

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Texas A&M vs Houston

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FedExForum

Houston Cougars Coach Kelvin Sampson Emanuel Sharp Jamal Shead

Media Conference

Houston - 100, Texas A&M - 95 (OT)

KELVIN SAMPSON: That's a perfect record for Houston -- had four players foul out and still find a way to win.

You know, one of the things I kept hearing was how much better Texas A&M was from the last time that we played them and how maybe we weren't.

And they were right. Texas A&M is a lot better than the first time we played them. Taylor, Obaseki, Radford, those guys are really good. There's a reason why they were dominating the SEC at the end of the year.

But regardless of who we put on the floor tonight -- our kids didn't play together, they played for each other, and there's a big difference in that. A lot of teams play together. But teams that play for each other -- that's the first time I've done this this year, is -- we lost four starters from last year's team -- Jarace Walker, Marcus Sasser, Tramon Mark -- and then a special guy in Reggie Chaney. And I hadn't mentioned Reggie other than when we watched him on film.

But I brought Reggie up at halftime, and said what would Reggie do, J'Wan? What would Reggie do Ja'Vier? Because I didn't think they played very good the first half.

I asked them about Reggie, and as soon as I said it, out of the corner of my eye I saw Jamal got really emotional. Ramon got really emotional. So that one was for Big Reg.

They were at full strength and played well. Texas A&M played great tonight. You can tell they're a lot better team



than when we played them early.

But as good as they played, we had the best player on the floor in Jamal Shead. And sometimes at the end that's all you need.

As far as, we're up 12 -- was that the biggest lead at the end of the game before they tied it? 13. Somebody's going to say, well, what happened?

Well, in case you didn't watch the game, let me explain how this thing happens. You got 1-for-2 from the free-throw line, and they come down, shoot and miss, ball's batted around. Next thing you know somebody spits it out and they make a 3. Okay.

But a couple of unfortunate turnovers, we had a couple of unfortunate calls go our way. But you give all the credit to Texas A&M there. You don't make any excuses. Their kids were fighting their hearts out. That's one of the things that makes Texas A&M so good. That's why they won five straight SEC games is how hard they fight. But you saw two teams do that tonight.

We have a tremendous, tremendous culture that's built on the kids that we bring into our program. We're not much of a -- you know, a lot of teams -- and the portal has been good to us. L.J. Cryer came from the portal; Damian came from the portal.

But it's the homegrown guys like, Jamal came in as a 17-year-old freshman. J'Wan Roberts, 17-year-old freshman. Emanuel, 18-year-old freshman. Ja'Vier Francis, 17-year-old freshman. Ramon Walker came in as a freshman. Most of our guys came in as freshmen and stayed. And probably the statistic that still blows me away in this day and age, our top 10 players, over the last 10 years we've only had two kids transfer that was in our top 10.

And we had some kids that didn't get to play much and they transferred, but they weren't our top 10. We've only had two in 10 years. It tells you about the culture we've built and the kids we've recruited. That allows us not to give in -- most people thought after that shot that the



Garcia kid shot -- I don't know how many 3s he's made this year, but he probably hasn't shot too many -- but that's how you upset.

They made hard shots. And they made a lot of hard 3s. But when that went in, I'm sure most people's thought process was, Houston screwed up, they're going to lose now. That would have been the wrong assumption because our kids are built for that.

We gave up a 15-point lead, I think it was, at Baylor. We were up 15. Baylor came back and tied it. The place was going nuts, and we won in overtime.

So we have something to draw from. (Phone ringing). It's my college coach's son. We had something to draw from, and our kids are tough, man. We've got tough kids, and in that moment we needed belief and we needed toughness.

Like I said, everybody was fouling out. We said Lath, No. 2, is that his number? He didn't start playing basketball until he was 15. We took him to help us in his third year. This is his first. He shouldn't even be playing.

We just found a way. All these years I've been doing this stuff, I don't know if there's a more satisfying win than tonight. Just can't tell you how proud I am of this group. Just really, really proud of this team.

