



UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

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Quotes from 2009-10 Houston Basketball Media Day Thursday, Nov. 5, 2009 • Houston, Texas • Athletics/Alumni Center

HEAD COACH TOM PENDERS

Opening Statement

"We're excited about this year's ball club. We have some quality players back from last year, and we have some exciting, talented newcomers that will show and prove that we had a great recruiting class. I don't like talking about top 25 recruiting class in the spring. You can't judge a recruiting class until they play and see how they perform. I was excited about the recruiting class that we got in the spring, and I am more excited about them now that I have had more than two weeks to practice with them on a daily basis. It's a very promising team.

"Kelvin Lewis has become a better basketball player than he was last year, and last year he was All-Conference USA Third-Team, this year a Preseason All-Conference USA Team member. He averaged 18.0 points per game last year and was our best defensive player. He, along with Aubrey Coleman, gives us a tandem of great wing players that can put up points and play defense.

"Zamal Nixon has evolved into the point guard that we thought he would. His game has improved dramatically. At the end of last season, he finished very strong. In our last home game, he was 7-of-9 from 3-point range. I am seeing that almost every day now. That's a big thing that we look for in coaching.

"It's like (UH junior quarterback) Case Keenum. There was a great article written earlier on Case Keenum, and I have it on the bulletin board in our locker room. It's about him being the same guy every day, somebody you can count on. These two guys and Aubrey Coleman give it to you every day. To have a few guys like that on your team is really encouraging. We all know how important that is.

"When we talk about recruiting, I can also go back to Case Keenum. Who ever heard of him coming out of high school? He is quite a football players. I don't think there is a football player in the country that compares to him and what he does for his team. We have a guy in Aubrey Coleman, who is almost the same caliber. He rebounds; he defends; he scores; he creates and he sets up his teammates. Last year he wasn't known for all those things, but I have seen a dramatic change.

"We have a very good basketball team. It's going to take a while for me to figure out who should play. We are really deep and talented. We have size this year; we have strength and bulk, and we have some great athletes. I am very excited about the season."

On long-term and short-term goals for season

"If you start popping off publicly, all it is is bulletin-board material for other teams. I didn't get to be a 35-year head coach by doing that. This can be a special team, and almost anything is within reach. We keep those things very private among the team.

"Last year, I did say publicly that our goal was to win 20 games. People thought I was off my rocker because we were picked seventh in Conference USA. We had lost five starters from the previous team. Nobody knew who Aubrey Coleman was. I knew how good he was. He proved to be All-Conference USA First Team in his first year. A lot of that has to do with winning. If you win, you get recognized. Individuals get more credit, maybe, than they should get when you win. We talk a lot about those kinds of things.

"Kelvin may not average 18.0 points per game. He may average less and play fewer minutes, but the quality of his play will be very evident. We have more depth. We have guys that can come in and give Kelvin a break. This year, we will be able to give him breaks, rotate more people and become a more effective team.

"Zamal has dramatically improved, and so has Desmond Wade. Between Desmond and Zamal, we have a great point-guard situation. We have two very good point guards. Aubrey is like having another point guard on the floor at all times with the things that he does.

"We can have an outstanding season. We will keep our goals privately to ourselves. We would love to win the conference, and for the first time in five years, we have a shot at winning the conference.

"When I first came here... we were a last-place program and not competitive. We have turned that around. We are not happy or satisfied. If we get to the Tournament this year and we don't go deep, I won't be satisfied. That's just the way that I am naturally, and we have players who feel the same.

On how he expects team to play

"Offensively, we are a much better basketball team than we were last year. We have a bunch of guys that are capable of scoring 20 points. We have some great shooters on this ball club. These guys (Zamal Nixon and Kelvin Lewis) can shoot with anybody. Kirk Van Slyke, a freshman, has been lighting it up every day. He can really shoot the basketball. I am very excited about his presence in the lineup.

"We have some other guys that you will learn about like Maurice McNeil. He is a great athlete and gets up and down the floor. There are so many new guys that look good that it's hard to single them out.

"A real key to our ball club is going to be the evolution and physical condition of Kendrick Washington, who was out for more than 12 weeks after having surgery on both shins. He started practice with us, and every day he gets a bit better. Every day, he has shown improvement. He is an inside presence. He has huge hands and is a big strong kid. When you have been picked by Kendrick, you've been picked. He is like a wall. He is a big, strong kid, and he is only a freshman. We are excited about his development. He gives us an inside presence that we haven't had.

Kahmell Broughton is cut and chiseled. He was a great football player as well as Kendrick. We have some pieces that we haven't had here, and that makes it more exciting."

On Conference USA

"The league overall has improved. We have some really good teams in this league. It's not easy to get away from the one-bid deal. The Conference USA office told us our schedule this year was by far the strongest schedule being played. I would have liked it to be even stronger. It's not easy to schedule when you are a team that is winning 20 games a year from a conference that is only getting one bid. It's hard to get games.

