

March 12, 2009



Texas – 61
Kansas State – 58

An interview with:



CHARLIE FISS: We are joined now by the Texas Longhorns, Coach Rick Barnes and his two student-athletes, Dexter Pittman and Varez Ward.

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

COACH RICK BARNES: It was exactly the type of game we thought it would be. Kansas State played as hard as any team we have played all year. We know that from our first encounter with them. We knew it would be a very physical game.

Early, again, they did a great job. In fact, they did a tremendous job on the offensive boards and we knew they would force us into some turnovers, and we got careless a few times. Nonetheless, when we had to make some plays, we made some plays.

Q. Dexter, you think you played even better today than yesterday considering the physical nature of the competition?

DEXTER PITTMAN: I think it was just a little bit more physical today than yesterday because Kansas State has big bodies. I knew going into this game, I would have to go in there and rebound and box out because they crash to the board every time.

I just went in the game with that mind-set, just block out and go to the glass and get the rebound and jump over them and use my athleticism.

Q. Dexter, are you starting to see yourself as a go-to guy on this team? Are you to the point yet where you are going to say "get me the ball" to guys like Damion and A.J. and say "run it through me"?

DEXTER PITTMAN: I'm just playing my role on the team. I'm doing my job. That's my whole mind-set.

I wouldn't say that I'm like a go-to guy. Everybody on the team has got a job. I basically think there is not a go-to guy on the team. We don't have a Kevin or a D.J. this year. Everybody has to do their job.

That's what me and, for example, Varez, he came in off the bench tonight and did his job. He knew what he would have to come in and do. He had to play defense and the defense stopper that he is.

Q. Varez, one, you had seven points in a row. Were you trying to duplicate Mike Singletary and go off there? Did you watch him last night?

VAREZ WARD: I just wanted to come in and do the little things today and help our team win the game.

Q. How much rest did you have? I know you lost some of the minutes you had gotten early in the year. How much rest are you feeling now?

VAREZ WARD: I had a whole lot of rest during the past couple of days, and I think that benefited me a lot today during the game because I was able to stay in the whole half and was able to kick in.

Q. Dexter, you keep setting records for minutes played. Are you in better shape than

you were earlier?

DEXTER PITTMAN: It is all just a mind thing. I'm taking over that now. Sometimes I look over at the sideline and the coach will be like "No, you're not tired." I will tell myself I'm not tired.

It is more a mind thing and play smart when I'm tired and don't let the fatigue come in.

Q. Varez, when Coach put you in the game at that moment, did you have any instructions? Did you have any idea what you wanted to do to try to help the team where you were at that point in the game?

VAREZ WARD: I really didn't have any instructions. When I go in, I'm always thinking defense first and everything else plays itself out.

Q. Varez, talk about going up against Clemente. Last time y'all faced him, he went for 44. You were the only one, it seemed, that day that had any success against him. Just talk about trying to keep him in track.

VAREZ WARD: Clemente is hard to guard because he is always coming at you full speed. I just wanted to come in and slow him down a little bit and really just take him out of his game, or at least try to take him out of his game.

Q. Dex, you mentioned Varez. Specifically, what did he do for your guys during that span that he was in the game? Did he kind of add some energy to what was going on?

DEXTER PITTMAN: I mean, like I said, Varez, his whole mind-set is defense. He came in there and he frustrated Clemente a little bit. I heard Coach tell him -- lock him down. I know V, I told him do his job and he said he was.

So I just knew that he took it as a challenge to try to cut Clemente out and frustrate him because last game he thought he had a little free ball.

I knew all of our guards took it as a challenge in this game to try to stop him.

CHARLIE FISS: Questions now for Coach Barnes?

Q. Rick, when you put Varez in there, was it for defensive purposes? And was his scoring just a bonus?

COACH BARNES: We talked at halftime and we just felt the way the game was playing it, and all I said to him is "This is your kind of game"

because it was a very physical, hard-fought game. We needed to drive the ball.

I just said to him "Do what you do defensively and drive the ball." With some of the things we were doing, we could change the guys on the floor. That's what we said, just be aggressive, go at it. The biggest thing was defensively. I thought he was terrific. I really thought he did some good things. What he did defensively was really good.

Q. Can you elaborate on what you guys were able to do against Clemente as opposed to last month?

COACH BARNES: Sometimes it is a make or miss situation. Some guys -- sometimes they make them. Sometimes they miss them.

