



### GREAT EXPECTATIONS

# Kansas prepares for tournament

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Standing at the podium during his Monday press conference, Kansas coach Bill Self started by joking about the lighting.

"These lights are getting brighter all the time," he said. "They haven't felt this bright since the day I took the job."

Maybe the lights were brighter than usual, or maybe Self knows he faces high expectations this year. Unlike in previous years, the Jayhawks are the top team in the NCAA.

Self's sarcasm was palpable after he found out that his team regained the No. 1 ranking this week.

"I'm ecstatic," Self said. "This may be one of the happiest days of my life."

Whether comparing the 2010 team to the 2008 or 2009 teams, one thing is the same: This year is different.

Senior guard Sherron Collins, a member of all three teams, said this was a more difficult year with the No. 1 target.

"Last year, we were supposed to lose but we kept winning," he said. "That was the easy part. It was easy sneaking up on people and surprising them."

This year also produces another problem: inexperience.

There are several players who have never been past the Sweet 16 in the NCAA and this is the first time the freshmen will be presented with a one-and-done situation.

Freshman guard Xavier Henry said he was going to use the Big 12 tournament as preparation for the Big Dance. The only problem was he had no idea what to expect.

He said he would approach each opponent like he had all season. Whether playing Kansas State or Colorado, the objective was the same.

"I look at everybody the same," Henry said. "It doesn't matter who they are; we just have to beat them."

Freshman center Thomas Robinson said that he had dreamed of being in the NCAA tournament ever since he watched it as a kid. The Jayhawks have cemented themselves into the tournament and don't have much to gain from the league tournament. Robinson said the only



Weston White/KANSAN

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Kansas coach Bill Self talks to freshman Thomas Robinson after he was whistled for his second foul in a game against Nebraska. Self has high expectation for Kansas, especially after the team regained No. 1 in ranking.

### COMMENTARY

## Still much to achieve in Big 12 tourney



BY NICOLAS ROESLER  
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Kansas awaits the victor of the first game of the Big 12 Tournament between Colorado and Texas Tech tomorrow with the mindset of a team halfway through the NCAA Tournament.

It may be tempting to think that this tournament really doesn't mean much to the Jayhawks. They already have a No. 1 seed locked for the Big Dance, as well as the regular season title for the Big 12. But the players are looking at the upcoming Big 12 Tournament games as vital to their improvement. It's just as important to them as it may be to teams such as Texas who want to earn a seed higher than eight.

"No disrespect to any of the other teams but, I mean, we're not playing to help anybody else's team out," freshman forward Thomas Robinson said of other teams having more to play for in the tournament.

Other teams in the Big 12 that desperately want to improve their chances in the NCAA Tournament include Baylor, Oklahoma State, Missouri and even Kansas State. The Big 12 has a total of seven teams looking good for spots in the NCAA Tournament. But the select few mentioned already have the most to gain.

Oklahoma State and Missouri are looking at being possible eight seeds. If they beat some ranked teams in the Big 12 tournament such as Kansas State or Kansas, their stock in the tournament rises. If even just by a single seed, that little boost improves their chances of making it further into March.

Kansas State, after fighting for a possible one seed then losing consecutively to Kansas on the road and Iowa State at home, might be watching its No. 2 seed dreams fade. That is why the Wildcats will come into the Big 12 tournament with the anger and determination of coach Frank Martin in every one of their players' eyes. If they win the tournament, they could fight their way back up to a possible two seed.

The Kansas players recognize what all the teams in the Big 12 Tournament are playing for, and the Jayhawks are looking at this tournament in the same way, especially after last year's loss to Baylor in Kansas' first game of the tournament.

"It stung; it was embarrassing; it hurt," senior Sherron Collins said of last year's loss to Baylor.

Coming into this year's Big 12 Tournament, Collins and junior Cole Aldrich have that extra year under their feet and are looking forward to bringing this year's younger players to the skill level that the 2008 team had reached by this point in the season.

"With this team, there is a little bit more youth," Collins said. "But I still see those same similarities, same depth of the bench."

The motivation is there. Now all the Jayhawks need to do is play how they talk about playing, and bring in a Big 12 Tournament Title as well as victory number 2,000 for the program.

