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JASON KING'S KING OF THE COURT
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King of the Court: Texas is James' gang

By Jason King, Yahoo! Sports *Nov 25, 3:25 am EST*

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Topics:

- In a zone
- In a funk
- Questioning ref
- Clipboard
- Week ahead
- Assistant of week
- Pit stops

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – He knows eavesdropping is impolite, but Texas coach Rick Barnes couldn't help himself before a game against Iowa earlier this week.

As he prepared to head to the court, Barnes noticed senior captain Damion James talking softly to freshman Jordan Hamilton in the corner of the locker room. Barnes hid behind a wall and listened.

"Damion was like, 'Listen, here's what you need to do to get into the flow of the game, here's what you need to focus on,'" Barnes said. "It was awesome. What he told Jordan Hamilton before the game, I couldn't have done it any better.

"He's becoming one of the best leaders we have."

And as a result, Texas boasts the best *team* it's ever had.

Or at least it could be if James continues to make the strides that have been evident since he opted to return for his senior season instead of entering the NBA draft. A 6-foot-7 forward, James entered Tuesday's game against Pittsburgh averaging 16.3 points and 11.3 rebounds.

With 1,011 career rebounds, James is on pace to shatter James Thomas' all-time mark of 1,077. But that's the last thing on his mind as Texas prepares to enter the crux of its season. The Longhorns have upcoming games against Michigan State, North Carolina and Connecticut.

"For us to be the best we can be, I've got to help these young guys, " said James, referring to a recruiting class that features top prospects such as Hamilton, Avery Bradley, Shawn Williams and J'Covan Brown – all of whom will log significant minutes.

"They don't know the ropes yet. They've got great talent, but they're still learning. It's only a matter of time, though."

Even with some of their players going through a learning phase, the No. 3 Longhorns remain one of the top teams in the nation. One of the main reasons for that is James, who four years ago was part of a recruiting class that included standouts Kevin Durant and D.J. Augustin.

While those two players became lottery picks after just one and two years in college respectively, James' development has come at a more steady pace.

He's played in 111 games in his three-plus seasons in Austin and averaged 12.2 points and nine rebounds during that span. Respectable numbers to be sure. This year, though, James knows he needs to take his game to another level.

Not just to help Texas, but to help himself and his family.

"I know I'm going to have a chance to play in the NBA," James said. "But a lot of players have chances. I want to be one of the guys who actually makes it."

James likely would've been a late first- or early second-round selection in last year's draft. Instead of taking a risk, he listened to the advice of NBA scouts and coaches who said he should return to school.

"People told him the truth and he was man enough to accept it," Barnes said.

The Longhorns are glad he did.

James' knack for rebounding has been no secret. From a consistency standpoint, no Big 12 player has been better on the boards the last few seasons. James, though, said he has enhanced his skill set by improving his ball-handling while adding range to his outside shot.

"I want to be a guy that can do a little bit of everything," he said.

James projects as a small forward in the NBA. But at Texas he's able to contribute in a variety of spots for the Longhorns, whose frontline is loaded with players: James, Williams, Dexter Pittman, Gary Johnson, Alexis Wangmene and Matt Hill.

James scoffed at the notion that Texas has one of the best frontcourts.

"I think we have the best," he said. "We've got six guys who we can sub in and out without missing a step. We know we have to get better, though. Hopefully we will."

Especially with James leading the way.

James' comments got us thinking. Who are the top-5 frontcourts in college basketball? KOTC's take:

1. North Carolina – Tyler Zeller is 7-foot, Ed Davis and John Henson are 6-10 while Deon Thompson and Travis Wear and David Wear are all 6-9. Most of these guys can also step out of the paint and score from the outside – a rarity for players of that size. The Tar Heels' length and the quality of their depth make them the top unit.

2. Texas – The 298-pound Pittman is as imposing of a force as there is in college basketball,

although his size prevents him from playing more than 20-22 quality minutes. James can score from anywhere and is great on the offensive glass. Johnson would start for almost any team in America. Add Hill and Wangmene to the mix, and this group can play a lot of different ways.

3. Kansas – Center Cole Aldrich seems destined for All-America honors while the Morris Twins, Markieff and Marcus, are as improved as anyone in college basketball. This group could rise in the rankings if freshman Thomas Robinson adjusts to the college game quickly and if 7-foot Arizona transfer Jeff Withey becomes a factor when he transfers next month.

4. Kentucky – Patrick Patterson, is a seasoned junior who averaged 17.9 points and 9.3 rebounds last season. Freshman DeMarcus Cousins is a 6-foot-11, 270-pound standout who plays with a mean streak. Both players could be top-15 picks in the next NBA draft. What other unit can say that? Still, depth is an issue.

5. Georgia Tech – Freshman Derrick Favors was a top-5 recruit who will likely be in college only for one season. Gani Lawal withdrew from last year's NBA draft even though there was a chance he'd be a late first-round pick. Not as good of a one-two punch as Kentucky's, but somewhat close.

IN A ZONE

Will Coleman – Memphis may not be loaded with the kind of NBA talent it's had in the past, but the Tigers have a workhorse in Coleman, a 6-foot-9, 260-pound transfer from Miami Dade Community College. He's not going to back down from anyone in the paint, and is averaging 11 points and 7.7 rebounds despite playing just 22.3 minutes a game.

Purdue-Tennessee – The Boilermakers' 73-72 victory over the Volunteers has been the best game of the young season. E'Twaun Moore scored 22 points for Purdue in the win, which came in the championship game of the Paradise Jam in the Virgin Islands.

Transfers – Here are some names who have had strong starts at their new schools: Wesley Johnson (Iowa State to Syracuse), Curtis Kelly (Connecticut to Kansas State), Ekpe Udoh (Michigan to Baylor), Jordan Crawford (Indiana to Xavier), Malcolm Grant (Villanova to Miami), Taylor King (Duke to Villanova), Herb Pope (New Mexico State to Seton Hall) and Elliot Williams (Duke to Memphis).

Jerry Wainwright – Even while going 0-16 in the Big East at DePaul last year, Wainwright never lost his reputation as a good bench coach. It's still early, but he's beginning to redeem himself with victories over St. Joseph's and Missouri Valley favorite Northern Iowa. DePaul's only loss was a four-point setback against No. 10 Tennessee.

Marcus Ginyard and Will Graves – After missing last season because of an injury (Ginyard) and suspension (Graves), the Tar Heels' forwards are making a huge impact in their return. Both are starters who average 11.7 and 7.5 points, respectively. Ginyard is shooting 47 percent (8 of 17) from 3-point range.

Clubtrillion.com – A huge King of the Court salute to Ohio State walk-on Mark Titus, whose hilarious blog has attracted nearly 2 million readers over the last year. As if giving us all a good chuckle wasn't enough, the blog is now proving beneficial to a Columbus charity. A local t-shirt company is printing Club Trillion shirts and selling them online for $25, with 100 percent of the profits going toward A Kid Again, an organization that helps children with life-threatening illnesses. NCAA rules prohibit Titus from being involved in the project, although last week he