

# Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Media Day

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

## Shaka Smart

Texas Longhorns

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Coach Shaka Smart from Texas. Coach, welcome, and your thoughts on the upcoming season?

COACH SMART: Good morning, everybody. Excited to be here in Kansas City, and really, really excited about being the head coach at the University of Texas.

Practice is about two and a half weeks gone so far for us. We're really excited about what's coming. Our guys are getting tired of playing against each other. But they've been terrific in practice. They've worked really hard. I think they've been extremely receptive since day one, on April 3rd, when we arrived in Texas.

Now the next step for us is putting that in place against opponents, against other teams. We haven't had any games yet, so we're champing at the bit to get on the court. I believe it's 24 days until our first game.

**Q. Coach, welcome to the Big 12. What do you see as your biggest challenge or primary challenge in your first season at Texas?**

COACH SMART: I think your biggest challenge in your first year is always implementing your philosophy, your way of doing things. People want to use the word "culture", your culture, because whether you're taking over a veteran team or a younger team, whether you've brought in new guys or it's mostly returning guys. Everyone is new to what you're going to do at that new institution. So the biggest challenge is getting on the same page, players, coaches, everyone that's part of our program, and us being connected around one goal, connected around a process for accomplishing that goal.

**Q. The other day pace of play, and I was wondering do you have a statistic in mind or metric in mind that you judge that, yes, this is a successful pace that I want to go at?**

COACH SMART: Not necessarily. We do look at a lot of different statistics. To be honest with you, we have statistics up to our ears. Sometimes I think you can get bogged down by that stuff, so you've got to be careful not to become obsessed with them. But I think they can give you an indication of the way a game's going.

Certainly possessions in the game is one statistic you



can look at. I think points per game is obviously an important one. You want to be putting points on the board. How many points you're giving up is obviously relative to how much you're scoring.

But for us, we also look at how quickly we're shooting, and how quickly the other team's shooting, the shot clock. It's going to be interesting with the new shot clock how that changes not only the way that other teams play in general, but the way that they try to play against us.

**Q. In the past your teams have been smaller and you've had that pace of play. Now you inherit a Texas team that last year had one of the biggest (indiscernible) in the country. So how has that adjustment been?**

COACH SMART: It's been interesting. I think one thing that's maybe a misnomer about our teams at VCU is that we didn't have good players up front. We had some really good players. In fact, every year our starting four or five led us in scoring in the six years I was there. But we just played a very fast-paced style where the guards really made a lot of plays in the open floor.

At Texas, we're fortunate, in this first year, we have a lot of big guys that we think can be really good players for us and contribute to success. Then we also have a lot of perimeter guys that we can play with, with great depth. So if those guys, again, can buy into the system of playing with great aggressiveness and enthusiasm, togetherness, then we'll have a chance to do some big things.

**Q. You mentioned getting guys to buy in, and you've got a couple of veterans in Isaiah, especially. Is it easier to get guys to buy in when you have veterans or is there a benefit to having older guys who maybe have been in another system and you're inheriting them?**

COACH SMART: Well, I'd rather have older guys than younger guys. We have one of the more experienced teams around, not just in this league, but I think around the country.

At the same time, there are a lot of experienced teams in this league. But sometimes guys that have been playing for a while maybe have a certain way that they

think is going to create success for them. A big part of a coach's job, I learned this from Billy Donovan, is to clearly define and hold accountable what goes into winning. So that's our job as coaches is to get these guys to understand what we feel is going to go into our team being successful and our guys individually having success.

**Q. You came from a very tough conference where you can get a tough game night in and night out. You come to the Big 12 where from top to bottom anyone can beat you. Does the mindset change going into the conference season knowing that there are no easy outs on any given night?**

COACH SMART: No, it doesn't change because that's the way you feel about your team whatever league you're in. I think if you ask coaches around the country in any conference, they're going to tell you their league is hard. Now clearly this is one of the best and it's one, as you mentioned, it's not one of those leagues with 14, 15 teams where there's a few teams at the bottom that you can count on beating, whether it's at home or on the road. This is such a challenging league. It's a true round robin.

But to be honest, our focus primarily is on our non-conference schedule because that's what comes first. We've got to do a great job establishing who we are in November and December. And then if we can continue to get better, I think the same things go into winning when you're playing a non-conference team that go into winning when you're playing in league play. Obviously, the stakes are higher, the crowds are more loud, they're more into the game.

And certainly, as a new coach in the Big 12, I'm going to have to get to know what this league's all about, particularly on the road.

**Q. You just talked about what you learned from Billy Donovan in terms of instilling the winning. Just curious, this was a team that last year had trouble closing out games. Struggled down the stretch, losing a lot of close games. How do you get them over that hump? How do you instill that confidence at closing time?**

COACH SMART: To be honest with you, we're not focused a whole lot on the past. I think you can learn from the past. It's something to grow from. But our focus is moving forward.

How do we instill a winning atmosphere, winning mentality? Again, I think it starts from being highly connected around having the same goal and the same process for reaching that goal. You can't have that unless there is a genuine love and appreciation and care for one another. Now we're talking about deeper

stuff beyond even basketball. As a basketball program, we need to get to know each other. We need to develop that bond. The last six months have been terrific in that way.

But we have faced very, very little adversity in the off-season. Now we get into the season and we play against teams that are really talented and want to win just as bad as we do, that's when you start seeing adversity and now you have to respond.

To be honest, the adversity is what allows you to grow even more. So we do have some guys and a lot of the older guys have been through some challenging times at different times in their career. Hopefully they can use those experiences and grow from them.

**Q. You've got a lot of guards that kind of combo-type guys that can handle the ball. Obviously Isaiah's going to play a lot of point guard minutes for you. Who do you see filling that secondary point guard role for you, and how important is that going to be in your half court?**

COACH SMART: Yeah, it's going to be big. Actually, Isaiah finds a way to get off the point guard position quite a bit in practice. And again, that's because as you mentioned, we have some other guys that can handle the ball and play that point guard position. He'll start there, unless something crazy happens.

Then we do have some other guys that I think will play in addition to Isaiah at that position. Javan Felix has a lot of experience playing the point spot. Demarcus Holland, although his primary position is off the ball, he can certainly play some point guard. And Kerwin Roach is a freshman that's played in practice quite a bit. I'd say 90% of his reps have been at the point guard spot. Though when he is in there with Isaiah or Javan, he's very capable of playing off the ball.