Tonight there is no doubt that I think that we tried to guard him the same way we did in Austin. We didn't give him as many open-court plays where he was able to get away from us.

Some nights it is just make or miss. We did go through a period where Varez, we were really trying to deny him the ball. We were trying to take him out and let somebody else handle the ball to put him into a clock situation where they would have to hurry something. We had a couple big guys make blocks at the rim and alter some shots. Again, I thought between the guards -- the guys that guard him, they really were conscious of making him come through them and trying to stay attached.

Q. Now, you guys will advance to the semifinals against the Baylor Bears who just took down the No. 1 Kansas Jayhawks this morning. Are you on any kind of upset alert against that team?

COACH BARNES: Well, first of all, I'm not sure you would call it an upset. People forget now that Baylor was picked -- I think tied for third in the preseason Big 12 poll and a team that they're playing great right now.

They come in and really -- they played well last night. I didn't see them play today. I don't think if you took a poll of the coaches, the coaches would say that it is that big an upset if they beat anybody. When a team is picked third in the preseason poll, you know they have proven in the past they can win. That's no different here.

I just know that our players understand when you play against Baylor, they've got an

inside-outside attack. You are going to have to play hard and sustain them for 40 minutes.

Every time we have been in games with them, they have been hard-fought games. And they are playing with, I'm sure, with loads of confidence.

So, again, I don't know upset alert, I don't know if I would look at it that way.

Q. A.J. takes four shots today. He had another efficient game just like yesterday. Dexter, you know, the stats are starting to head into the paint. I asked Dexter this. Is it to the point where he needs to say -- and obviously the shots question is probably to your liking. But does he need to say to Damion and A.J., run everything through me?

COACH BARNES: I think you are looking for some quote or something. The guys are doing what they need to do. They know Dexter is a factor, and we've always wanted him to be a factor. And the fact he is staying out there, doing it.

The difference in the game there, we told our team going in that our offense really hurt us in Austin. We took bad shots. We were just, again -- they are a hard team because they pressure. Our shot selection was bad.

Again, for the last longest while here, every time Dexter has gone in the game from start to finish, we have tried to go through Dexter every time he has been in the game. Where he is today is because of his willingness to continue to improve. I'm serious, from the very first game in the season when he went in the game, there was no doubt that the whole team knew we wanted to get him the ball. I don't think that's really changed any.

Q. What did you see causing all the turnovers out there? Anything in particular or careless plays?

COACH BARNES: What upset me at the end, we came out of the time-out and we didn't execute what we wanted to from a time-out. So a couple times there. Early, I thought they were not being aggressive with it. You should have gone by the double team as opposed to waiting on it.

Other times, we just got in a hurry. But they play hard, they are aggressive. We should have -- a couple times we got down the floor. We were just letting doubles as opposed to attacking and doing what we wanted to do. But give them credit. They played really, really hard.

They pressured the ball early in the game. I told the players at halftime I thought we needed to be tougher with the ball. We drove a few times. They slapped the ball away. We had some rebounds in our hands that they came and took away from us. We just kept talking about we got to be tougher with the ball. We have to do a better job on the boards.

Dexter, I told him the most impressive thing he has done since he has been at Texas is those 20 rebounds tonight. That's what I told him this morning when we walked away from the meeting. You have shown that you can score. I want you to block shots and be a factor on the defensive end. Today he may have done that better than at any time, no question.

Q. Rick, has Dexter's minutes kind of ceased to be a major issue with you in terms of how long you can keep him in the game, how long you can play him? He had 34 today.

COACH BARNES: Again, foul trouble today. Obviously -- in the past, that's one of the reasons Dexter's minutes didn't go up. I said this all year long. I thought earlier in the year officials had a hard time officiating the game because of his size. I think it is hard because he is such a big man.

He gets in there, and sometimes he just turns. Earlier in the year I think people were flopping and doing things like that. I think Dexter has also adjusted to know what he can do, where he needs to be. He has learned not to lead so much with an elbow or shoulder into people.

We try to use the time-outs, try to get him out before the time-out break, if we can. You got to give him credit. He is really learning how to do it. It is just experience. There is no doubt he is working at it. The more he can stay out there, he is a factor. There is no question about that.

CHARLIE FISS: Thank you and congratulations.

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