Q. Jamal and Eman, just your thoughts at the end of the game when Ryan's on the line shooting free throws and you guys are on the bench fouled out?

JAMAL SHEAD: I was shocked he missed one. He works just like we work. And if I'm being honest, he works harder than we work. Anytime -- you can ask anybody on our team and they can vouch for him -- anytime we walk into the gym, Ryan Elvin is in the gym, working, helping someone else work.

Terrance was having a really good year the beginning of this year because he was working out with Ryan Elvin. That's the guy that we trust and is a pillar of our culture. And honestly I'm shocked that he missed one. Kudos to Ry. And way to step up.

EMANUEL SHARP: Pretty much the same thing. Ry puts the work in. He's prepared for moments like this. Our guard coach, Coach Q, is always telling I'm not afraid to put Ryo in because I know he's ready. That's a prime example of it. Everybody knew he was going to make those free throws.

Q. Jamal, we heard Coach talk about it, that halftime speech and just Reggie's influence and impact on you,

talk about how that affected you and how the halftime speech kind of changed things?

JAMAL SHEAD: He mentioned Reggie, and I kind of didn't really listen to the rest of the speech, kind of just started to tear up a little bit. But going into today, round of 32, we have 32 on our jersey for a reason.

That dude was a warrior. He played with broken knuckles, stress fractures in his knee, back spasms. And I think he may have missed one game.

So when he asked, what would Reggie do? Reggie would fight. And I think we did that the second half.

Q. Jamal, especially there in the first half, y'all kept Wade Taylor to just one point. He had 34 in the first game. How did you all do that? How were you able to keep him contained?

JAMAL SHEAD: I don't think we contained Wade. I'd say they didn't go to him. Obaseki and Radford carried the load the first half because they were actually getting to the rim. And I felt once we stopped them a little bit, then Wade kind of took over and tried to do his thing.

When you play against good players like Wade, all you can do is try to make him miss. Hats off to him and the work he's put in. And it's been an awesome journey for him because I've seen him grow from high school, and it's amazing to see him at this level and what he's been able to do.

I don't think we contained him. I think they just kind of went to him a little too late.

Q. Emanuel, I think you were hurt your senior year of in high school. Maybe a little bit about that injury, and how you've gotten to this point. And the game you had tonight, you must have been feeling it, shooting it from deep?

EMANUEL SHARP: At the end of my junior year, I broke my leg. I had (indiscernible). I was in a cast for six weeks, and kind of just decided to take my senior year off and come to college early. And that was the best decision I could have made.

I got to come here early, experience the culture and see the game from a different view. I just got in with Bishop and the rest of the staff and they helped me come back from a crazy injury like that. I rehabbed a lot, and it's got me all the way to where I am right now.

My teammates trusted me tonight, especially Jamal,



always looking for me. And the shot was going in today.

Q. When you hear your coach speak about you the way that he does and about the fight in this team, what is it like to play for Kelvin Sampson, and what's it like to have him as your leader especially down the stretch in a game like this?

JAMAL SHEAD: He only gives credit when it's earned. He makes you work for it. And he always tells us, trust your work. That's the biggest thing I've learned here if you put the work in he'll give you the opportunity to show that you put that work in.

He has the ultimate trust in us and we have the ultimate trust in him. He's the best motivator I've ever been around in my life. Best coach I know in America. And when a guy like that trusts you, your confidence level is through the roof.

Q. Feels like a while ago, but the put-back dunk in the second half, can you tell us what happened there?

JAMAL SHEAD: I'm not even supposed to go for offensive rebounds. So I'm glad it went in and bounced my way. Or if they would have scored in transition I would have got a butt chewing.

It happened to bounce my ways. Coach says it all the time, good things happen when you play hard. It was just a good bounce and I went and got it.

