

March 12, 2010



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Texas A&M - 66

An interview with:



CHARLIE FISS: We want to offer our congratulations to Bill Self to Bill Self and Kansas Jayhawks and student-athletes Xavier Henry and Markieff Morris. Coach, your comments.

COACH SELF: I thought it was a great game. I thought both teams played very hard. A&M controlled the game for the most part, the first 30 minutes. And we were just a basket or two behind the entire time. I thought we tried really hard the first half. A lot of defensive breakdowns from a mental standpoint, but it wasn't from a lack of effort.

Then Sherron put us on his back to keep us in contact, and then last 12, 14 minutes everybody played great. So it was a good win for us.

CHARLIE FISS: Questions for our student-athletes.

Q. Xavier, talk about the telling part when you all went on that long run, what you thought the key to that was, and within that context, how big Sherron's steal and conversion was.

XAVIER HENRY: Our run started on the defensive end. We switched up our defense a little

bit, and it kind of got them just out of sync. And once we started playing better defense and rebounding the ball, we started scoring too. So it just led on and kept going on. And Sherron's steal at the end was big, it was big. Got him another bucket and put us ahead and gave us a little more cushion towards the end.

Q. Markieff, could you take me through those back-to-back layups you made? First one was with nine-and-a-half minutes left, and the second one was with eight-and-a-half minutes left that gave you the lead. What kind of looks were they giving you that allowed Sherron to lob the ball in to you?

MARKIEFF MORRIS: I think they put a lot of pressure on Sherron because he was making a lot of shots. I kept working, and when he threw it over me I should have dunked it but I was a little tired, so I made sure I got the bucket. And I know coach told me as soon I came to the sideline to dunk the ball next time, but they was releasing on the post and I was getting a lot of buckets.

Q. Markieff, what happened with the double technical? And secondarily, how do you guys like being judged from game to game this time of year whether you're into it enough emotionally getting ready for next week?

MARKIEFF MORRIS: What happened was I stepped in, Sherron was arguing a little bit. I stepped in. The ref thought I was talking to him. What I was doing was actually pulling Sherron back. He gave us a double tech. But we don't want to have the image of bad guys. But we won't back down. And I just think we're going to keep playing hard.

Q. Markieff, what do you make of this Aggies team in terms of physical, how tough they play? Do you feel they're a team that can do some damage in the tournament?

MARKIEFF MORRIS: I do, they real

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tough. Last game we played they had 20 offensive rebounds on us. They've got real good guard play with Sloan, and their big fellas, they're bangers, and I think they can make a good run, just keeping it together.

Q. You had 11 points when you guys went on that 21-2 run in the second half. What keyed that run for you guys? What triggered that?

XAVIER HENRY: Just our defense. Our defense and ability to rebound. And my points, it was all my teammates finding me. They looked for me all the time and I just tried to find the open spot.

CHARLIE FISS: Thank you. Questions for coach.

Q. Bill, what did the switch to the zone do for you?

COACH SELF: Well, probably, you know, had as big an impact in the outcome of the game as anything, because we didn't really guard them well man-to-man or they were able to beat us off the bounce a lot.

And I think when we went zone or went triangle and two, I think maybe for whatever reason just got them out of rhythm and it's hard for them to get it back. We don't practice the zone a lot, but I thought our guys did play it pretty well. And we actually rebounded pretty good out of it, which is something when you don't practice a lot it's kind of hard to do.

But whether the zone or offense or whatever we play, we played pretty good the last ten minutes. We got the ball where it needed to go and our first shot defense was good and we rebounded very well.

Q. I'll ask the same question I asked the players, how do you like the team being judged from game to game this time of year, number one, just trying to get ready for next week, the emotion? And even Texas A&M missing two key players to come out and play a game like that?

COACH SELF: Texas A&M, you know -- I'm sorry, I didn't mean to cut you off. But tonight, in our league you had four of the top 12 RPI teams in America playing. No other conference has that. And so I think A&M is either 11 or 12, if I'm not mistaken. Baylor and K-State are like 5 and 8, and I could be wrong, and I think we're 1. That didn't happen anywhere else. So you expect other teams to play good when you play good people.

