

Big 12 Conference Big 12 Men's Basketball Tipoff Media Day

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Kansas City, Missouri, USA

Kansas State Wildcats

Coach Jerome Tang

Media Day Press Conference



win the National Championship. We have five -- for the first time in AP poll history we have five teams in the top ten.

So you can get caught up in that or you can say man, we've got to get better every day. Our approach hasn't changed. We go 1-0 every day and try to get a little bit better.

At some point in time we have to face all those guys, but that's a ways down the road, and we have a lot of basketball that we have to improve on before we get to that.

Q. You're going into your third year here, and there's obviously a lot of roster turnover again. How do guys that you bring along with today like Max Jones and Coleman Hawkins play into this new team?

JEROME TANG: Well, first of all, they're both terrific young men. This is not something that I'm the only one in the country that's facing -- we're all facing this. So every coach has the same challenge.

Very thankful to both of them chose to come to K-State. They're both terrific human beings in their fifth year of college basketball, so they have a lot of experience, and their knowledge of basketball allows them to pick up some things a lot quicker.

Then they're both guys that their teammates like being around, and so that kind of fosters the chemistry that you have to build.

Q. You're 58; Tony Bennett was 55 and decided there was a lot happening in this game that he didn't necessarily want to be a part of. How do you feel about all the changes in college basketball and how have you adapted?

JEROME TANG: Yeah, well, first of all, when I heard that Tony had retired my immediate thought was, man, it's great to be able to step away on your own terms, because a lot of guys get moved out of the business. That was great for Tony and his family.

JEROME TANG: First of all, I'm blessed to be able to coach at Kansas State, a place I love with people I love doing what I love. That's just an honor. So thankful to the Lord for this opportunity.

Second thing I want to do is wish Scott Drew a happy birthday. So if y'all see him, it's his birthday. Make a big deal out of it. It'll drive him crazy.

Then thirdly about my team, just super excited about these guys, man. Pretty much a new roster. We have three guys back. Thankful for David N'Guessan. When a young man spends three years with you in this day and age, it means you're doing a little something right and that he's really enjoying his time.

So thankful for his leadership and the guys we have in. Just terrific young men. The passion about the game of basketball, a lot of versatility, better shooting and size.

I've said a number of times they remind me of our 2012 team when I was at Baylor with the size and then the guard play, and so excited to see what we can become.

Q. With all the recent changes in the Big 12, including new teams joining the conference, how has that impacted your approach to the season in terms of competition, preparation, and maintaining the team's focus for your long-term goals?

JEROME TANG: That's a great question. The Big 12 was the best conference in the country two years ago and then we added teams, and one of the teams we added was the conference champion.

Then we were the best conference in the country again last year and we added teams, and one of the teams picked to



Second thing is Tony has been a head coach for a long time, so he's had a while to build up a nest egg that allows him to do that. The Bible tells us that a good man leaves an inheritance for his children's children. I'm not there yet, so I've got to keep working.

All these changes, like we're all facing it. So you either adapt or you get left. For me, it's a challenge every day, and I have a staff that's very creative, and man, they've got young minds and bodies and they're constantly pushing me.

One of my things with our staff is I tell them, hey, man, push me as far to one end or the other end as possible and let them rein us back in. I've got a group of guys that keep me moving and don't let me get caught up in what is wrong.

We try to focus on what's right and try to take advantage of it.

Q. You've been in this league a long time, longer than most, at Baylor, now at Kansas State. It's always been a strong conference, but at some point it went from a place where you could reasonably think you could win here or there to fast forward to today and there's no easy victories on the road. Do you remember a time when you looked up and recognized that the bottom had gotten stronger and that there weren't easy places to go anymore?

JEROME TANG: Man, I don't know if I can pinpoint the time. When I first got into the league we were the easy win at Baylor, and then Scott and the staff there were able to build that program.

We have great coaches, great coaches in the league, and very much like some of the -- like the SEC with football, they have great coaches, and players want to play against the best. In the Big 12, the guys we recruit want to play against the best.

It's not close. It's not debatable -- I guess people can debate what they want to. But the results show -- there have been three schools in the last four years to win a National Championship, and two of them are from the Big 12. It's the best players, best coaches, best environments, and kids want to be a part of that.

That's really the thing from top to bottom. Everybody is good. Everybody has got great players. Everybody has got great coaches. Everybody has got great environments.

Q. With Coleman Hawkins being named the Big 12

co-newcomer of the year, how do you see his skill set translating to the Big 12, and what kind of role do you envision for him during the season?

JEROME TANG: Well, whether he was named that or not, it wouldn't have changed the fact that he is a very versatile basketball player with a high IQ who can play guard and play offensively multiple positions. He takes great joy in watching his teammates have success, and that's rare.

Then his teammates like him, and so he's going to help us -- when he's on the floor, he makes the guys on the floor better players, and he makes me look like a better coach.

Q. To the point about this being such a competitive league top to bottom, how important is it mentally to have a team able to roll with the punches, knowing that you could have a team in this league lose six, seven, eight games, and that's still a really good year in this league, but that losing sometimes can wear on a team. How do you get to a point where mentally you're able to roll with the punches and still be able to thrive as the year goes on?

JEROME TANG: Yeah, I think it starts with the staff. The staff has to be able to move on from the last game. Sometimes as coaches we let a team beat us twice because we can't get past the last game, and it affects our players.

Our thing is we go 1-0, and my definition of toughness is the ability to do the next right thing, and as a team, we have to be able to move on. It's something we talk about every day, and not just in games, it's just in possessions, in practice. Whether something went well in the classroom or at your apartment, your ability to go on and do the next right thing.

If the staff has the ability to let go of things and move on and not bring the last loss with them, then the team is going to be able to do that.

Q. You've gotten to see your guys go up against themselves quite a bit. You've gotten to see them go up against some other people a little bit. Through this early opening part of the season, what's the thing you like about this group the most so far?

JEROME TANG: Wow. Man, there's a lot to like about these guys. I don't know if I can pinpoint one thing. What I've enjoyed is seeing them empty their cup and allow us to fill it. We have a bunch of guys that have been coached by some really good coaches and been in some really good programs and had success, so sometimes you bring all that with you and think that's the only way to have success,

and in the game of basketball there's a lot of ways to get to four.

I've been so pleased that our guys have been willing to empty their cup and let us fill it and realize that the way we do it will allow them to have success, also, and see the buy-in that's taking place.

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