"The conference this year looks to be exciting. A lot of teams feel they have a shot, and that's good for the league."

On recruiting in combination with success of football team

"I believe we have recruited every year. We have guys that are much more highly recruited. With Kendrick Washington, it boiled down to us, Marquette and Missouri. Five years ago, there was way we are involved with a kid like that. Kids want to be part of a winner and a style of play that has been established

"It's easier to get another Case Keenum when you've got Case Keenum. Somebody says 'I can go there and do what Case did.' Recruiting is about winning."

"There are other things. It's an arm race today. I've been doing this a long time, and it never mattered before what your facilities were like. We used to travel everywhere in buses and vans at schools like Fordham and Rhode Island. Today it's how big is your locker room. How many computers do you have in your locker room? How many flat screen TVs, etc? That's what recruiting has turned into now. We are now in that fight, and I'm excited about it.

"I'm excited about our program and our players, but I am even more excited about the leadership and the direction that we are heading in now. We have a chancellor and president in Dr. (Renu) Khator who wants to be first class. That filters down. It starts with the Regents; they want it. We have a director of athletics, who has done some amazing things here in a very short period of time.

"We have a budget now to compete. We have some things going on here. That's what helps recruiting as well as winning. It's a combination of a lot of things. We're in the ball game, and we're getting better. We've turned things around, and we're averaging 20 wins a year, but I want more, and our players want more."

On team's defense

"That's what we're trying to build now. You start practice, and you have a month to prepare for your first game. You have to have an offense in to defend. I hope our offense is still this good in March. It's cooking.

"Now, we have to build a defense. I have to figure out what style of defense. Last year, with big Marcus Cousin, we were stuck in a half-court, conventional defense. With this year's club, we can press and play some trapping zone defenses. We can do some things to really get after people, go out and get them more than we could last year. Defense is critical.

"There are two things that have been the foundation of my programs for years. One is defense. We are almost always in the top 10 in steals in the country. We also are very high in fewest turnovers. Last year, we were second in the country in fewest turnovers per game. We have always been in the top 10 since I've been here. Those two things are things that we are working on hard now. Let's keep those turnovers to a minimum and let's improve the defense.

"When you have a guy like Kelvin who gives it to you every day, it carries over. Aubrey Coleman is a much better defensive player than he was last year. He is a lockdown-type defender. He is not just a guy who leads the conference in steals, which he did last year. I expect that again.

"It gets contagious when you have a guy like Kelvin Lewis, who is one of our tri-captains this year. We have three great seniors. We have Aubrey Coleman, Sean Coleman and Kelvin. All three of them are outstanding leaders. That also gives me a lot of confidence in what is going to happen this year."

"Sometimes, you have seniors, but they are not leaders. All three of these guys are leaders in their own way, verbally and by example. I am very pleased with that. All you have to do is take a kid out and say 'I want you to watch Kelvin Lewis. Just watch him. Can you play as hard as Kelvin Lewis?' It's great when you have your best players as your best defensive players."

SENIOR GUARD KELVIN LEWIS

On the upcoming season

“We have high expectations. We’ve been together this whole summer working hard. We’re real excited.”

On improvements

“The big thing this year is getting over the hump. When we played Arizona, we played a great 38-minute game but we didn’t finish it. For us to get over the hump, we need to win those big games. We play a tough schedule every year but now we need to win the big ones. “

On the different look for the team

“We have a lot of new guys and we’re really starting to mesh well. We lost big Marcus and he was a big factor down low. But now we’re a little quicker, taller, leaner, so it compensates.”

On the team’s goals

“The ultimate goal is getting into the (NCAA) Tournament. That was why we were in the weight room at 5 a.m.. We say championship at the end because that’s where we want to go and that’s our ultimate goal.”

JUNIOR GUARD ZAMAL NIXON

On the lineup

“We’re deep at the wing positions so no one has to play too many minutes. Whenever Kelvin or Aubrey comes out, there won’t be any drop off.”

On his shooting

“I’m working on being consistent. Last year I’d play a game like against SMU when I went 7-for-9 and against Memphis I didn’t shoot the ball that well. The biggest thing for me this year is getting to the gym before or after practice just to be a consistent shooter.”

On Conference USA

“The league is wide open but it’s certainly not going to be a walk in the park. There’s a lot of good competition in our league.”

On last season

“We won 20 games with the 21st game coming in the CBI. We lost to Oregon State and maybe we could have went a little further and had a few more wins. We’re a team that feels like we have a lot of talent and that we can play with the big guys. We have to prove that this year and qualify for the NCAA tournament.”

On the next step

“The next step is winning those big games. For example we play Oklahoma on Thanksgiving. If we can get that win that could set the tone for the rest of the season. “

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