

Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Championship

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Kansas City, Missouri, USA

Texas Longhorns

Shaka Smart

Postgame Press Conference



Texas Longhorns 67, Texas Tech Red Raiders 66

SHAKA SMART: It's always a war against those guys, take my hat off to Tech for really, I mean, they were at a high level with their aggressiveness and their toughness the way they battled, the way they offensive-rebounded. They turned us over twenty times. Impressive, impressive game by them.

We struggled for a lot of the game but I thought the way that our guys fought back from deficits in both halves showed a lot of resolve. Key contributions from a lot of guys. And then we had a couple guys who it wasn't their night.

We have to quickly turn the page. Obviously got a great team coming up tomorrow.

Q. We are watching it from a little bit different perspective but as I'm looking up, I'm wondering, man, they are only down by this, considering the turnovers, Tech's offensive rebounds. How did you guys pull this one out? What went into winning in those final minutes down the stretch?

SHAKA SMART: Well, I think first of all, when you play Tech, like I said, at least when we play Tech, it's always a war and sometimes it's not the prettiest game. Sometimes it's kind of a game of attrition to some extent. And you're right, I mean, even when we got down ten in both halves, it certainly felt doable that we could come back.

The biggest thing that went into winning is the guys believing and staying together and then the next biggest thing was actually getting stops. There was one point where they scored eight consecutive times in the second half and we had a time-out and I said, "Guys, you can't win that way. They can't score that many times in a row. You have to stop them."

Down the stretch we were able to do that. That's why we

won.

Q. We don't talk about this enough, but your relationship with Matt, how long y'all have known each other, how long y'all have been together. You're practically tied together. He wins the game tonight and he's going to have to be big rest of this month. What does he mean to you and what do you think when he takes over these games like this?

SHAKA SMART: The biggest thing is I trust him, and I think he trusts me. In any relationship, that's a very, very important component. You know, I love seeing him play with great confidence. When I first met Matt, he was in eighth grade, and you know, you would have thought this guy is the best player in the world with the confidence that he has. And since then, he's been through a lot of twists and turns. He's had a lot of great moments. Won a National Championship in high school. Came here.

Has had a lot of great moments here and also has had some challenging moments here. You know, years where a team didn't do as well as we wanted to do, but he's always stayed attached with what we want him to do and been a leader for us.

I was telling Craig Way on the radio, sometimes we are on him about having more urgency, but the flipside is he's cool as a cucumber when pressure comes, and you know, that's kind of the give-and-take. You know, he stepped -- I had no doubt he was making those free throws. And obviously the way he played was huge for our team.

Q. This was a frustrating night for Greg. Curious where he's at, what do y'all have to say to him and what's the team got to say to him? He's a guy you're going to need going forward this month.

SHAKA SMART: Well, I haven't talked to him since the game ended. I think the first thing is having a passion and excitement, all of our guys for winning. That's a heck of a win and it wasn't easy.

Secondly, Greg is a guy that we really value and appreciate. But I think for all of our guys, really, really



taking ownership of how to play well and how to help your team on both ends of the floor is huge. Obviously that's toughest when you're in your first year. So we've got to help him with that. We have to help him understand that he's not on an island. We love him. We care about him.

Tonight obviously as a team, we turned the ball over too much and we have to do a better job with that. But we'll spend time together tonight and tomorrow and try to get right for tomorrow.

Q. I know you chart deflections and turnovers and 50/50 balls and I would suspect that Tech dominated in the 50/50 area tonight. But with the fouls and Courtney and Greg struggling, you guys still managed to win the game, is that a culture win for the Texas Longhorns?

SHAKA SMART: I think it is and they have got a heck of a culture, too. Like I said, it's always a war against them. And you're right, they did win more 50/50 balls and that's one of the first things our guys will see on tape, because we have to get better. There's one on the floor in the corner that, you know, I just thought we weren't fast enough to.

But our guys found a way. I think culture is about finding a way when the chips are down, when things are not going great. It's easy to have a good attitude and do everything the right way when things are going well and you're up big. But I thought our guys really hung in there together.

Royce Hamm, it's funny, he had not played all game, but he was unbelievable on the bench with his energy. And then Jericho got four fouls and I'm like -- K.T. told me, "Put Royce in." And yeah, I'm going put him in. He was engaged and in it. That's what we need.

Today was not perfect from that standpoint, but our guys, one thing we have learned this year because we have had more of them, is when you win big games like this, it gives you a certain feeling that you don't get from any other type of experience. And you want to do it again.

So that's what our focus needs to be obviously going into tomorrow.

Q. Matt joked he wished the refs could be more lenient with those four fouls with Jericho, putting him back with five and a half with four to go in that situation, and just how do you maintain his mental state as he's committing fouls and picking up cheapies or whatever you want to call them?

SHAKA SMART: We have a word we use, big and I kind of go like this, to indicate to him just move on to the next

play; respond.

Jericho, believe it or not, I know it's hard to tell because he's so quiet. He's very hard on himself when plays don't go his way like a foul is called on him or he misses a shot. So in the past he struggled to respond or move on to the next play.

Guy had a double-double tonight. He really, really helped us. I felt like at that juncture in the game, we had to have him in. We had to kind of roll the dice a little bit with some foul trouble but I just felt like we had to have him and he was big for us defensively.

Q. Do you almost feel like you're growing as a team still and you're a more complete team because you just don't have to win with great play from three guards because you've got Jase and Jericho and Kai?

SHAKA SMART: That's a great point. We absolutely are going and need to continue to grow. I know it sounds crazy that we are almost to mid-March. But because of the nature of this year, Greg being new, Jase coming off injury, Kai becoming a guy who is rapidly evolving as a player, the goal is for them to be much different in March than they were in December. And then the other guys evolved, too. I think Jericho is gaining confidence.

But when you play teams like Tech, sometimes they are going to take certain guys away, and tonight was not Courtney's night. But man, I mean, he's our guy, and you know, we're going to need him big time moving forward. And it doesn't necessarily mean necessarily a number of points or anything like that. It's about just continuing to contribute to your team as he's done all year.

Q. Jase was 5-of-9 but all nine were from three. What steps can he take going forward? He even talked about he's still figuring out his own way with that knee but what steps can he take going forward even with a 55 percent night from three?

SHAKA SMART: Well, I tell you what, we'll take 5-of-9 from three any night. But he's always probably going to be, you know, tilted that way a little bit. I thought in the -- it was either TCU or Oklahoma game, he had a great drive to the elbow. Got to two feet, gathered himself and shot.

So we want him to continue to attack close-outs if they really run at him. Tonight they ran at him and he shot-faked a couple times but he side stepped to shoot the three which we are fine with if it's a good look.

He's continued to trust that knee more and more. I don't think this season he's going to get to the point where he's

not thinking about it at all. What I've encouraged him to do is just be super, super aggressive, and if you make a mistake, it's an aggressive mistake, I thought tonight his mindset was really good coming out the gate just with the way that he was bouncing in the shots, and obviously we needed that.

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