And we weren't very good defensively early on. Our ball screen defense was awful because we didn't play behind it the way we were supposed to do. And they got some easy baskets and got some uncontested looks that gave them confidence. But top 12 team in the country, that should happen.

Just like if they give us confidence, we should play a little bit better. And we had a lot of careless turnovers. But I'm not going to defend how we played tonight, because if you told anybody before the game you'd win double figures against A&M tonight you'd think you played very, very well. The situation was instead of playing great the first ten minutes, we were great the last ten minutes.

And I do think in games like this you can really learn and grow from it, because we're going to be behind again. And guys have to step up and make plays. We may have to switch things on the fly a little bit. But I thought our guys responded very well to that.

Q. I was wondering, when you get to this point in the year every year and the games get more intense, Big 12 and NCAA tournament, how important is it for the teams across the board to have really good guard play?

COACH SELF: I think it's imperative. The thing about it is you can have great post guys but somebody has to get the ball to the post guys where you can have great guard play, and you don't have to pass it to them. They can go get their own shots or create for others. The further you go -- even though I will say this, a lot of times your offense is potentially better in the NCAA tournament than it is in your conference tournament, what not, because other teams hadn't scouted you as well, they don't know you as good.

The key is when you have good guard play, you can manufacture things without running anything. Like, guys can just beat their man forced help and pass it to a guy and he makes a shot or a guy can just make a play defensively, or a guy understands time score and momentum. And I really think in the NCAA tournament it's imperative you have that because teams will come up with a scheme to keep the ball out of the post a lot of times.

And you need both, obviously. But if I had to pick anything to have, I'd say great guard play is

the most important thing in the tournament.

Q. On that theme, Donald Sloan, does any team rely as much on any one player as A&M does with Donald Sloan? Seemed when he got the third foul and went out, both times he went out you guys took advantage of the quick runs.

COACH SELF: He got his third foul and went to the bench, that was positive for us. Like it would be for anybody when you take the best player off a team and set him down a little bit. But they rely on him a lot. I don't know if they relied on him tonight more than we relied on Sherron.

But we do have some nice pieces around him. I thought Donald played great. I thought he made some hard shots. He got them off to a great start. He had 13 in the first 17 minutes or whatnot. And didn't force anything. Made some guarded shots. He is a terrific player. And that's one of the big reasons why A&M has a great chance to have success moving forward, is because when you get the ball to a guy and you're being defended well and he can just go and get you two points, that's an advantage that a lot of teams don't have.

Q. Could you talk about the other semifinal game tonight, will you allow the guys to watch the entire game or do you put them down early, or is the scout done for both teams?

COACH SELF: The scout's done but our coaches will watch the game. Our players aren't going to stay and watch it. We'll watch it back at the hotel when we eat as a group or whatever. But it's going to be a fabulous game. You've got two really good teams that are so explosive offensively, both of them, when their guards are making shots.

Tweety and Dunn and obviously Pullen and Clemente, they're as good offensively as any guards in the league, period. So I think it will be a fun game. You've got length. You've got guys that pursue the ball. You've got athletes, both teams play hard. Kind of different styles defensively. But it will be a fun game to watch. And whoever we play, obviously, will be a very difficult game tomorrow.

Q. Could you comment, please, on Xavier's development as a freshman shooting confidently all over the floor and playing a key role?

COACH SELF: Xavier has been a key player for us. He's played really well the last

month and a half or whatever it's been, six weeks or five weeks. I mean really good. Like as good as anybody we have on our team. I wasn't happy with him at all the first half. I thought that he wasn't aggressive. They took his ball a couple times. Really labored.

And then the second half I pulled him and the next thing you know he comes back and he reacted like a player's supposed to react. Water off his back. Next play as opposed to dwelling on the negative. And he was able to spin it. Of course, he made some huge shots for us.

He's a terrific shooter, but he's become a better player, too, and that's the thing I like most, is that because he's becoming more whole, basically, each and every day.

CHARLIE FISS: Thank you, Coach.

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