

October 21, 2010



An interview with:

COACH RICK BARNES

PETER IRWIN: We're now joined by Texas Coach Rick Barnes. Coach has suggested he would just take questions.

COACH BARNES: I'm ready.

Q. Among many, two of your biggest problems last year were team chemistry/leadership and point guard play. Look at those particular areas now as you begin to move into this season.

COACH BARNES: Well, obviously they are some issues we looked at and knew we had to address. I can only tell you from the end of last season to where we are now, I think the returning players had a great spring, a great summer. We have had a great preseason. In terms of our chemistry, I'm really pleased and happy where we are right now with our basketball team. And I look at the point guard position, I think obviously with Dog being able to get back, he will be back. With the addition of Cory Joseph, I feel that we are going to be fine there.

I just really -- I have enjoyed being with this group as many as any group I have been with for a long time because of the fact they have really, I think, bought into the fact that it is about the team, about winning and if we can continue with where we are right now and continue to grow, I think we have got a chance to have a really nice basketball team.

Q. As far as depth goes, you obviously don't have as much as last year. How have the big kids who have been around a while, it has only been a week, but how are they doing so far?

COACH BARNES: I think okay. I think obviously the newest one to it would be Tristan Thompson. I think, one, Tristan has come in and I

think he would be the first to tell you that the older guys have really embraced he and Cory and helped them, let them know what lies ahead as much as they can right now. Obviously both of those guys, those young guys will have to go through it to experience it.

But up to this point, again, Tristan has really worked extremely hard, in some regards maybe as hard as anybody on our team. I just think if he will continue with the type of effort he is putting in right now and with the focus that he's giving us, he has got a chance to have an outstanding year.

Q. A lot has been made with the way the Big 12 conference is going to change, that without Nebraska and Colorado and with having home and home with everybody, that it will be a much stronger basketball league. Do you get a sense that basketball will be even more important in this conference, even a bigger deal than it has been?

COACH BARNES: I think because we are going to play a round-robin schedule, I think it is going to make it, in my opinion, I think it will be the best basketball league in America. I really believe that. Over the time I have been in the league now, this is my 13th year, I have watched this league grow. I watched programs grow. When you start playing a round robin, it is really -- it is going to be really tough.

And I think, you know -- I hope in some regards that when what we do as a league right now, that maybe people are going to realize that you don't always have to expand to be better, but maybe being at ten is the right number. And I think for the reason that we're going to have great success with all the other sports as well, but I think basketball-wise, I do think this is going to be the one sport in our league now that's really going to take off and people, I do think, will look at it in the near future as being the best basketball league in America.

Q. With the departure of Jones and

Pittman, can you talk about Gary Johnson's role in the front court this year.

COACH BARNES: Well, again, Gary Johnson going into his senior year, he has been with us. Even though he has played somewhat of a -- people might say a lesser role, I'm not sure I would say that, because he has been a very important part to our program since he has been there. But, again, what I have been impressed with with our leadership is the fact that I think he and really Matt Hill have been the two guys that have really given us great leadership. And they do it with what they do every day on the court. They -- neither one of those guys, I would say, are real vocal type of leaders. But their work ethic, the way they go about their business, they set a great example for everybody.

And if anyone deserves to have a great senior year, it would be Gary and Matt. But Gary is -- again, he's won a lot of basketball games for us. Been in a lot of big situations for us. We will need that from him this year.

Q. Can you just talk about Jordan and maybe any changes you have seen in him. Obviously last year he won you some games with his ability to shoot the basketball, but other times maybe the shot selection wasn't particularly great.

COACH BARNES: I don't think what Jordan went through last year is really unlike any freshman. He is young, coming into the college game, trying to learn a totally different game. And there is no doubt that Jordan has really worked and he continued to work all last year to try to improve and try to understand the game more and more. And I think, again, he had a great spring. He has had a great summer. He has continued to work really hard into the fall here.

And I think Jordan would be the first one to tell you that he still -- like I would say this about any guy in college basketball, they are still a work in progress. They are still young. They are still getting started.

But in terms of his attitude, it has been excellent. As long as -- again, he'll continue to want to learn the game, and he does want to learn this game. He wants to be good at it. But, again, he has had a great offseason and he is building now and he will continue to grow.

Q. Would you talk about the raw ability of your two freshmen. And where is J'Covan Brown right now in the big picture?

COACH BARNES: Again, the two freshman, I think if you ask anyone in the program, from the coaches to the players, I think the first thing they would tell you is their work ethic. They are two of the guys that are in the gym first and I can tell you they are the last two to leave every day. And they have done that from the time they have walked on campus. I think that in itself speaks volumes about them.

And I think it speaks volumes to the upperclassmen, that these guys want to be a part and do their best. Every day they are the two last guys on the court that leave.

J'Covan, a lot like, I think, our team in general, is that the season is over with last year, we knew that we had to improve in certain areas. We talked about it. We say what we're going to do. And we knew what standard that we expect our basketball program to live up to. But every one of those guys have had a good offseason, good summer, good fall right now.

But I'm happy with all of them. I really am, because I think they truly are making a conscious effort to do everything the way we want it done. And I think they understand that for us to have the kind of season that we have to have and we want to have is togetherness.

And they stay together, they work together and so there are so many positive things that have happened that has our entire coaching staff excited. We think, again, it will continue to grow.

We have got a chance to have a really good basketball team.

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