

BIG XII SPOTLIGHT

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A weekly look inside the Big 12 Conference

Eric Sorrentino
esorrentino@ljworld.com

Deja vu avoided in Texas

With 2:12 left in regulation of Kansas' 75-68 overtime triumph against Memphis on Monday, similarities to the 2003 national championship against Syracuse were eerily present.

In both games, Kansas found itself trying to mount a late comeback. In 2003, KU trailed by 12 with five minutes left; the Jayhawks trailed by nine with 2:12 remaining Monday.

In both games, Kansas ran into freshman sensations who played major roles in building leads on the Jayhawks. In 2003, Carmelo Anthony scored 20 points, grabbed 10 rebounds and dished out seven assists. On Monday, Derrick Rose scored 18 points, grabbed six boards and dished out eight assists for the Tigers.

Kansas wouldn't go down easily in either title game. In fact, both games, KU cut the lead to three and had the ball on the final possession with the chance for overtime.

That's where the similarities stop, though. It's the differences — aside from the obvious end result — from the two years that benefited the Jayhawks the most on Monday.

Those differences: free-throw shooting, depth and the final possession.

For instance, Kansas misfired on 18 of its 30 free throw attempts in 2003. That doesn't win championships. The Jayhawks converted 14 of 15 free throws on Monday. That figure (93.3 percent) is instrumental in winning championships.

Furthermore, KU had only one key bench player who saw regular minutes off the bench in the 2003 title game: Michael Lee. On Monday, Kansas brought Sherron Collins (34 minutes) and Sasha Kaun (21 minutes) off the bench for mega minutes.

Without Collins, there's no overtime Monday. With just under 2:00 remaining, the sophomore guard grabbed a critical steal and saved it inbounds to KU hero-of-the-new-millennium Mario Chalmers. Chalmers dished to Robinson, who kicked it back out to Collins. The Chicago native drained a mammoth three-pointer from the right corner to cut the Memphis lead to four with 1:45 to play.

Finally, the most critical difference: the final possession.

In 2003, Kirk Hinrich found Lee open in the left corner for a potentially game-tying three-pointer as time wound down. Hakim Warrick blocked the shot and essentially ended the game. In 2008, KU was also down three on the final possession. Tragedy in 2003 warped into triumph in 2008 when Chalmers hit the biggest shot in KU history.

Rose and Robert Dozier were doing their best Warrick imitations, but Chalmers drained the contested three.

KU then dominated overtime, which led to roughly 40,000 Jayhawk fans parading on Massachusetts street. They deserved it. Before 2:12 remained in regulation, it was almost like a bad dream.

A defining moment



Nick Krug/Journal-World Photo

KANSAS PLAYERS CELEBRATE after defeating Memphis, 75-68, in overtime on Monday at the Alamodome in San Antonio. There were many memorable Big 12 games from the 2007-2008 season, but KU winning the national title for the first time in 20 years took the spotlight.

The 10 best Big 12 games of the season

By Eric Sorrentino

Journal-World Copy Editor

When Mario Chalmers left his spot on the right wing and made his way toward the top of the key in a designed weave to get the junior guard the ball, a crowd of 43,257 at the Alamodome watched the release of the most historic and biggest shot in the history of the Big 12 Conference.

Before Monday's 75-68 KU victory, no Big 12 team ever had won the national title.

Of course, Chalmers' shot hit the bottom of the net, and Kansas dominated Memphis in overtime with a 12-5 advantage.

Down nine points with 2:12 remaining, the KU comeback was improbable, but it happened.

The national title game was the undisputed and obvious choice for most memorable Big 12 game of the 2007-2008 season. Here's the other nine:

2. Kansas vs. UNC (April 5, 2008; NCAA Final Four, San Antonio, Texas)

What made it memorable: What didn't make the game memorable? Roy Williams history aside, it may have been the most productive half of basketball in KU history. KU coach Bill Self called the first 15 minutes the best he's ever had a team play. At one point, the Jayhawks led the Tar Heels, 40-12.

Freshman Cole Aldrich, typi-

cally eighth off the KU bench, frustrated national player of the year Tyler Hansbrough. Kansas led, 11-6, when Aldrich replaced Sasha Kaun. Fewer than 10 minutes later, the Jayhawks led by 28.

Final score: Kansas 84, North Carolina 66

3. Kansas vs. Texas (March 16, 2008; Big 12 Tournament championship, Kansas City, Mo.)

What made it memorable: Did anyone miss during the first half? Rarely, particularly from long distance (Texas 72.7 percent in the first half, KU 60 percent).

In arguably the most exciting Big 12 game of the season, KU hit a Big 12 tournament-record 15 threes, while UT converted 12. Chalmers played the game on another planet (8-for-12 threes, 30 points), while Brandon Rush drained six of the nine threes he put up.

Final score: Kansas 84, Texas 74

4. Kansas State vs. Kansas (Jan. 30, 2008; Manhattan)

What made it memorable: Kansas State beat Kansas in Manhattan for the first time since 1983. Freshman Michael Beasley, who guaranteed victory, delivered 25 points and six rebounds. **Final score: K-State 84, Kansas 75**

5. Baylor vs. Texas A&M (Jan. 23, 2008; College Station, Texas)

What made it memorable: It was the longest game in Big 12 history. The game went into five overtimes before Baylor guard Curtis Jerrells took over and scored 11 of his career-high 36 points in the final period.

Final score: BU 116, A&M 110 (5 OT)

6. Texas vs. UCLA (Dec. 2, 2007; Los Angeles)

What made it memorable: Obvious buzz surrounded this early-season game, which saw scouts from 29 of the 30 NBA teams on hand. It was the highest-ranked team the Longhorns ever beat on the road.

Final score: UT 63, UCLA 61

7. Kansas vs. Davidson (March 30, 2008; NCAA Elite Eight, Detroit)

What made it memorable: KU coach Bill Self was 0-4 in Elite Eight games before the two-point KU victory. Self looked on in the crouched position as Jason Richards missed a 25-foot prayer as time expired, then rolled forward to the ground in the relief of victory. It's some of the most memorable footage CBS displayed in its One Shining Moment highlight video.

Final score: KU 59, Dav. 57

8. Texas vs. Stanford (March 28, 2008; Sweet 16)

What made it memorable: All the questions surrounding Texas stopping Stanford's 7-foot Lopez twins. Brook had 26 points, but failed to score in the final 14 minutes. Robin only scored six.

Only one other Stanford player scored in double digits. Four Longhorns did.

The victory, combined with KU's victory over Davidson, put two Big 12 teams in the Elite Eight.

Final score: Texas 82, Stanford 62

9. K-State vs. Missouri (Feb. 15, 2008; Manhattan)

What made it memorable: The Michael Beasley show (40 points, 17 rebounds).

Final score: KSU 100, MU 63

10. Kansas vs. Texas Tech (March 3, 2008; Lawrence)

What made it memorable: The historic, 58-point pounding the Jayhawks issued the Red Raiders. It was the largest margin of victory in conference play in KU history. It also represented the Jayhawks' 24th straight Senior Night win; a memorable sendoff for Jeremy Case, who hit a trio of three-pointers that had the Allen Fieldhouse faithful at its loudest.

Final score: Kansas 109, Texas Tech 51