zone, and that's the reason we are going to do it.

Man-wise, we wanted a smaller lineup out there. I think if he can keep getting better in the middle of it, it is going to help him. It is not an easy position to play, it really isn't.

Q. You just referenced that we are just beginning to see Dexter. If he continues to work, continues to progress, what is the upside there for Dexter? How good can he be?

COACH BARNES: Again, I do think he will continue. I mean, it is really amazing, if I could put up the before and after pictures of his -- the way he has changed his body and where he started, he really -- believe it or not, he is at 13 percent body fat. It is amazing where he is at and where he came from.

His body, it changes. It is amazing how it changes, and it keeps continuing to change. I still think that he will continue to -- his stamina will keep getting better. I said before, I think as he continues to lose weight, which he will, he's got great hands. I'm telling you, you don't realize how hard it is to shoot a basketball when your hands are as big as his hands. It is unbelievable how hard it is. For him to have the touch that he has is really, I think, a compliment to him how hard he's worked.

How hard he has worked -- and he really cares. He is very conscientious. When we do walk-throughs, he is at the point now where he asks more questions than anybody on our team because he really wants to do the right thing. So this is all kind of new for him in terms of playing the minutes he is playing and knowing that we're coming at him every time pretty much on the offensive end.

So I think that in itself is an adjustment for him, knowing that he has got to produce. I think people don't realize that. It is hard to be a legitimate 20-point scorer, 15-point scorer because every night people are game planning for you.

There is no doubt that people have to game plan for Dexter now.

Q. Rick, on the zone D, also if you may be playing four games in four days, does that help? How would you rate your defense down the stretch this season?

COACH BARNES: Well, now, we didn't play it thinking in terms of we are going to rest or any of that. We didn't do that. Again, looking at our tape with Colorado, they just -- when we had them pretty much in the same position we had them today, they just kept staying in the game and caused us fouling because they drive the ball so well.

Any time you look at the fact they shot 35 percent, you will feel good about that. They scrapped and came up with offensive rebounds. One of the drawbacks in the zone is the rebounding. Some of those shots come off and there is one area of the floor that it goes against everything we taught because we don't block out in the zone. If you do go block out you get penalized or you get hurt by it most of the time because the way the ball is going to come of.

That's the thing that's hard, again, getting guys to block out of it consistently and getting the guards to come down. Dogus came down with great rebounds today and the guards have to rebound out of it. We'll use it. We get in it now. We'll stay in it until I think people get comfortable against it.

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