— Edited by Megan Heacock

### FOOTBALL

## Meet recruiter Reggie Mitchell

BY JAYSON JENKS  
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In the corner of recruiting coordinator Reggie Mitchell's office sits a row of small, inconspicuous boxes that might contain the next Todd Reesing.

Each box is filled with DVDs featuring selected plays from high school recruits around the country. And Mitchell watches each one.



Mitchell

"Every film that's over here," Mitchell said, grabbing a random tape, "every one of these high school coaches said these kids can play in Division I football. And then some kids even send you the film."

If it sounds overwhelming, Mitchell concedes that sometimes during the season it can be.

But the hours of analyzing film

aren't the biggest grind in the demanding recruiting world. No, the hardest part is the close-calls – the recruits who seem destined to sign with a school only to change their minds.

What's often forgotten when a recruit declares his intentions by picking up a hat on national television is the man left behind the scenes: the other school's recruiter.

"You always think that you're in it," Mitchell said. "The hardest thing is you put all this time and effort into it, and then you lose a kid." "It's an emotional roller coaster."

This is the world Mitchell calls home. In recent years, as subscription websites such as Rivals.com and Scout.com have developed larger followings, recruiting has also grown in scale.

People track a recruit's official visits online, and nationally-televised press conferences are held when a highly regarded recruit

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### BASEBALL

## Jayhawks shut out Spires

BY BEN WARD  
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Freshman pitcher Tanner Poppe passed his test against St. Mary's, holding the Spires hitless through five innings of work. But it wasn't time to relax it was off to prepare for another one.

Only it wasn't baseball-related. Poppe was barely able to celebrate Kansas' 10-0 victory because he had to leave Hoglund Ballpark quickly to be on time for a tutoring session.

Schoolwork aside, Poppe's performance on the field was a marked improvement from last week's outing when he allowed four runs on four walks during a March 2 loss against Arkansas.

"Hopefully this gets some confidence in him, and gets him around the zone a little bit more and we'll build off of that," pitching coach Ryan Graves said.

Graves said the plan for Poppe was to keep things simple during Tuesday's outing: having the freshman focus primarily on his rhythm from the mound, and on his control — specifically



Mike Gunnoe/KANSAN

Freshman infielder Kevin Kuntz scoops up the ball Tuesday at Hoglund Ballpark against Saint Mary's. The Jayhawks won the game 10-0.

throwing his fastball for a strike. "He's got great stuff," Graves said. "It's just a matter of his pitch ability developing to where we can mix certain pitches."

And it's that control and variation of different pitches that coach Ritch Price said Poppe would need to succeed against Big 12 competition.

"Then he'll truly be a college pitcher," Price said.

Price didn't intend the comment as a slight to the youngster saying

Poppe's five shutout innings met and exceeded his expectations for the game against the Division II Spires.

Although Price viewed the outing as an opportunity for Poppe to "get his feet wet" — he didn't mean it in the literal sense.

Rain throughout the day almost cost the Jayhawks (8-3) yet another game, but because of one of Price's old sayings, they

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## Springtime smackdown



Mike Gunnoe/KANSAN

Abbey Holtz, a freshman from Topeka, returns the ball Thursday. Holtz plays tennis as much as she can and played all four years for her high school. "The weather has been getting nice so we have been playing," Holtz said.

## FOOTBALL (CONTINUED FROM 1B)

decides to make a decision.

During his nearly 30 years in college football, Mitchell's most memorable signing day experience occurred in 2003, when he was the recruiting coordinator at Michigan State. At that time, he was pursuing a talented linebacker also considering Michigan.

On signing day, Mitchell thought he had the linebacker, Lamar Woodley, lined up with Michigan State. Instead, he signed with rival Michigan.

Woodley, who is currently with the Pittsburgh Steelers, earned First-Team All-American honors as a senior in 2006.

"When that happens," Mitchell said, "in the back of your mind you're saying, 'What could I have done better? What did I do to screw this up?'"

Mitchell insists that's the way he always thinks after losing a recruit.

In a business that is competitive, never-ending and features vastly diverse characters, part of the battle is simply coming to peace with your own personality traits and quirks.

