

Maturity marks Texas Basketball in Season Opening Win

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[box score](#)

AUSTIN, Texas – In a span of 55 seconds midway through the second half, sophomore swingman Jordan Hamilton threw down a pair of dunks, igniting the Texas Longhorns and the Frank Erwin Center crowd during Monday night's 83-52 season-opening victory against Navy as part of the 2K Sports Classic benefiting Coaches vs. Cancer.

Those four points stood out as the most entertaining of Hamilton's game-high 26. Most telling, however, was Hamilton's thoughts when asked post-game to describe the sequence. He gave credit where credit was due.

"Just two great passes from J'Covan Brown," Hamilton said. "He always finds guys in the open court."

The 2010-11 version of the Texas Basketball program will be defined by such talk. These Longhorns have come to understand the importance of each other, the specific roles they play and how it all relates to wins and losses.

Hamilton, for instance, wasn't simply satisfied with his 10-of-17 shooting. Now a sophomore, he understands there is much more than scoring that defines his and the team's performance.

"I want to be known as more than that. That's why I crashed the boards, and I tried my best to defend," said Hamilton, who also had 10 rebounds for his second career double-double.

Forward Gary Johnson gets some credit for this mindset. As one of the seniors, Johnson has identified his role as a leader, and he's taken to doing so by example. On the court, Johnson has always been a worker, but against Navy, he displayed an ownership of his space that is signature of a more mature player.

His effort was equal on both sides of the ball, and Johnson made his first four shots from the floor, including a free-throw line pull-up jumper, and finished with 17 points and 10 rebounds.

"I feel like I've been through the most on this team. Guys look to me. I take it upon myself to get us through," Johnson said.

Defense gave the Longhorns their foundation against Navy. The Midshipmen shot just 30 percent for the game, and of the 13 players who saw the floor, only center Mark Veazey managed to break into double figures with 14 points. No other player scored more than eight.

It took time for the UT offense to find its rhythm, but by the second half, the Longhorns were fighting for space, dribbling less and moving more. UT made 20 of 35 shots in the final 20 minutes, and only three of the Longhorns' 15 turnovers came after intermission.

"It's good watching those guys. They play together and they play hard," head coach Rick Barnes said. "There were really a lot of good things. They were focused, and I liked the demeanor."

Hamilton's emphatic alley-oop that finished the sequence augmented the momentum UT was building in the second half, and so Barnes was happy for Hamilton -- not for the plays, but for the player he is trying to become.

"He's worked hard," Barnes said. "He wants to be coached, and he's really trying to learn the game, not just from the offensive side of it. He was really working hard on the defensive end."

