



Posted on Tue, Nov. 24, 2009

KU fans keep watchful eye on Longhorns

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The Kansas City Star

Texas beat Pittsburgh 78-62 in Tuesday's CBE Classic championship game, but for a smattering of fans in the Sprint Center, the Longhorns were facing a different opponent.

Take a guess. The fans were wearing a different shade of blue than the Panthers' color.

"I like Cole Aldrich over (Dexter) Pittman in the middle," said Frank Burris of Lenexa, wearing a Kansas sweatshirt. "I think we have an advantage there."

Yes, to some this was an evening of hoops mixed with some advance scouting with plenty of KU shirts and hats in the building.

Some weren't wearing the colors. Sitting two rows behind Pittsburgh's bench was Jayhawks guard Tyshawn Taylor.

Playing about 40 miles from the nation's top-ranked team, third-ranked Texas impressed their fans and those of the Jayhawks.

"The depth for both teams is the strength," said Jim Harrison of Merriam. "Their second fives could beat a lot of teams."

Texas and Kansas seem to have much in common, including their position in national perception.

The Jayhawks are a strong No. 1, and the Longhorns are a solid third. They'll meet in the regular season on a Big Monday showdown in February in Austin — and as they did for three straight years through 2008, could face off in the Big 12 tournament at the Sprint Center.

Then, maybe the NCAA Tournament.

So, it was natural to wonder how Sherron Collins and Taylor would fare against some of the Texas freshman guards such as J'Covan Brown and Avery Bradley.

Think of the offensive skills of a Xavier Henry-Jordan Hamilton clash, and the contest between the Morris twins and Damion James, not to mention a battle between Aldrich and Pittman, two of the nation's best big men.

If they played today, ESPN analyst Terry Gannon, the former North Carolina State guard, would give the edge to the Jayhawks.

"Just based on their experience, all those players back for them," Gannon said. "Down the stretch, after Texas has had time to grow, it might differ. Kansas is deep, but I don't know if any team has the overall talent as Texas.

"I see them as different teams in another way. Texas has one leader, and that's James. Kansas has several of them."

Entering Tuesday's game, nine Longhorns were averaging at least 17.7 minutes, and none more than James' 26.7 minutes.

Four starters returned from the team that fell in the second round to Duke, and Barnes added what some have rated the nation's top recruiting class. The group doesn't include another newcomer, Florida transfer Jai Lucas, a point guard who will be eligible in December.

Texas' depth was needed Tuesday when starting guard Varez Ward injured his left knee during a layup line in pregame warm-ups and was taken from the floor on a stretcher.

The injury forced Barnes to start a freshman backcourt, Brown and Bradley, for the first time this season.

Kansas is working in newcomers as well, though at a different pace. Henry is the only newcomer who starts, and freshmen Elijah Johnson and Thomas Robinson are averaging around 13 minutes in the Jayhawks' three games.

A Kansas City-area Texas fan, Dean Powell of Lee's Summit, doesn't know who'd win but believes the Longhorns would match up well.

"I think they would," Powell said. "I think it would be a great game."

Next year's field

Next year's CBE Classic field for the Sprint Center is tentatively set, and Kansas State is scheduled to make its first appearance in the event.

Joining the Wildcats are Duke, Marquette and Gonzaga.

Marquette defeated the Blue Devils for the CBE Classic championship in 2006, the last year it was played at Municipal Auditorium

@ Go to **KansasCity.com** for a photo gallery from Tuesday night's CBE Classic championship game.

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