USC's Lane Kiffin's in-your-face public persona may work with recruits, so, too, may Alabama's Nick Saban's strictly business approach, but Mitchell prefers a more laid back approach.

"That's the one thing I don't think people get in recruiting," Mitchell said. "They see this guy be successful because he's flamboyant and he's outgoing and he's flashy. But if that's not you, you can't. You have to be comfortable in your own skin."

Sitting in his office on a sunny afternoon, Mitchell is direct and up front with each answer. No time is spent overdramatizing or underplaying an aspect of a world in which

most people only gather knowledge from Rivals or Scout — the tips of the recruiting iceberg.

The e-mails, phone calls and time spent connecting with recruits are generally done without much public knowledge.

"So many times through the process, kids want you to tell them what they want to hear," said Mitchell, who is also Kansas' running backs coach. "And you have to do that to a certain extent, but you also need to be honest and up front with them."

And it's those traits that current and former Mitchell recruits insist they most respect.

"Say that you're in college and things aren't going the way you want them to go — well, with me being from Kansas City, I'm 45 minutes from my house so I can go back home," said Dexter McDonald, a defensive back recruited by Mitchell for the

2010 class.

"But on other terms, you want to be able to go to someone you can trust and someone that can really care for you besides just on the football field. And I know he is that person."

During conversations with recruits, Mitchell insists that he never discusses other schools. Instead, Mitchell said his pitches focused solely on the benefits of coach Turner Gill and the University.

Darrian Miller, a running back who verbally committed to Kansas for 2011, said Mitchell talked about past running backs he coached and the things Miller could accomplish at Kansas.

"I wanted to be close to the running back coach and me and coach Mitchell hit it off from the start," Miller said. "He's just a straight up coach and doesn't sugar coat anything."

For now, Mitchell spends most of his afternoons dissecting possible recruits.

There are plenty of tapes left to be watched. More will certainly arrive when the football season gets closer.

That's just the nature of the business — one that Mitchell is certainly comfortable with.

"The best form of advertisement is word of mouth," Mitchell said. "If you're honest and up front with them on the front end, they're going to say, 'Everything he told me was going to happen, happened.'"

— Edited by Kirsten Hudson

## TOURNAMENT (CONTINUED FROM 1B)

goal was to prove the team was worthy of its ranking.

Last season, Kansas went in as the top seed in the Big 12 tournament and lost its first game to Baylor.

Collins said he still hurt thinking about that game.

With such an inexperienced team, Self said he wanted this situation taken seriously even if nothing came of it.

"It isn't as much a game situation as it is respecting the situation," Self said. "If we're not at our magic level, then anybody can beat us."

That "magic level" has to do

with dealing with distractions and balancing focus and energy.

Self said that the team had played that way 12 to 15 times this year, but that it needed to be consistent.

For Collins, this tournament is all about consistency

— the same consistency that got the Jayhawks a 29-2, 15-1 record.

"I don't think it will change the seeding," Collins said, "but we might as well finish it off the way we started."

— Edited by Kirsten Hudson

## MLB

### Brewers beat Cubs after two-run homer

MESA, Ariz.— Joe Inglett, trying to win the final spot on Milwaukee's 25-man roster, hit a two-run homer with two outs in the ninth inning Tuesday, lifting the Brewers to a 5-3 victory over the Chicago Cubs.

Randy Wells pitched three innings of one-hit ball for the Cubs. He picked off the only man who reached base, meaning he and fellow starters Carlos Zambrano and Ryan Dempster have combined to pitch to the minimum 27 batters in their four outings.

Jeff Suppan, who had pitched two perfect innings his first time out, gave up three runs on five hits in three innings — the first runs allowed by any of Milwaukee's five starters this spring. Derrek Lee hit a solo homer off Suppan in the third for a 3-0 Chicago lead.

Cubs closer Carlos Marmol allowed two fourth-inning runs, one unearned because of catcher Geovany Soto's throwing error, and the Brewers tied it on Jody Gerut's double in the sixth.

In the ninth, Adam Heether drew a leadoff walk and scored on Inglett's homer off Blake Parker. Inglett, battling Heether, Luis Cruz and Mat Gamel for a backup infielder job, is the only candidate who is out of minor league options.

— Associated Press

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