Q. What's kind of going through your mind at the end of the game when Ryan's on the free-throw line?

KELVIN SAMPSON: There's probably not a day in the month where I'm not up at the office. I'm a perpetual tinkerer. I like to tinker, whether it's watching stuff on the iPad -- but when I go in on Sunday mornings, that's my favorite time because nobody's there except one person -- Ryan Elvin.

He's always, Sunday morning, he's on that gun. I've never been in there on a Sunday morning and Ryan Elvin's not on that gun. He's such a great role model for our guys.

He's one of those guys that has "it". He's the best bowler on the team. He's the best pool player on the team. He's the best softball player on the team. He's the best shooter on the team.

He was a preferred walk-on. I didn't know what that was until about two years ago. We recruited him -- we asked him to walk on. I found out later that was a preferred walk-on.

But the second summer he was here -- the guy that was his biggest fan was his dad. And his dad passed away. And that was a big loss to our program. Ryan's also a great cook. He goes to the grocery store and buys groceries and cooks in his apartment and invites the team over. He's just one of those guys.

Somebody needs a ride, Ryan's always taking care of him. He's the guy on the team that, when they need advice, they go to Ryan.

Guys come and go. We've had some sustained success here. Seems like every year we lose three or four starters, right? But Ryan's been here for four years. Jamal's four years. J'Wan is five years.

Ryan is kind of a behind-the-scenes link. I'm so glad you guys are asking a question about him because I could bring him up and he wouldn't mean anything. But when he stepped up there and missed the first one, I said, okay, he got that one out of the way because he never misses. Then the second one, he just drained.

And I almost left him in because he's really good at the top of the 2-3 zone. But as much as I love Ryan, he's got my athleticism, which is not very much.

So I put the kid that I felt could help us in his fifth semester in, in his second semester.

But you know, we were just cobbling it together. Everybody was in foul trouble. They went to the free-throw line 45 times. They played good. They killed us on the boards. But it's been like this in the Big 12 all year, close games. We've been in a lot of close games.

And we're very fortunate tonight to win. Texas A&M could have won that game. But only one team can advance, and I've learned not to autopsy wins this time of the year. So we move on.

Q. You kept speaking on teams that can play together but playing for each other, and just what that looks like even deeper, to go into that, and how this team banded together, for one another, in a very unselfish, very focused demeanor tonight.

KELVIN SAMPSON: A basketball team is very nomadic. I'm a little uncomfortable with all the people around us this time of year because we take pride in being by ourselves.

Starting the first Monday in June, our kids are on the -- on Monday, we're on the baseball field at 6:15 a.m. With our culture, that means they're there about 10 to 6. There's

nobody there then, it's just by ourselves, and we're working. We have to run 18 100-yard sprints in time. On Tuesday we go up to a parking garage that's got a ramp that we run straight up with pipes behind our back with a weighted vest on for time. Wednesday is the shooting day. Thursday is gym day, where it's ridiculous amount of running.

Then I time them in the mile every Friday. When you go through stuff like that at 5:45, 6:00 in the morning, you learn to respect the guy beside you.

You know he's going through everything you're going through, and I hold them all accountable. I don't treat anybody any different. Doesn't matter whether it's Jarace Walker, Marcus Sasser, Corey Davis, Armoni Brooks, DeJon Jarreau, Jamal Shead, Ja'Vier Francis or J'Wan Roberts, if you come into our program, you're part of a special group. But there's an accountability, an expectation to meet our standard. And we have high standards.

It's kind of funny watching us being ranked No. 1 in the nation. I don't know that we ever think that way. I know our fans do. But our fans don't really know us. They just pull for us if we win.

I remember the early days at Hofheinz, when nobody was around then, and that's where we learned how to work. And I'm so blessed to have coached that first team that went 13-19. That was the only team that my wife's ever asked, could you get them to sign a basketball for me.

So that 13-19, my wife has that ball. We have a lake house in North Carolina, and I see it every summer. She has that ball displayed in a prominent position there, and that's the only one.

We've been to Final Fours, Elite Eights, won a ton of conference championships, but she's only got one ball. That's from that 13-19 team. She appreciated that team because they never quit.

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