

# Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 14, 2024

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

T-Mobile Center

## Houston Cougars

## Coach Kelvin Sampson

## Jamal Shead

## J'Wan Roberts

### Postgame Press Conference

Houston - 60, TCU - 45

THE MODERATOR: Head Coach Kelvin Sampson is here along with Jamal Shead and J'Wan Roberts. Coach, could you give us some comments about the game?

KELVIN SAMPSON: I liked our first-shot defense. After that, not a whole lot to like. TCU is a really good offensive rebounding team but, you know, I was disappointed with our physicalness and blocking out. We're playing small. Without Arceneaux and without Tugler and without Walker, those of three of our better rebounders. We are not as good of a rebounding team as we were. People say we are this rebounding team, but we are not that rebounding team anymore. That's probably where we missed all three of those guys. The previous two games Arceneaux played before he tore his achilles, had 19 rebounds. That's what he does. He's a really good rebounder. Walker might be our best offensive rebounder per minutes played. Tugler, he and Roberts are our two best rebounders, period. I know we're as good a rebounding team. Even if our guards can't get it, that's okay. Just make sure they don't. Be more physical with your block-outs. Our defense was good. I thought we shared the ball well. When you get into a tournament you win the game you don't spend all your time trying to rehash it, autopsy it or worry about it. Win and advance, that's what we'll do.

**Q. J'Wan, when you hear Coach talk about you guys not being physical and not being a good rebounding team right now, do you take that as a personal challenge going forward as a big man?**

J'WAN ROBERTS: Definitely. Knowing they were undersized, we start, probably, 6-1, 6-foot, 6'5", 6'7", 6'8". We're probably one of the smallest teams in the country



but that should never be an excuse to rebounding. Knowing me I'm a natural rebounder. That's what gets me going, not scoring or getting touches or whatever. Rebounding is what fuels me to do everything else on the court.

So just being a leader rebounder, just basically going into the game with no ego and just try to fly around and do my best to impact winning other than scoring.

**Q. Coach, you've talked about thinking that Jamal wasn't getting the credit or attention that he deserved for the way he was playing. Between some of the conference awards and the way the season has gone, do you feel like that has shifted a little bit?**

KELVIN SAMPSON: I don't know if I meant he wasn't getting the credited he deserved. It was after the Iowa State game and I had seen some people that have since started watching us play, I guess, because I saw somebody put out their best six point guards and he wasn't even on it. I didn't get upset about it but I just reminded them, you may want to watch the point guard from Houston. He's pretty good. Not that the other kids aren't, they are. But he's pretty good.

We're not exactly a media darling. Sometimes when you are not one of those guys you don't really get looked at a whole lot. That's fine, except if you've got kids like Jamal or J'Wan and if they're deserving -- if they're not, then they're not, but if they're deserving you certainly want to fight for 'em to get 'em noticed. To answer your question, Justin, I think he is.

**Q. I wanted your perspective, veteran coach, have a sense of the program. Can you speak to what you've seen from the job Jamie has done at TCU building their program up to where they could actually beat you guys. Compete with you guys, and --**

KELVIN SAMPSON: It's nothing about us. You know. We won a bunch of games this year that we could have easily lost. So we're not running around here thinking we're God's gift to Big 12 basketball because we're not. We could easily have lost at BYU, Texas, Baylor. Sometimes



you've got to put yourself in those positions to win and we have. I've always, always admired and respected Jamie Dixon. I really have. He's somebody that I've known for a long time in this business. Jamie's been an outstanding college coach for a long time.

I remember when he was at Pittsburgh, and the job he did there. Now coming home to his Alma Mater and the job he's doing now. And the sign of an outstanding coach, especially like Jamie is, doing it every year. He's got his team in the hunt every single year. If you were a player you would have to run a shuttle. For having your phone on. But I'm going to let you go, but if you had your phone on and we were in a meeting like this and it was one of my players, they would be in trouble. Make sure it's off.

I think Jamie is one of those guys that -- when you think about a really good coach you think about Jamie Dixon.

**Q. Jamal, you have been part of deep NCAA Tournament runs, obviously you guys had success in the regular season. Being in the Big 12 Tournament for the first time, any different approach from you or the team in general from what you have done in the past at the AAC?**

JAMAL SHEAD: I think for the past four years that I've been here we approached every game the same. Like we said at the beginning of the year, Big 12 is a lot harder competition at a consistent level but, no, nothing different preparation-wise. We try to look at our match-ups, identify something that we can do to help us win and then try to go out there and execute. Our preparation is usually the same. It's just about going out there and executing what we work on.

**Q. J'Wan, after losing to TCU back in January and now with this game here and this being the only loss that you have not avenged, was there extra juice going into this game for you guys at all?**

J'WAN ROBERTS: Not really. We just try to treat every game the same. This game isn't more important than this other game. Every game is important the same way. We played them probably early, you know, January, and we just saw them again. I feel like when we played at TCU we just probably didn't execute how we was supposed to and ended up losing. So just playing them the second time is just adjusting, and like Coach says, we're not just playing against TCU. It's just looking at your match-ups and trying to win your match-up. That's basically what we hang our hats on. If Jamal is guarding so and so, dominate your match-up. Dominate whatever it is. It's just how we approach every game.

**Q. Coach, can we get your thoughts on facing Texas Tech in the semifinals tomorrow?**

KELVIN SAMPSON: Yes, it's been so long since we played 'em. I have to go back and look at the film. I remember Jamal played really good. I don't remember a whole lot about that game.

I think Texas Tech was our second or third game, so that was, what, 15 games ago. Then our next one was Tech. But Texas Tech is a lot like TCU; outstanding coach. But that's this league, everybody has a good coach in this league. They're all really, really good coaches. Great home court advantages, which is what makes our game unique. But like them, they probably won't remember a lot about us until they go back and watch film. We'll go back and watch film and figure out, come up with something we need to do and go play 'em tomorrow.

**Q. Coach, you used the term "media darling". You're number one, you're regular season champion. Why don't you feel that Houston is a media darling?**

KELVIN SAMPSON: I don't know. I have no idea. It's not that important, either. I probably shouldn't have said it. It's kinda one of those throw-away statements. I don't really care whether we are or not. I'm just glad we beat TCU today. We will play Texas Tech tomorrow and go do the best we can. That's a game we certainly can lose. Texas Tech is good enough to beat us. We're going to have to certainly play better than we did today.

**Q. Coach, you mentioned some of the injury struggles you guys have had this year. We saw Kansas shut a couple guys down this week in preparation for next week. Do you have any concerns with the grind that this conference can have when you have a shorter roster?**

KELVIN SAMPSON: We thought about it. We have no margin of error. We are playing a kid right now that in all reality should have red-shirted. Shouldn't even be playing. Started playing basketball when he was 15 years old. He has no experience. He's a freshman that we had no intention of playing whatsoever this year and now he's our first big off the bench. But it just so happened the three guys that we lost all played up front. You know, we didn't lose any of our guards, which is our issue with rebounding right now. That's why I don't overreact to it. Somebody will lead off their story tomorrow about our rebounding. That's not the story. The story is we won and that we're still turning teams over and we're still playing defense.

The second half we were better, but J'Wan had 10. He's had games where he's had 20. He's probably going to

have to bump up, he and JVA are going to have to rebound more. Mal has had games where he has had 10 defensive rebounds. That's got to be more of an emphasis. When you come to a Big 12 game, first-round game against any of these teams, they're all good. They're all really good. You win by 15, you move on to the next one, man. Not going to spend two minutes worrying about any of this stuff, just get ready for a really good Texas Tech team.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you very much.

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